

INDONESIAN LITERATURE AFTER REFORMASI: THE TONGUES OF WOMEN

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Abstract

The end of the Suharto regime in May 1998 unleashed a flood of free speech in Indonesian literature and the popular press, which had long been suppressed during the “New Order” period. In literature, this new freedom was signified by the theme of “Sastra Reformasi,” a literature of “Reformation.” This writing was socially committed to changing the regime and promoting new and more democratic values. This paper discusses works by three major writers of this new era, all of them women: Helvi Tiana Rosa, Ayu Utami, and Dewi Lestari. Each of these writers deals with this period of rapid social change, and its impact on social and personal (especially sexual) morality. The paper suggests that the tongues of women are beginning to speak, with an increasing strength in various and sometimes violent ways, to the enormous changes in personal values which are continuing to take place in Indonesian society.

Keywords

Indonesian women writers, Reformation literature, self-fulfillment, sexuality, violence in Aceh

About the Author

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INTRODUCTION

The resignation of President Suharto in May 1998 was followed by an amazing reassertion of free speech throughout Indonesia. During the “New Order” period, newspapers, magazines, writers, and public performances had been carefully scrutinized by government authorities to ensure that nothing was said or published which might “disturb public order.” Newspapers and magazines had regularly been banned (most notably in June 1994, with the closure of *Tempo*, *Detik* and *Editor*); theater performances were censored and had sometimes been closed (for example, the play “Suksesi” (“Succession”) by Riantiarno’s Teater Koma in October 1990); books had been forbidden circulation (including the works of Pramoedya Ananta Toer); and, on occasion, writers (for example, Wiji Thukul) had even “disappeared” when their criticism of the government became too vocal. In consequence, authors turned to absurdist styles of writing, which

apparently had little to do with the critical depiction of the society in which they lived. As Henk Maier, Professor of Malay at Leiden University in the Netherlands, has argued: “Rejecting realism and strict moralism, the tales of the seventies and eighties were preoccupied with an experimental freedom and playfulness that confused the critics, alienated those who thought that ‘literature’ still had a role to play in the New Order, and discouraged new and young readers who subsequently turned away from *sastra* as a crucial manifestation of national culture” (258). It was Maier’s opinion that “Suharto and his administrative apparatus have castrated a generation of writers, robbing them of their generative power, the power of being historical witnesses who could tell others about what is happening before their very eyes” (258).

This new freedom of speech flooded the newspapers, the magazines, and the literature itself. Writers everywhere frankly criticized the government. In literature, this new trend was known as *sastra reformasi*, Reformation Literature. A humorous example of the criticism can be found in Agus Sarjono’s striking poem, “Sajak Palsu” (“Fake Poem”):

Good morning sir, good morning ma’am, the school children say
with fake politeness. Then they study fake history
from fake text-books. When school is finished
they are horrified to see the range
of their fake marks. Unable to enter university,
they go to their teachers’ homes to offer
their fake respect and envelopes
full of money. With fake smiles,
the teachers pretend to refuse, then finally
accept the envelopes and make fake promises
that they will change the old fake marks
for new fake marks. The semesters pass,
and they are born as fake economists, fake lawyers,
fake agricultural scientists, fake engineers.
Some become fake teachers, scholars,
and artists. Passionately they rush to take advantage
of fake developmental policies based on fake economics.
They witness fake trading based on fake exports
and fake imports, offering fake quality goods.
Fake banks busily offer fake bonuses and gifts,

while silently providing loans based on fake
letters of security signed by fake officials
from the fake state banking authority.
Society trades with fake money supported
by fake exchange rates.
Fake currencies snarl at fake exchange rates
until the whole structure collapses
and the crisis destroys the fake government
through fake bad luck. The fake people
shout with fake delight and debate fake concepts
at fake seminars, honouring the arrival
of a fake democracy,
a democracy which is so brilliant
and so very, very fake. (79-80)

WOMEN WRITING

Besides politics, authors also wrote about private concerns, particularly sexuality, in a way which had not been seen before. Remarkably, the most exciting and innovative writers of post-Reformation Indonesian literature were women. In itself, this was a significant new development in Indonesian literature. For the first time, women held centre stage in Indonesian writing, and readers could now hear women themselves speaking frankly about personal and social female experience, female subjectivity, and female bodies.

