THE RITES OF THE BALI AGA
POEMS

by

Sitor Situmorang

dedicated to Ula,
to I MARIO
son of the soil of Bali

THE IMAGE

Cherishing your memory
that keeps me sane
amidst the steely splendour
of my future in Megalopolis
I sing

Out of the cage of matter
gulping in
the image you left
in my void
I sing

Contents:
1. The Island
2. The Rites of the Bali Aga
3. To My Friends on Legian Beach
4. The Beach

Editors' Note: The editors are pleased to share with the readers of Indonesia a recent work by Sitor Situmorang, one of Indonesia's most prominent poets who was jailed after the 1965 coup. "The Rites of the Bali Aga" was written in early September 1976. Following his release from prison last year, Sitor made a trip to Bali; the poems reproduced here were composed (in English) while he was enroute home to Jakarta. The author wrote continuously over a period of two days, during which time, in his own words, he was "in some kind of trance." Of his trip, he writes that "Bali was then a spiritual bath after so many years in jail. I found there a brotherhood of wanderers among low-budgeted young foreign tourists, some of them called hippies. [I] interviewed them and had intensive contacts with them. English was the language we conversed in. And then, with my interest in mysticism of longstanding heightened [by being] in isolation for so many years, [I wrote this piece]."

Further information about Sitor Situmorang's life and works may be found in A. Teeuw, Modern Indonesian Literature (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1967), pp. 180-90.
THE ISLAND

And the sea is always present. The abode of days, moons and centuries. The presence of the flood in earth's bowels under the sea a crawling forest of creation

book without alphabet
the island kingdom of the animals equator's tides, filling the ancient sailor's bones in the coral fortress of a wrecked ship

footprints of approaching century the messenger seagulls in the mist of dawn the omnipresence of the sea

rainbow gate of the poles sea within sea sea under sea sea above the sea

Lotus of light of kalpa a drop of blood of star in the palace of whales! of the southern seas bemoaning the light of dawn on my nails

welcome storm of earth's age engulfing the lines of fate on my hands

and the sea an eternal presence and the continuing tides

my ferry to nirwana swallowed up by lava of time on top of Semeru

the blue region of the ancient buffalo drying its net on the veranda of the sun welcoming me. Sakyamuni born again dwelling in the star of Bima sailing in the ripples of full moon celebrating the ritual of nusantara

the omnipresent sea and you
THE RITES OF THE BALI AGA

I

1

Courting the demonic
I failed myself—
To be holy
is to be
unending ritual
tantric or
franciscan

Out of the lava
of black magic
blooms the lotus
of orgiastic nature

weaning life
spiritual
in the clear oceans
of primeval spring
without seasons

Bali never fails
but I failed you—
my love

2

Like a peintre maudit
you slash my eyes
right into the heart
of a sufi night
of Bali's mystery.

drama as life
the life of drama
the haunting vision
of Afandi and Mpu Baradah
in Calon Arang's
bleeding womb.
surreal bunuelesque

3

I greet you—
with a skull's kiss
of pure animality
of the surfrider
on a cosmic beach
Submerged in the pools
of a mythic volcano
like of old
I preside
over the rites
of killing my last love
in a glass of ice cream
in the bustling street
of selling and buying.

Splashing the paint
like a pugilist
in a Roman arena
The shakti painter paints
my mask
driven by
the inner force
of biological act
of colours
like stains of blood
in a cockfight.

The painting
an extended function
of his body and mine
moulded into one
the boxer and the yogi
through the discarded bodies
of lingga tubes of paints
fiery and seminal.

Failing you
I failed the world—
Not for lost causes
but in spite of the many victories
in so many battles
of endurance

the humble treading
of the hiker
to scale the holy mountain
to view the rising sun
like a yogi

in failing
to perceive and transcend
the air we breathe in
into some power
of the haggard beauty
of the spiritual mendicant
I that is in you
knocking at the gates
enclosed by the barbed wire
of concentration-camps
of a future shock
of consumptive functions
of a Bali pig.

