

BLACK SOUP

SUTARDJI CALZOOM BACHRI

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**Department of Malay Studies
National University of Singapore**

Sutardji Calzoum Bachri
BLACK SOUP

Introduced and Translated from Indonesian
by Harry Aveling

DEPARTMENT OF MALAY STUDIES
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE

FOREWARD

I am delighted to write this short foreward to introduce the poems by one of Indonesia's most respected poets: Sutardji Calzoum Bachri.

In recent years, Indonesian literature has become better known among Singaporeans through the works of such literary luminaries as Promoedya Ananta Toer, Mokhtar Lubis and W S Rendra. The production of this collection of poems by Bachri, it is hoped, will further inform Singaporeans of the Indonesian literary scene.

The Department is proud to record the work put in by the translator Mr Harry Aveling. In making available Bachri's poems in English, he has made possible a wider readership.

Finally, as in the case of the Department's Seminar and Occasional Papers Series, the views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s).

March, 1993

Tham Seong Chee
Professor and Head
Department of Malay Studies

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Some of these poems have previously appeared in *Arjuna in Meditation* (Writers Workshop, Calcutta), *Malay Literature* (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur) and *Westerly* (University of Western Australia, Perth).

INTRODUCTION

Sutardji Calzoum Bachri is considered by many to be Indonesia's greatest contemporary poet, more important than Rendra and surpassed only by Chairil Anwar. "If Chairil Anwar is our right eye," critic Dami Toda has written, "Sutardji is our left".¹

This volume aims to present a selection of Sutardji's poetry in English translation, from his earliest writing in the mid-sixties to his most recent.

Sutardji's attitude to his poetry is expressed in his "Poetic Credo". Poetry aims to unleash the force of language, to present the experience of life as dynamic a way as possible. Through this freedom, poetry is beyond the conventions of the public arbitrariness of grammars, dictionaries and even morality. Language, and poetry, exists for its own sake, its own pleasurable qualities, partaking in the powerful qualities of the mantra, which Sutardji sees as the source of all language and speech.

Sutardji's earliest work shows him to be a lyrical poet, concerned with the gentler aspects of nature and of human desire. The search for God is playful: God is hidden in the world, waiting to be discovered by those who would find Him.

As Sutardji's work developed in the mid-seventies, much of this gentleness began to fall away. God seemed more remote; the search for Him more urgent and more difficult. The intensity of experience once possible through looking at trees or running water, and feeling the breeze, seemed capable of being reproduced only in situations of pain and suffering. The possibility of death, in the future and even now, in the midst of life, became more oppressive. Sutardji's attitude to love became more sexual and violent.

These shifts in attitude find their peak in the collection "Axe". Here, as he himself states in his "Preface" (presented here in a condensed form), the world is a place of alienation and grief, the process of death is ongoing from the moment of birth, and human intimacy is impossible because of the unwillingness of individuals to renounce egotism and discover a common identity with other persons.

The collection marks the end of Sutardji's fifteen years of seemingly complete obsession with poetry and the image of himself as "the best of poets".² In the "Preface" Sutardji insisted that a poet need not write poetry for as long as he lived and it was indeed a declaration that he needed time to rest, possibly to free himself from the demons of writing and the demands of his highly physical (and drunken) public readings.

¹ Cited by Chin Woon Ping in her important essay: "Playing Dangerously with Words: Translating the Poetry of Sutardji Calzoum Bachri", in (ed) B Bennett, *A Sense of Exile: Essays in the Literature of the Asia-Pacific Region* (Centre for Studies in Australian Literature, University of Western Australia, Perth, 1988), p 223.

² See the last extract "From Amok", below.

Sutardji wrote little during the eighties. The pieces here present a new, more Muslim Sutardji. "Idulfitri" and "Mirror" show him seeking to come to terms with this tradition: in "Before the Ka'abah" the process is completed. His poems find their fulfilment in the holy places of Islam and he himself begins to disappear, lost in the greater mystery of God. The two poems which follow this conversion are both public poems, critical of political corruption.

Sutardji is almost fifty, no longer a "young Indonesian poet".³ Taufiq Ismail, a fellow writer of the so-called "Generation of 1966" and a few years older than Sutardji, has continued to mature as a poet and to incorporate a rich and complex spirituality into his vision of the world. Those who know Sutardji's work are always eager for more of it. We may continue to hope that he will engage in the painful process of creation, that others may be led to experience life more intensely and fully.