In Indonesian prose, the voice of men writing *about* women has long been the dominant voice. This was true of the major works of the prewar canon. Marah Rusli's *Siti Nurbaya* (*Siti Nurbaya*, 1921) is the story of a woman, Siti Nurbaya, forced to marry an ugly old man she does not love, Datuk Meringgih. Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana's *Layar Terkembang* (*With Sails Unfurled*, 1936) tells of the fates of two very different sisters, one modern in her outlook, the other traditional in her expectations of love and marriage. Armijn Pane's *Belenggu* (*Chains*, 1941) is the story of a prostitute. It is also true of more recent works, such as *Bumi Manusia*, (*This Earth of Mankind*, 1980), and *Gadis Pantai*, (*The Girl from the Coast*, 1987), both by Pramoedya Ananta Toer who is now widely revered as Indonesia's greatest novelist of the twentieth century.

In poetry, too, we have often heard the voice of men writing about women. These

include distant disembodied descriptions, in which men address women as “you” (*kamu*) in an intimate way. Sapardi Djoko Damono’s very beautiful poem “*Aku Ingin*” (“I Want”), for example, begins: “*aku ingin mencintaimu dengan sederhana*” (“I want to love you simply”) (see Aveling 180-1). What she wants is never asked. In other poems, we have heard the voices of men in different ways urging submission by their wives to the “five womanly duties” proclaimed by the state in the 1970s. These duties are: (1) to support her husband’s career and duties; (2) to provide offspring; (3) to care for and rear the children; (4) to be a good housekeeper; and (5) to be a guardian of the community (125). Darmanto Jatman’s most famous poem “*Isteri*” (“A Wife”) begins: “*Isteri sangat penting untuk mengurus kita/ Menyapu pekarangan/ Memasak di dapur/ Mencuci di sumur/ mengirim rantang ke sawah/ dan ngeroki kita kalau kita masuk angin*” (“We need a wife to look after us / To sweep the yard / Cook in the kitchen / Wash at the well / send food to us when we are in the fields / and massage us when we have a chill”) (see Aveling 188-91). The pronoun *kita*, “we,” is inclusive; the reader, necessarily, is assumed to need a wife as well. What a wife needs is, again, not a question that is ever asked.

The new voice is not the older literary voice of women who accept the traditional roles of wife and mother, with an occasional sigh when things go wrong. Rather, it is the voice, or more correctly the voices, of young, educated Indonesian women writing in an honest and a critical way about the lives, the pleasures and the suffering, the sexuality, and the need for full self-expression, of themselves and other Indonesian women like themselves.

In this paper I want to introduce and discuss some of the works of three women writing around the time of the beginning of the Reformation era: Helvy Tiana Rosa (born 1970), Ayu Utami (1968), and Dewi Lestari (1976). They grew up in an independent Indonesia, knowing no other President but Suharto (who held power from 1966 to 1998). These women belong to a modern (even post-modern) world. They are tertiary educated and were educated in the Indonesian language. They have a close involvement with the mass media. Religion formed an important, and natural, part of their development. It is possible that these women writers, and others like them (Dorothea Rosa Herliany, a major poet, for example, and the fiction writer Oka Rusmini, a brahmin Balinese, raised in Jakarta but now living as a journalist in Bali), were, and indeed still are, the forerunners of a whole post-Suharto era in Indonesian literature, the generation sometimes called “the Generation of the year 2000” (see Korrie Layun Rampan).

HELVY TIANA ROSA

Born in Medan, North Sumatra, in 1970, Helvy Tiana Rosa graduated in 1995 from the Middle Eastern Studies Program of the Department of Arabic, University of Indonesia, Jakarta. At university, she established an alternative Muslim women's theater group in 1991 and directed some of its productions. She began working with the children's magazine, *Annida*, in 1992, and is now its editor. The magazine is popular with Muslim youth and sells approximately 40,000 copies each fortnight. She also established the organization, Forum Lingkar Pena, in 1997, and it now has some 3,000 young writers as members. Helvy has published some sixteen books, and her works are included in another fifteen anthologies.

