

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

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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

4

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.

5

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.

6

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.

7

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—

8

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

9

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.

10

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—

11

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

12

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

13

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

16

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—

17

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

II

1

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

3

behind your comic mask
 of tragedy
 drunken with brem, I found
 the bounty and
 the beauty
 of carnal and
 ascetic
 Cakra of the seasons.

4

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

5

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

6

In truth
 I hereby swear
 atoning 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

7

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

8

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

9

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

10

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

11

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
 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

13

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

14

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.

THE BEACH

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.