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³ The subtitle to my *Arjuna in Meditation* (Writers Workshop, Calcutta 1976) is "Three Young Indonesian Poets: Abdul Hadi W M, Darmanto Jt and Sutardji Calzoum Bachri". This present work aims to bring that earlier work up to date.

POETIC CREDO

Words are not implements for conveying meaning. They do not carry their intent the way a pipe carries water. Words are their own meaning. They are independent.

Take the word "chair", for example: it exists in its own rights, you cannot sit in it. The word "knife", too, has its own significance. You cannot cut something with it, nor can you kill someone.

In everyday life, words do tend to be used as implements. They are sent out like envoys, bearing messages. No one cares about the way words are free of all meaning.

Words must be free of the tyranny of meaning and the burden of ideas. They must be free to determine their own fates.

In my poetry, I seek to free words from the worn-out traditions which enslave them. From dictionaries. From the moral oppression which leads society to consider some words obscene. From the rules of grammar.

Once words have been freed in this way, it is possible to begin to be creative. Words can create themselves, play as individuals, determine their own path. This sudden creativity arises from the spontaneous inversion of the usual function of language.

Creative ideas and actions, never before thought possible, arise of their own accord.

When I write poetry, I give words their complete autonomy. Excited by this freedom, they leap and dance across the paper, get drunk, take off their clothes, run backwards and forwards, show their faces and sometimes their rears (even if one cannot sometimes tell the difference), divide at will, gain new strength by joining with each other, turn around, invert themselves, and even fight among themselves. They are free to do all these things. They are also free to commit suicide, should they so desire, in defence of their right not to be burdened by the meanings people seek to impose upon them.

As a poet, my only task - other than not interfering with their freedom - is to allow them to fulfil their own meanings and ensure each receives the maximum stress possible.

I consider poetry a way of liberating language, of permitting words to return to their original state. In the beginning was the Word.

And the first word was a mantra. Writing poetry is a way of allowing words to be mantras once again.

Sutardji Calzoum Bachri
Bandung, 30 March 1973

EARLY POEMS

WHITE HORSES

my white horses
white horses of wind, white horses of rock
pounding in the wind, racing past stone

sun horses
stretching fiercely into the dark
the moon falling from their backs

my white horses
horse of hunger carved of hunger
stiff neck flowered with wounds
bites of love
drinking rocks, singing, screaming at the sky
- the rose wall falls beneath my feet

white horses
wrestling with stone
across the field of rock

white horses
he who rides
will be ridden by silence
he who spurs
will be driven by desire
he who rides
must sit quite still
he who falls
will weep for ever

LONELINESS BEING TIRED

loneliness being tired
 placed two leaves
 on a park bench
 and slept
with the wind

loneliness flickers lamps
 in rooms
 and the dark
 and loneliness
 rests
 wrapped warmly
 and dark
then you knock
tick tock
(no answer)
loneliness wrapped in a blanket and asleep
 the next morning
 wondering
 - who knocked/was it
 a dream?-

perhaps you can say
perhaps you are sorry
perhaps you don't really care
about last night's game
 and how
they worry worry worry
with their clocks and machines

I COME TO YOU

I come to you
like the falling banyan
I come to you
like the wind
I come to you
like an exploding rock

I smile at you
you are silent
I play with my fingers
you are silent
I play with my shadow
you are silent
I am angry
you are silent
I scream
you are silent
I shout
you are silent
I laugh
you are silent
I am silent
you are silent
I am alone
because of your silence
I am Loneliness
You are Silence

Q

(1973)

OH

Oh
 Inspiration
 descend
 I have caressed your wounds
 I have kissed your grief
 I have set up hope
 I have spun your mantra
 I have been anaesthetised
 I have felt
 the cracks
 in your doorway
 and left the temple of your pretentiousness

Inspiration
 confusion of consternation silence of prophets question of
 reality reason of time essence of being thorn of desire
 wound of the way turbulence of storm tower of books
 anxiety of heart roar of thunder despair of self sorrow of
 ego Dontknow of Somebody me beautiful princess
 descend

what is reason? answer. what is death? time.
 what is rain? regret. who screams? alas. who
 learns? the teacher. who needs? the lover. who
 wants? I do. of sorrow form me of holes form me of
 poles form me of grief form me of questions form me
 of answers I know nothing

who is the fastest river darkest heaven the widest sea the
 most trodden earth the highest bird the loneliest father the
 one who knows his ignorance the one who knows that he
 does not know You the most I-like if not I the most
 melancholy

moon over the pond wish for fish moon over the pond
 wish for love flesh over thigh wish for repleteness light
 over day wish for wednesday monday saturday friday
 thursday tuesday sunday Descend