"RED NETS"

Here I want to discuss just one of her stories, "Jaring-jaring Merah" ("Red Nets"), which was published in the literary magazine, *Horison*, in April 1999, and was subsequently chosen as one of the ten best stories in *Horison* for that decade. The story is remarkable for its courageous criticism of the Indonesian government and its sympathy for women who have been violated in war.

"Red Nets" is a horrifying account of actions allegedly undertaken by the Indonesian Army, or parts of it, towards villagers in the Province of Aceh, as part of the Army's efforts to crush the rebel Free Aceh Movement (GAM, Gerakan Aceh Merdeka). Criticism of the Indonesian Army is, as one might imagine, a rare and a bold action in a time of potential national disintegration (see Korrie Layun Rampan 296-303).

The story falls into four clear sections and is told in a mixture of real and dream-like scenes. The narrator is a young woman, Inong, whose character hovers between absolute insight and the mental derangement caused by the brutality of war.

In the first section, Inong sees two wild dogs tearing at a corpse, while she walks through the forest at night. The dogs snarl at Inong, as if to frighten her.

"Frighten me?" she asks. "Don't these mangy dogs know that I have seen three to seven corpses floating each day in the river near my house! I saw Yunos Burong's throat slashed and his head displayed to the villagers. I have seen the bodies of those who have been shot on the back of a yellow truck. Their blood spurted everywhere. I saw my neighbor, Rohani, stripped, then gang-raped, before her house and husband were set alight. I was there when *Geuchik* [the Village Headman] Harun was tied to

a tree and shot repeatedly. I saw it all! Everything. I also saw them slaughter ... my family, for no reason." (Trans. mine, Korrie Layun Rampan 296-7)

She then sees two men wearing boots (soldiers) approaching her. The men dismiss her as:

"That mad woman!" who "used to be pretty once." Inong sings, "with the moon, the clouds, and the night air. With the whispering of the wind, an owl and the howling of the dogs. With the shadows of my Father, Mother, Ismail and Agam. We sing, we dance *bungon jeumpa*. Then I smile shyly, just as I did when Hamzah, my fiancé, used to ride his bicycle past our house. Once. Yes, once." (298)

There is only one person who cares for Inong in her madness, Cut Dini. Inong doesn't know much about Dini, except that she is a member of an NGO, an *aktivis mesjid* (Muslim activist), who has returned to Aceh after finishing her studies in Jakarta. Dini washes Inong, feeds her, provides her with psychological support, and comforts her by chanting the Koran. Dini represents the Muslim activism to which Helvy is so passionately committed in her own life. The character is didactic but, in a predominantly Muslim state, she can be expected to arouse wide-spread sympathy, a sympathy which is here directed against the national military forces. NGOs form a necessary, but not always popular, leaven in the strongly authoritarian Indonesian state.

In the third section of the story, two soldiers visit Cut Dini and offer her money if she will sign a statutory declaration promising to "say nothing to outsiders." (The term "*orang asing*" can refer to non-Indonesians, perhaps western journalists, or simply to those from outside the region.) Dini angrily rejects their offer: "No!" she insists. "What about the rapes, the tortures, the slaughterhouse at the *rumah geudong*, the corpses scattered around The Hill of the Skull, the Yellow Bridge, Tamiang River, Cot Panglima, Krueng Campli Forest ... everywhere! The villages of three thousand widows, the orphans abandoned" (3).

In their reply, the soldiers plead that they are only fighting against the GPK (an alternative term used by the Indonesian Army to refer to GAM—Gerakan Pengacau Keamanan, The Movement to Disrupt Security); that what has happened is a military operation, whose one purpose is to protect the peace of society (*menjaga keamanan masyarakat*). This provokes a further response from Cut Dini: "Who are the people really afraid of? Many of them were forced to become *cuak* (military spies), to spy on and treat their own friends as followers of Hasan Tiro and the Free Aceh Movement. But it is

all finished. There is no place here for people like you now” (300). The response uses language in various ways. It is the national language, Indonesian, but it continues to incorporate sympathetic references to the regional language, Acehese. It rejects the distorted language of the state, which refuses to admit that the rebels have an ideological commitment of their own. Finally, it accepts wider national and international accounts of what is happening in Aceh as potentially carrying their own truth, a truth which is suppressed in the immediate region.