Sitting in the palatial lounge
of an Intercontinental hotel
I thought
of my friend, the painter
expressing the wish
to be able to copulate
like a dog
at every street corner

I thought of sons and daughters of the sun
of Kuta Beach
and of King Erlangga
at his initiation
for Brata
in the Field of Corpses
holding the attributes
—the skull in the left hand
the kris in the right one—
his lips and hair
dripping with blood
standing on a heap
of fresh corpses—

I denounced myself
and so many years
of languishing
in the human form
of bodily prisons

So, you do not need
to tell
I have to find it out
myself

and any time
you count on me
my perspective blurs
on any meaning
except for the lingering
presence
of seasons
I am homesick for
like
Riviera beaches
and Parisian alleys
and the pull
of shadows
of Bali candis
under the waringins
and be lost.

So
play your kendang
just this once
while looking at the TV screen
with the last film
on anti-racial demonstrations
in some forgotten city
we used to call home

and being trapped
right at the intersection
of traffic-zebra lines
of lumped lives—

Rest only to cry
and be masochistic
in extreme
after the trip.

What does it mean? you mean?
Being in love again
at this state of
yoga tantra
another twist
of fate
the condition of
being
part stranger
part native
in the no-man's land
of contemporary bhairawas

hell-driving
on a poetic in-balance

As for this moment
I pray—
Play the kendang
of weighing years
of yearning
for the lost rhythm
and balance
the lost gesture
of first love
in an alpine spring.

14

Show me the way
to the gorges
of Bali
to the hut
of the recluse
show me the road
to the banjar
the bamboo dome
and the ecstatic architecture
of sawah terraces.

Show me the way—
the swaying lines
of impressionistic
Bali weavings
the drunken rays of light
on women's shoulders
the vista of demons
and cremations
and gong vibrations
and volcano slopes—

Then I will show you
the ashes of black lava
of my holiness
in utter poverty
and death
and the seven suns
in the arid plain
of the senses.

15

This would be the end
of which has no beginning
of the deathly encounter
of two suns
in one body
one burning,
like a continental prairie
one
cold as a dead star

in the grip
of gravity
of disjointed system
of a taoist painting
of gamelan music
in pure balance
Here you are treading
ascetic grounds of
holy Gunung Agung
The cremation carrier
of the cosmic love
terrible as an evil Naga
with thousand heads
besmeared with sacrificial tears
of the destitutes and the mirth of
the scavengers of souvenirs
from desecrated temples
on women's breasts—

lost
you stumble
into the all too human
bones
of coming earthquake, I pray
om, om, om
sadhu, sadhu, sadhu!

Ashes of space
and death
has lost meaning
in the altered relations
between now
and the past

Exposed to the elements
I live the hereafter
of the Scatterer of Worlds
beyond the lake
to the west
never frequented since long ago
by the gods
of the volcanos
and the seashores

ashes of space
on the cold waters
blowing through rivers
and the leaves
of life's lontar

never to be read again
never to be heard
the mute incantations
of the night
to the immutable mountains
the roaming
ashes of space
in the ravines
of atoms of spirit

in prayer
for the altered order
of past
  present
and future
of Bali unseen

as decreed
by the gods
after the Fall

turning eastward
into pilgrimage
of a new reality
of existence

in one act of Creation

the cycle
of sowing and
reaping
fertilized
by the ashes
of space
throughout the universe
of man's toiling
and labour

2

alienated by the influx
of foreign habits
I now learn to know you
better
and even more
myself
as well as the other
since
deserted by the gods—
you faded away
from memory

in cosmic indifference

the fatalism of
rituals
in neglect
the lost flowering of wisdom
in the folly of life
behind your comic mask
of tragedy
drunken with brem, I found
the bounty and
the beauty
of carnal and
ascetic
Cakra of the seasons.