Oh
 Inspiration
 I have left the temple of your pretentiousness

the only river is water the only suspense continuation the
 only name the most passionate which is to say anxious the
 only earth is death the only support

is
 some
 sort of God
 perhaps
 me

So
 inspiration
 descend
 leave the temple of your pretentiousness
 Love! stop refusing me
 descend

WHERE ARE YOU GOING

the fish has a mouth
 full of pond
 water

the bench is asleep
 the lonely wind sighs
 the leaves
 hope the wind
 will caress them

the moon smiles
 as the fish nibbles its cheeks
 the winding road brings those with the road in themselves
 you have lost the way
 (where were you going)

eventually
 the fish
 chases you back
 yesterday you were kidnapped
 (luckily they left the lake)
 run and ask
 - whose road are you carrying?
 - mine?
 (darkness)
 where are you going
 who are you

stop thief!
 the fish has eaten the moon

STONE

stone rose
 stone sky
 stone sorrow
 stone weary
 stone needle
 stone dumb
 are you
 the unanswered
 riddle

a thousand mountains and the sky stays up a thousand
 maidens and purity remains a thousand things to do and
 still I am bored a thousand desires and yet I lust hear my
 plea

the clock throbs and the blood still travels mountains
 explode and the sky does not fall bodies embrace and
 still there is not love hands wave and no-one waves back
 why

nervous stone
 anaesthetic stone
 are You my stone
 dumb rock
 are you
 the unanswered
 riddle

COME

Break the bottle
and use the wounds
for flowers

Break the clock's tick-tock
and use the hands
for silence

Break the lamps
and use the flames
for truth

Break the wheels
and use the spokes
for a road
back
to grieving Adam
watching us destroy
being and non-being
and then back
to ourselves
childishly gathering the pieces
like Adam
finding the world

CHANGE

not every pain
 becomes a wound
not every grief
 becomes a thorn
not every question
 leads to doubt
not every answer
 has a reason
not every hand
 is meant to be held
not all the news
 is meant to be known
not every wound
 is a mirror
 through which one sees
 God

GNOME

the woman is a crack
 the crack is a river
 the river is an estuary
 the estuary is a boat

the boat is a crocodile
 the crocodile is a gnome
 the gnome is a drug
 the drug is lust

desire is sod
 sod is boredom

the drug is an island
 the drug is the moon
 the drug is a crocodile
 the crocodile is a boat

the drug is a spear
 the drug is a bird
 the drug is a sea
 the drug is a shark

the drug is an island
 the island is the moon
 the moon is a crocodile
 the crocodile is blue

the drug is a tiger
 the drug is a swamp
 the drug is a bird
 the tiger is blue

the drug is dirt
 the drug is fear
 the drug is pain
 the drug is a spear
 the drug is time
 the drug is nostalgia
 the drug is me

you are useless
 so am I
 I am who
 who am I

POT

what pot is that pot pot are you my pot
pot pot pot
it answers me pot pot pot are you the pot
it answers me pot pot pot are you my pot
whose pot is that pot is it my pot
POT

HERMAN

Herman cannot walk on the earth cannot sleep on the moon
cannot warm himself in the sun cannot stay in a body
cannot drink the ocean cannot wait on the ground
cannot fly in the wind cannot live on a cloud
cannot reach through words cannot keep quiet cannot stop
talking
cannot hold in his hand cannotcannotcannotcannotcannot
cannot
where is herman? do you know?
help herman help help help helphelphelphelppppp!

LEAF

leaf
 bird
 river
 flutter
 climbing to the sky
 who can tell
 fruit grass blanket
 blue breast
 pink sky
 come!
 knife of grass you are a rock
 you you you you you you
 you you YOU you you
 you you you you you
 you

SOLDIERS

let the young people
climb in your
cannons

don't disturb them
let them rub
together
in your cannons

go away
lie down and rest
sleep
whistle
and if you want
pick grass
to help you whistle
in the valleys
sky
fields
at home

just do
whatever you want

but please
don't disturb them
let them ram the barrels
with their bodies
light their torches
and explode

SOLITUDE

the most roselike
the most thornlike
the most birdlike
the most earthlike
the most knifelike
the most eyelike
the most armlike

the most high
God

WHAT DO YOU KNOW

a great big paralysed elephant
a heap of sorrow a heap of sorrow
the wind blows through holes in the door
we are wounded we are wounded
who can halt the storm's blast
what do you know what do you know
who can drop anchor
in my heart in your heart
who can heal the wounds
what do you know what do you know

LOST (FOUND)

stone without silence
clock without time
sharpness without blade
mouth without song
sky without space
earth without death
innocence without corruption

You without me

stone without silence
clock without time
sharpness without blade
mouth without song
sky without space
earth without death
innocence without corruption

You find me

GOD?

which

God

to

or

from

because

and

therefore

between

You

and

I?