The fourth section of the story is divided into two parts. The first part returns to Inong’s madness. It begins with Inong’s graphic dream of the death of her family members and her own rape. The part second tells of the appearance of another two soldiers. Dini pleads with these men: “She is only one of thousands of victims of savagery (*korban kebiadaban*), Pak. Help us, give us justice. You have seen for yourself. Those elements (*oknum-oknum*) have taken everything this poor woman had.” And despite Cut Dini’s reassurance, “Inong..., they will help us” (303), the story ends with Inong’s floundering, as she struggles with the red cords which bind her. Here Helvy offers to salvage the reputation of the Army, but only if they will declare their commitment to social justice.

This is an extraordinary story about an extremely difficult situation, told through—and on behalf of—women and the civilian population under attack. “Operation Red Net” (“*Operasi Jaring Merah*”) was the military code name for its operations against GAM during the 1990s. During these operations, over a thousand civilians were killed, almost twice as many disappeared, hundreds of women were raped, almost seventeen thousand children were left orphans, and over a hundred buildings (including schools) were burned. Helvi carefully blames these events only on “certain elements” in the Indonesian Army, and calls on other parts of the Army to put the situation right. Her concern for women, her belief in their power to stand against (and sometimes be crushed by) social violence, and her faith in the healing power of Islam, is new in Indonesian literature, and unmistakably powerful.

AYU UTAMI

Ayu (Yustina Ayu) Utami was born in Bogor, West Java, on the 21 November, 1968. She is a graduate of Department of Russian at the University of Indonesia and has worked as a journalist for such magazines as *Matra*, *Forum Keadilan*, and *D&R*, as well as being an editor of the cultural magazine *Kalam*. After the banning of the magazines *Tempo*, *Editor*, and *Detik* in 1994, Ayu was a founding member of the Aliansi Jurnalis Independen (AJI, Alliance of Independent Journalists), which protested against censorship of the press by the

Suharto regime.

Saman (*A Name*) is the first part of a larger novel, *Laila Tak Mampir di New York* (*Laila Didn't Stopover in New York*), which won the major prize in the Novel Writing Contest held by the Dewan Kesenian Jakarta (Jakarta Arts Council) in 1998. Originally published in April 1998, before the fall of Suharto, *Saman* was phenomenally successful. It had already reached its thirteenth printing in June 1999, and its fourteenth in March 2000. (Most Indonesian novels only print one edition and sell a total of 2-3,000 copies over a period of perhaps three to five years.)

Despite their common concerns about Indonesian political corruption, “Jaring-jaring Merah” and *Saman* are written from very different perspectives. *Angkatan 2000* includes a smiling picture of Helvy Tiana Rosa wearing a Muslim head-scarf. The back cover of *Saman* showed a picture of a windswept Ayu in long-sleeved t-shirt and jeans, somewhere in the deserts of mid-west America. The back cover also carried praise from such major literary figures as Sapardi Djoko Damono: “Fantastic ... displays a compositional technique which, to the best of my knowledge, has never been attempted by other writers in Indonesia, and perhaps not in other countries either.” The novelist and public intellectual Dr. Umar Kayam wrote on the back cover: “I don’t think any other young writer could compete with her now. And probably not many older writers either.” The veteran Pramoedya Ananta Toer was overwhelmed: “The writer shows the highest possible integrity ... I could only read it with great difficulty. It made me feel as though I was a political prisoner all over again.” And the social activist Roman Catholic priest, the late Y. B. Mangunwijaya, added: “Superb, splendid [in English] ... This novel can be enjoyed by mature readers and will be of great use to them. It is a very mature work. And honest. Especially about politics and social anthropology, and even more particularly about religion and faith.” Ayu represented a more modern, secular Jakarta perspective on the nation at this point in its history.

Not all readers were as impressed as the major Indonesian writers cited on the back cover of the novel. Questions were also raised in 1998, particularly by men, as to whether a woman could properly write such a work. Most readers, especially women readers, felt that the remarks were condescending and insulting.