Beloved among the islands
since I forgot you
by my rivers of self-exile
in Babylon

listen, from this moment on
on each seventh day
of every moon
I will visit you and
lie on your beach
making love to your dawns

as befitted
the lastborn among the dewas
who long since
have retreated
to their misty dwellings
on the mountaintops

As
from today on
I swear the sacred oath
of loyalty
in this kaliyuga of chaos
in East and West

I hereby decree
As from now on
Within the circumference of
200 miles from your tides
to the height of
77 miles
I declare
sacred again
to be approached in purity
on penalty of
second exile

according to the first article
of your Teaching
to humanity
In truth
I hereby swear
atonning for past disloyalties
to you my Guru
and guardian of
the right relations
between nature and man
as the true culture
for a future
foretold in your sufferings and
parables of creation
against odds and demons
when your life was ritual
and ritual was life
in progress—
in authentic gesture
of complete humanity
as you taught
with the genius of the child
to the gods in awe
for your Shakti
and artistic mastery of dualism
in life
a lesson and
vindication
for the recurrent homecoming of man
back from exile
home to the Island
to you
eternal Bali
live
consummated in body
and spirit
hard to bear
and not easy
to cherish
when Babylon and
the Babylonians
are within me
out of reach
of your palms
and beaches
and prayers
in the stark silhouettes
of metropolitan concrete
and the glare of neon progress
and the shiny comfort of
airlines
I know myself entrapped
like the Barong amidst the demons
of his own making
dancing a wily Cak

So I pray
at the last homecoming
at the moment of release
by the fire of cremation
burn the mask of duality along
with my corpse
into ashes
to cover
my face of impurities

This is East of Eden
with no archangels
with fiery swords
barring the entrance
except for unworthiness
through hesitations
and blind gropings
in the blinding moon
of hedonism

As for Paradise
what is it?
other than the stroll
on your beaches
any time of the day
and the seasons
any stage of yoga tantra
of becoming and doing

my homecoming
home with my share of
daily burdens
and perfections
the vista of Gunung Agung
open
to the heavens and
to the oceans
to the rivers
watering
your fields
trod upon by Krishna as Christ
and by Christ as Lord Krishna
without the superstructures
of technology or theology
except for the abstract design
of rice terraces

from up high
viewing the dawns
sunsets celestial
ever Bali and
beyond

the mythical carpet
of rainbow colours
and the ocean
a bubble
bursting
into moksa

12

effacing the bloodstreams
of Kuruksetra and Armageddon
in so many fratricidal wars

while being companions
in the only true rite
of toiling life

since the first Cak
of Creation
when Lake Batur and
the Bali Aga tribe
was danced into Existence

the call for human labour
to populate the world
to water the valleys
to weave clothes
to tend the beasts of the fields
and make the first gesture
of perfect dance
in the temple without walls
of nature exorcised
complete with the props
of banjar life of
belonging
This is the vision
the grandeur of music
engulfing past Apocalypse
of failing power
the Shakti lost
of caring love

the desperate call
of the Supreme Mystic
in me—
the frenzied popsinger
in the land of Bandawas
donning the barong mask of Bali
in the polluted alleys
of metropolitan boom
in the land of Hastina
in the capital ———
I cry
the trauma
of the Jauk Dance of
rebirth

giving myself in marriage
to you
yogini—
outside the law
sacrificing in holy fire
the holy cows of modern superstition
slaughtering
in one stroke with my kris
the perversions
of false samurais
banishing the idols
of fake worshippers
from the precincts
of the Temple of Dawn

Where we will rest
bride and bridegroom
in one
a body of sheer light
heatless
colourless
soundless

a formless vessel
of beauty and
truth
beyond delight.
TO MY FRIENDS ON LEGIAN BEACH

I am the hippies
the afro-wig
at home
while homeless
the blowing ocean wind
my cap
under Bali's sun
the bird's song
my breakfast
in the banjar
after the night
on the pillow of sand

I am the bridegroom
of nature's hinterland
talking in native tongues
on Nepal's peaks
in the alleys
of Sosrowijayan

singing the white song

Welcome!
Hippies of all continents!
To be
a sack is all I need
maybe a batik shirt
and not even that!

I greet you
before you depart for Antartica
or just for the nearest inn

hitch-hiking monsoons
with wings of
conquering feet

crossing the myriad archipelagos
under the moon.
Beyond Tampaksiring and Ubud
the Ocean
rolls over blue space
washing
ashes of cremation
off the garland of skulls
on the tantric beach of Bali
off the crowning sun
of Kuta's sunset
the supreme moksa of Durga
in the bronze of my body
surfriding on currents
of bliss.