OLD MEN & YOUNG BOYS

Old men sleeping
 in the beach
young boys playing
 in their flesh
 and their heads
 and their dreams
 on the sand
 laughing laughing

the old men rise
 and watch themselves
 laughing laughing

the wind swoops down
 digging the sand
 and the old men see
 their own bones
 in the sand
 and cry
 themselves to sleep again

and the boys laugh
and laugh and laugh and laugh

MEOW

A long lane to the mud and my distended body. A cat plays with the mouse failing in its claws. A woman and a man bite each other. Which is the cat and which the mouse? Meow. A long lane. Decide. I know Africa I know Europe I know the seas I know the time I know electricity I know how to fly. But when two people bite each other in loneliness I find it hard to decide what is pleasure what is a wound what is empty what is meaningful what is human what is a monkey what is sin what is heaven.

BRIDAL BED

we can't

the walls are eyes

the doorpanels voyeurs

the keyhole is watching

we are not alone

although they pretend to have left us

naked

the walls laugh at us

we can't

the room is stripped bare

I hold you in my arms and thighs

and nothing

do not cry, soon it will be day

soon

we can open the door

- good morning - they'll say

the comfort of day

repeat - good morning -

cold comfort of day

AMOK

(1976)

CAT

Meow! there is a cat in my blood he roars he runs
 he hurts he flows through my aorta in the forest of my
 blood he is enormous but he is not a lion and not a
 tiger and not a jaguar and not a leopard but a tabbycat and
 not a cat but a cat Meow! he is hungry he levels
 the forests of Africa with his claws and madness he roars
 he howls don't feed him he doesn't like meat Jesus
 don't give him bread he doesn't like bread Meow!

a cat fighting in my blood roaring pushing his way
 through the coals in my heart he is hungry very hungry
 Meow! he has not eaten for a million days a thousand
 eons he is never satisfied very hungry my curious cat
 perpetually clawing wait God created the cat I didn't ask
 Him to he roars in search of Him he is hungry don't
 feed him flesh feed him rice God created him I didn't
 want him to he wants God to one day make him tame so
 he can live at peace in the world

Meow! he roars how many Gods are there give
 me one to keep my cat quiet Meow! shush pussy
 shush I fix traps in Africa in the Amazon in Riau in
 cities who knows perhaps I'll catch a God not bad
 a slice for you and a slice for me shush pussy shush
 Meow!

FROM "AMOK"

who made socrates who made plato
 who made archimedes who made zeno
 who made satre who made laotze
 who made the teacher who made the master
 I did of course
 if I'm so clever
 why can't I find
 God?

huh

I have so many prisoners
 a proud man a confident man a stubborn man an arrogant man
 meow

I place a thousand feet on their bellies
 strip them and tear them open
 with my teeth
 and my claws

slice their bodies crush their bones tear open their brains
 break open their chests
 perhaps I'll find a God hidden there
 I send them to the gallows
 hey you martyrs proud men prisoners
 how many gods do you have
 you misers!
 keeping God for yourself
 until the day you die
 and God creeps away
 in your very last breath
 but I don't know where
 the tiger dies, unsatisfied
 the man dies, only God survives, but I don't know where

fox

give me your chickens

tiger

give me your deer
seahawk

give me your fish

magpie

give me your worms

beasts of the fields

give me your gods

at least a slice

perhaps they will make my cat

happy

for a while

shush pussy

shush

have pity on them

they are only poets

hush pussy

forgive me

I am not just a poet

I am the best of poets

the best hunter

the best at freeing language

the best at calling You

pot pot pot

pot pot pot

if the pot doesn't want the pot

then the pot is every pot

looking for a pot

pot

hey You! hear my mantra

hear my cat calling You

izukalizu

mapakazaba itasatali

tutulita

papaliko arukabazaku kodega zuzukalibu

tutukaliba dekodega zamzam lagotokoco

zukuzangga zegezegeze zukuzangga zege

zegeze zukuzangga zegezegezegze zukuzang

ga zegezegeze zukuzangga zegezegeze zu

kuzangga zegezegeze aahh ... !