SAMAN

During the 1960s, the novelist Iwan Simatupang attempted to introduce the tenets of the French “New Novel” into Indonesian, against the predominantly realist tone of writers such as Pramoedya Ananta Toer and Umar Kayam. These principles led him to write the

sort of work described by one of the characters in his *Ziarah* (*The Pilgrim*, 1969), as “a novel without a hero, without a theme, and without morals” (112-3). Although less extreme than Simatupang’s work, *Saman* (and its sequel *Larung*, 2001) are well-crafted contemporary novels, told through the use of a series of unreliable, shifting, first-person narrators who are more ordinary characters than Simatupang’s vagrants, madmen, and heroes. Both parts of *Saman* treat the serious concerns of the late New Order young rich elite: school, travel, sexual relationships, politics, the environment, international business, NGOs, institutional religion, and even the antics of ghosts.

In *Saman* the stories of four young women, and that of the ex-priest /NGO activist, Saman, are inter-woven and non-sequential. Saman’s story is largely political. His story begins halfway through Chapter One with the death of a young local worker following an explosion on an oil-rig. The story later tells of the attempts of one of the workers on the rig, Sihar, to confront the company over the death. In this struggle, Sihar is assisted by an NGO worker, now known as “Saman.”

Saman’s earlier life is described in Chapter Two, where he is still called Athenasius Wisanggeni. In the traditional shadow theater, *wayang*, Wisanggeni is a minor character: a bold and aggressive son of Arjuna from a heavenly nymph, who refuses to speak anything but low Javanese to the gods. In *Saman*, Wis is a devout Catholic. We follow his ordination to the Catholic priesthood and his return to minister in the village of his childhood, Perabumulih, the site of the office of the oil company in the previous chapter. Some of this chapter is devoted to a “ghost story,” telling about a series of spirit children born to Wis’s mother, whom he hears but never sees. The major part of the chapter, however, deals with Wis’s struggles to help the villagers fight against a government supported company which seeks to coerce them into growing palm oil, rather than their currently successful rubber. By using outside resources, Wis is able to hold off the company for a long time. Finally, however, he is taken captive by the company’s goons and tortured. This leads to a mental breakdown, and a loss of vocation as he realizes that he is unable to help the villagers because he is not one of them. He supports them but, unlike them, he has nothing to win and nothing to lose, by supporting their struggles as priest. There is also a somewhat childish sense that God has failed to support him as he struggled to practice care for the poor and humble. As the ramshackle shed in which Wis is imprisoned begins to burn, he is saved by his spirit siblings. The ghost story is presented as being as real, and as important, as Wis’s spiritual crisis and his practical liberation theology. The book shows absolutely no faith in the Indonesian legal system, and the struggle to convict the manager of the rig is successful only because of an elaborate trick which the two men manage to perpetrate.

The second, and more prominent aspect of the novel, is romantic. Chapter One follows Laila Gagarina over one day, the 28th May 1996, as she waits in Central Park, New York, for her lover, who is Sihar. The language is soft, yearning and not a little naïve. It opens:

In this park, I am a bird. I have flown thousand and thousands of miles from a country with no knowledge of the seasons, migrated in search of spring, where I can smell the fragrant grass, and the trees whose names and ages are all unknown to us.

The fragrance of the wood, the cold stones, the smell of tree trunks and the mushrooms—do any of them have names, or ages. People give them names, the way parents name their children. (Trans. mine 1)

The chapter marks the passing day three times (at 10 A.M., 12 P.M., and 3 P.M.) as Laila continues to wait for Sihar. Between 10 and 12 o'clock, we are taken back to her first meeting with Sihar in 1993. Two other stories run through this flashback. The first is Laila's subsequent difficulty in losing her virginity to Sihar. She is, as she laments several times, *masih perawan*, still a virgin, despite Sihar's earlier attempts to remedy this affliction at a hotel by the beach on 22 April 1995. The symbolic message that the park setting seeks to convey is an encouragement of spontaneous natural behaviour, beyond language and conventional social morality. Laila lacks the courage to live this message out in Indonesia, but hopes that America might be different.

The love interest is revived in Chapter Three. Laila, after her disappointment at not meeting Sihar, returns to the house of her old school friend, Shakuntala, who is now studying dance in New York. The chapter opens aggressively:

My name is Shakuntala. My father and my siblings call me a slut.
Because I have slept with several men and several women. But I've never asked for any payment. My father and my siblings don't respect me. I don't respect them.
(115)

In this chapter, we are led through Shakuntala's various sexual experiences, including the loss of her virginity to a teaspoon, and an early affair with a hairy European giant.