I free these names

to find God as they will

MARRIAGE MACHINE

birds nest outside flowers seed two sexologists
 make a marriage machine out of flesh and wood bolt down nut
 up naked throbbing sparkplug flame tiktaktiktaktiktak
 titaktik bolt up nut over final check sexologists in and out
 timing firing seven six five four three two one zero go!
 the motor roars the wheels turn flesh on flesh on rubber on flesh
 the sexologists smile the boat sails tiktaktiktaktiktak
 hold your nose I am embarrassed the sexologists smile
 would you like to try our marriage machine? tiktaktiktaktiktaktik
 no no no no no no no no no no mouth on mouth flesh on flesh
 bolt down heart and body tiktaktiktaktiktaktiktak the sexologists
 smile the boat sails do you want to try our marriage machine?
 tiktaktiktaktiktak no I don't want to be put in a box I don't
 want to be screwed I want flesh in the field and I want the bird
 to fly and I want fruit to grow tiktaktiktaktiktaktiktaktiktak
 the sexologists smile the boat sails do you want to use our marriage
 machine stainless steel shockproof water resistant guaranteed fresh
 would you like to shake yourself free from pain? tiktaktiktak
 tiktaktiktaktiktak no no no no no no no no no no **ZZZZZZZZZZZZ**
ZZZZZZZZZZZZ **ZZZZZZZZZZZZ** **ZZZZZZZZZZZZ** **ZZZZZZZZZZ** no

EGG

floating egg primal egg woven egg soul egg
who walks there who bends there who sleeps there time
who whispers there fate whose is the face you kiss
whose the hand you touch what do you want your life
your wound your pain

swollen headed egg the earth is ready
phooey!
drop dead!

WOUND

ha ha

YOU

all!

AXE
(1979)

PREFACE TO "AXE"

Why axe? An axe can tear apart a static situation. Anyone who falls into a routine becomes static, rigid, dead. His soul has no life of its own. To avoid this, one must have an axe with which one can break open the world, let the days flow freely and meet the challenge to live creatively. When one is driven to be more creative, one feels life more intensely.

The challenge, however, exposes us to hurt, to the possibility of being wounded. The desire to live intensely, totally, to be creative every single minute, is a cruel passion and forces us deeply into life itself. If we are serious about life, we cannot avoid this challenge.

Most of my previous poems have been about the search for God. In this new collection, I am more interested in death, and in the possibility of dying before one dies.

Confronting death is not like finding a purse lying somewhere or other on a footpath. Death is present within ourselves, every single moment. From the first breath we take, we have begun to die. Our bodies are rotting away, from the inside out. For some people, this process takes a long time; for others, it takes very little time at all.

We live in the world like astronauts who have suddenly dropped to earth. The fall is painful and eventually kills us. The fall unites us, like twins with a common fate and a single spiritual quest.

In the modern world, this sense of our common unity is often obscured by the difficulties we have in communicating with each other in any serious way. Human intimacy, total and intense human communication, can only occur when each person is willing to translate himself or herself into the other. If we learn how to do this, we will be able to speak the same language and be reunited as one people once again.

The poems in "Axe" show my desire to extend my work beyond what I have already achieved in my previous collections. Writing is a serious business. A poet is under no obligation to write for the rest of his life. He can stop whenever he wants. As long as he does write, however, he must live life to the full, as seriously and as intensely as he can. You must search. You must search for language, and you must find it. The person who does not find language is not a poet. I am a poet and I have my own language. But I am also aware that "were I to use every letter there is/ my alphabet would never be as great as God" (even).

Sutardji Calzoum Bachri
 Jakarta, 17th May 1979.

**A GIFT OF LOVE FROM AN INDONESIAN GENTLEMAN IN IOWA CITY
USA TO A YOUNG INDONESIAN MAIDEN IN JAKARTA**

some lovers send gifts of flowers
some lovers send gifts of blood
some lovers send gifts of tears
I send you my penis

may it grow longer and longer
may it stretch thirteen thousand miles
from me to you, ignoring US postal regulations
against parcels longer than 3'6"

my lady, my love, don't cry, relax
open your soul, your mind, be naked,
let us hope that my almighty penis
can stand tall, straight,
as magnificent as the flagpoles outside the United Nations,
soaring into the air, offering you peace,
amen.

An earlier English version of this poems first appeared in Writing from the World (University of Iowa). The Indonesian text has never been published. (Trans.)

JAWS

beneath the moon
a shark waits
 mouth open
for an astronaut
 to fall from the sky

I will drop
a pair of shoes
into his mouth
with you in them
if you are not careful

my brother
 my twin
we are bound
by our common
fall

AXE

everyone carries an axe
everyone is going
up to the sky
everyone is determined
that if he can't reach the sky
he will cut it down again
see how fiercely they strike off
beating their axes together
damn I can't sleep
I have hollow dreams
and the bed is broken

PRAYER

Father Axe
give me long necks
to hack
so restless blood may flow
down to the waiting sea
Death!

SOUP

I am eating black soup
drawn from my own blood
and I am bloated
my blood is full of black dogs
barking and tearing at time
my heart pumps green cats
around the edge of the forest
my blood screams
pounding out the words
of an unwritten
and unpublished
dictionary

I am eating black soup
drawn from my own blood
sucking it
sip by sip
like a mad woman
in an experimental movie
drinking from a man's arm

NOAH

in wounded swamps
black leeches eat the moon
the sun has vanished
the clocks drip
infected seconds

nothing escapes
even while sleeping
earth earth earth
give me a hill
on which I can place my feet!

A PATH AMONG THE GRAVES

gaping wounds in my body
bear me over hills over reefs over mountains
to the stars
the flies dig wells in my flesh
for your grave alina

for your grave alina
I dig deep into myself
kings will flow in the rivers of my blood
 waving black flags
I will polish the sun weep at the moon
and drink your tears alina

the river flows to the sea
 bearing graves
the sea flows to the ocean
 bearing graves
the clouds flow into rain
 bearing graves
the rain falls on the trees
 their roots and their flowers
bearing your grave alina

IMAGINE

For Salim Said

he drank
 whisky
 slug
 after slug
 imagine, he said, if there were no whisky
 the blood would stop flowing in my veins

beside his whisky
 in the yard
 his children played
 imagine, he said, if there were no children
 I would forget how to cry

slug
 after slug
 of whisky
 weeping

one day he took a pistol from a drawer
 imagine, he said, if I lived for ever
 and he shot himself in the head
 imagine

DRUNKARDS

in the valleys
drunkards
climb drunk hills
sometimes slip
and fall
then begin climbing again
they want to pluck the moon
from on top of the mountain

trembling
they say
"we will never drown
in the moon's waters"
they sing and sing
and fall
and rise again

on top of the mountain
they pick the mountain
and put it in their pockets
they are in the moon's pocket

on top of the mountain
everything has a place
everything is safe

BLEEDING

I am bleeding today. a black axe lies buried deep in my dairy.
 breaking open my wednesday blood flows my monday blood flows my
 tuesday blood flows my friday blood flows
 blood flows and throbs rushing through my dictionary my library
 everything is covered with blood scarred with deep wounds
 my hand body road stars atoms all bleed
 I am bleeding today but no one knows the extent of my pain
 I shout desolation replies I call silence speaks I ask thorns reply
 I sing melancholy dances
 you send your children to school you send them year after year
 they sprout pubic moustaches long hair
 who can translate my pain?
 who knows the right words?
 not green not yellow not blue not red no colour the blood splashing
 inside me is a sea and I am a fish in a sea of pain
 we dive for coral, prawns, cockles and tripang the way we dive for
 pain. the wounds I bear we all bear
 I am walking through my dairy today. I shout tear it up I moan in
 a fever I shake with fright. There is so much blood! If even my shadow
 touched the ground, the whole earth would fill with blood!
 my pain is your pain it is our pain
 we come from the same pain. the wounds I bear we all bear. perhaps
 you don't know that. perhaps. you don't.

WHO

I open the window and walk in the garden
 a river flows between the trees
 I send perfumed courses to all who have hurt me
 a crocodile flies through the air eating ash
 I hate beautiful things
 may the river take you all
 I sink into a house of rocks
 what am I if not a thorn
 stabbing the silence

who sings? I don't know! who does know? I can't say! tell me the
 conventions. you are, of course, why are you so lonely? you're not
 a rock. damn, my body hurts. it trembles. misfortune smiles on me.

I stretch out my hand to a tree
 a bird dances on my bleeding fingers
 my days flow through the sun's veins
 my body flows home to the moon

my beloved, take shelter
 in my broken branches and imprisoned soul
 my dove, open your wings and fly
 the sky lies open before you

the longing is eternal, I know
 the pain is immediate, you cannot escape
 who stands erect? time's gender. why today? be out in the light!
 what is this? hair. it seems so thick. like sorrow.

laughing I plunge a needle into your mouth ha ha ha ha you are
 a good horse I am a boat you are the harbour one vanished into
 the other. spread your wings, my dove and fly. you cannot reach
 the sky in a single day

who stands erect

EVEN

even the greatest poet
will never be as great as God

once I looked for God within myself
now I do not

when I die
I will die like a rock, or sand
and my soul will live in my poetry

seven peaks cry out
day's anguish screams at the sky
I write my longing on sand

were I to use every letter there is
my alphabet would never be as great as God

ONE

I will translate my body into your body
your hair is a translation of my hair
if your hand cannot claim to be my hand
I will translate my hand into your hand
if your tongue will not speak as my tongue
I will translate my tongue into your tongue
I will translate my fingers into your fingers
if your fingers cannot touch me
I will translate your blood into my blood
if your blood follows a separate rhythm from mine
if your stomach cannot swallow my stomach
I will translate my stomach into your stomach
if your genitals are not my genitals
I will translate my genitals into your genitals

our flesh will be one, our souls one
even when we are far apart
what is stuck into you will make me bleed

RECENT POEMS

IDULFITRI

See

how the sword of penance slices through my heart
 removing the worn and futile past
 I have kept the Fasting Month
 I have prayed every night
 spun my beads, day and night
 spread my prayer-mat
 towards Mecca
 and my own heart and blood.
 On the night of Qadar I waited
 in vain for Gabriel or any other angel.

But I encouraged myself
 I said:
 Tardji, each night you bathed in your longing for God
 it wasn't enough to make Him come to you
 but you are a stubborn creature and you loved Him
 you never forgot Him
 or His promises
 May God grant you the love you seek

Although you didn't meet Him
 your prayers cleansed your soul
 and drew you closer to Him.
 The closer you came
 the more foolish you saw your life to have been.

Lord, look at this former drunkard
 speeding along the straight path
 Please don't kick me back into the gutter
 where I wasted my days drinking wine in the world's wine-shop
 May I taste the wine of Your light
 now that my days are almost over.

I wasted so many years
 that is why I have to hurry so quickly
 Please, Lord, don't kick me back into the gutter
 where I wasted my days drinking in the world's wine-shop

This morning
 I put on the armour of la ilaha illallah¹
 my boots of siratul mustaqiem²
 and ran straight to the field of prayer
 bearing my mosque within myself
 I spread out my mat
 prayed
 and celebrated
 my new birth.

¹ There is no god but God... (The Muslim Profession on Faith).

² The straight path (from Al-Fatihah).

MIRROR

You want to be good friends with Allah azza wa jalla³
 and you pray
 but I can tell
 you are thinking of your prick
 You carry it wherever you go
 You are a donkey
 Your prick is your boss

You say you are writing
 but all I see are scratches
 You don't know the words
 You are painting, applying make-up,
 you slut, smearing lipstick
 onto the flesh of your rotting words.
 May God save me from such men.

As soon as a pretty woman walks past
 or you remember someone
 your itch returns.
 Your body stinks and soul rots
 as you stare at the mirror.
 I see a swamp
 filled with corpses.
 As you betray yourself
 you sink further
 into the mire of forgetfulness.

You have sinned
 Save yourself
 Seek God's apostles,
 see how they bow before Him
 how they dance in ecstasy
 Follow them
 you fool!

The apostles' feet never touch the ground!
 Their hearts propel them
 along the straight path
 Cleanse your heart,
 pray the set-prayers.
 I have seen you weeping on your prayer-mat
 Your tears fell no further

³ The Creator.

than the carpet.
Then you laughed
and giggled
and forgot all about them.
Damn you!
It is time
to leave this earth
Time
to stop being a donkey
Rise up
on the wings of penance
and fly!

Reach for the branches of the sky
Stop clinging
to earth's despondent twigs.

Fly!

You love
the land beneath your feet
You long for the Truth
and content yourself with trivia
You want God
yet you waste your time with sex
Your fear decay
yet you befriend stinking flesh
You say you hate infection
but you are fascinated by your own blood
There is no life in you
Only death!

BEFORE THE KA'ABAH

"I come. I come in answer to your call." But where have you come? You have come into your empty self. You are like the Ka'abah. This amazes you, even shocks you. In the house of the self, no one waits, no one welcomes you. Back at the airport, in Jeddah, you saw "bienvenu", "willkomm", "selamat datang" and heaven knows what in Chinese and Japanese. Here you are host and guest, both. As Umar said: "Allahumma zid haadzal baita tasyriifa wa ta'zhiiman wa mahaabatan wazid man syarrafahuu wa karramahuu mimman hajjahuu-awi tamarahuu tasyriifan wa ta'zhiiman wa takriiman wa birra".⁴ You must encourage yourself. You are the guest. And you are the host. This is your house. So make the preparations you know you will need. Guest of the self, inner spirit: your soul is hungry and thirsty, it wants to drink in endless cycles of prayer, to chew on thousands of blessings. Feed your soul. Let it have its fill! Let it encircle the Great Mosque and run between the hills of Safa and Marwa. Oh restless soul, return to your God!

Before the Ka'abah, I come to the end of my poems. After my questions and my restlessness, after my heart has been driven wild by worry, after the cat has roared through my blood, this is the way forward.

I look at my veins and search for my blood. My blood flows in prayer, circumambulation, in kissing the Black Rock. Bismillahi Allahu Akbar. Everything fades. Fades. Fades. There is no Tardji. There is no crowd of pilgrims circling the Mosque. There are no Afghans, no Iraqis, no Pakistanis, no Iranians. Call "Ghulam", no one will answer you. Call "Gotbzadegh", no one will answer you. Call "Burhan", no one will answer you. Call any name, all you will hear is the roar of prayer.

You gaze at the sky. Thin clouds play with their prayer-beads. Do not look for God there. God does not live in the sky. Look for him in the believer's heart! I gaze at my chest, watch it daily throbbing, see the world destroy me there. The circling crowds tell how the souls of Muslims meet the great Soul. Prayers reverberate in every corner of this great building. May my soul flow around the Ka'abah, may I learn to walk again. Inside my breast I hear the ancient prayer, the classical poem papaliko arukabazuku kodega lagotokoco zukuzangga zegezegeze zukuzangga zegezegeze ...

The journey without an end begins here, in the Great Mosque, the journey beyond the body, beyond all words. Here prayer is more than fantasy. God Himself is the house of prayer. Once I brought you flowers and You said wait. I brought you my blood and You said not enough. I brought You my grief and You said it was too

⁴ "On Lord, give glory greatness and love to the Ka'abah. And give glory, greatness, honour and well being to those who undertake the lesser and greater pilgrimage, and who honour, and revere this House." Saidina 'Umar ibn al-Khattab was the second Caliph of Islam.

small. I brought You my body and You said that was better. I came with nothing.
Ah!

You take me to Safa, to Marwa, to Safa, to Marwa, to the desert, to the mountains,
to the stars. Alina, my prayers replenish me, feast me, caress me! Alina, I found
my own religious order by bowing at Abraham's Grave, taking vows at Multazam,
pouring water from the zamzam well into my fevered veins, and clinging to the
straight path. Alina!

Alhamdulillah, Illness, you have brought me to God. Thank you, Age, for leading
me to Him. Once my poems were as silent as a rock. Now, near the Black Rock,
I see His secrets. The light! Light! Light!

What is that noise? Prayer, What flows? The soul. What lies buried? the past.
What is He? Light. I embrace the La'abah and place prayerful kisses on the Stone.
As I kiss it, I kiss Abraham, Sarah, Ismail, Hagar, Mary the mother of Jesus, and
Muhammad. On this day, I weep.

DAVID COPPERFIELD, REALITIES '90

David Copperfield amazes me
Houdini entralls me
All great magicians fascinate me

I'm astounded when a magician
turns suffering into skyscrapers
I'm spellbound when he turns wounds
into a major financial institution

I'm bewildered
when his voice
sounds exactly like mine

I'm astonished
that his wand can reach out
and strike at will

I marvel
that one man's eyes can see us
wherever we are

I'm stupified
when he takes our tears
and turns them into glass
in a shopping plaza

I'm shocked
one magician can turn forests
into gold
and another changes hillsides
into deserts

Lord,
this is Tardji,
astounded, astonished,
amazed and shocked,
alone and afraid
living in a land
full of magicians.

The master conjuror 'David Copperfield' visited Jakarta in 1990. His show was entitled "Illusions '90".

CHEATS AND LIARS

You eat bananas
we eat the skins

you rush along highways
we sleep under bridges

you build skyscrapers
we sweat in the shadows

you build mosques
and churches
for us to pray in
you want us to pray
while you enjoy the world