In Chapter Five politics and romance merge, as the novel traces with increasing

urgency Saman's affair during May 1994 with another of Laila's friends, Yasmin Maningke, "the girl who has everything" (24), including a husband.

It can be argued that the major theme of both aspects of the novel is the search for freedom. The women seek to be free to express their own sexuality. There is a long and direct discussion of women's rights (180-1.) Saman's main concern, first as a priest, later as a member of an NGO organisation, is with empowering villagers. The suggestion that Father Wis is seeking to engage in the praxis of "liberation theology" is raised by the army (103), but also dismissed as totally inaccurate ("bullshit belaka" 107). Saman instead explains his own motives as a way of creatively working out the human capacity for love (161), and his growing affair with Yasmin is presented as a way of his attaining full adult maturity.

As Barbara Hatley has argued:

Saman ... breaks all the rules. Most startling to readers, it seems, are its transgressions of sexual taboos. Here there is no distancing of a female narrator from sexual expression and assertiveness. All four women ... speak intimately, frankly and with earthy humour to one another of their sexual experiences as well as their conflicts with their parents and others. ("New Directions" 454)

We may also note that the detailed criticism of fraudulent business practices, with the support of the military-civil regime, prior to the fall of Suharto, would have made a significant impact on readers (see Collins).

Some Indonesians have also questioned the nature of the "liberation" which all the characters in that work seem to be seeking. The East Javanese poet Tjahjono Widijanto, wrote an article entitled "Dari 'Siti Nurbaya' hingga 'Saman'" ("From Siti Nurbaya to Saman"), in *Kompas*, as early as May, 1999:

Saman ... attempts to express the new phenomena of a "sexual revolution" which is taking place in the larger cities. There is a shift in values, in which women feel that they have found a symbol of their own independence through sexual freedom. This especially applies to upper class women. The novel explicitly portrays the dark picture of the generation produced by the New Order who are the victims of the culture of modernism, developmentalism, and completely permissive capitalism.

The women presented in *Saman* basically depict how women were the obscene

victims of the New Order culture which was well advanced into capitalism and materialism. On the one hand, the women in the novel have a far larger public than domestic sphere in which to move, but, on the other hand, they still represent the amulet of a culture which experiences depression as it tries to translate the meaning of rebellion, freedom and independence.

They are still Siti Nurbayas—modern Siti Nurbayas, facing newer, crueller and more sophisticated Datuk Meringgihs, an utterly permissive capitalism, which is more dazzling, more cunning, freer and more deceitful (trans. mine 199).

This criticism is also an explicitly Islamic response to changes in contemporary Indonesian society, and an assertion of contrary moral values. It is hard to deny, from a more secular perspective, that the political story belongs to Saman and Sihir; and the romantic adventures to the female characters, who must wait upon the pleasure of their men. This is, from any perspective, a limited form of liberation.

DEWI LESTARI

The third author I wish to discuss here, Dewi Lestari Simangunsong, is younger than either Helvy Tiana Rosa or Ayu Utami. “Dee,” as she is often known, was born in Bandung on the 20th January, 1976. The front cover, inside flap and back cover of early editions of *Supernova* all carry the address of Dee’s web-site www.truedee.com. Here readers will find that she is an “Aquarius (and proud to be one).” Dee is also a graduate and holds the degree of Bachelor of Political Science in International Relations from Universitas Katolik Parahyangan. However, she was best known prior to the publication of *Supernova* as a singer and songwriter in the all-girl band RSD, Rida Sita Dewi. The back cover of the novel also notes that she is a cultural activist and speaker at seminars. Finally, the cover acknowledges Dee’s interest in “spirituality and science—which she considers to be ‘the only windows which are capable of being shattered at any moment’—these have led her to an exploration of values which she has later presented in this work.”

Supernova was published by Dee’s own company, Truedee Books, at the end of 2000. From other sources, we know that while *Saman* sold 30,000 copies in its first three years, *Supernova* sold a staggering 70,000 copies in its first six months. *Supernova* does not claim to have won any prizes. Nevertheless, it was short-listed for the major Khatulistiwa Award, offered annually in Jakarta. (Although it did not win, Dee’s commented at the time: “*finalis*

yang paling funky" ("maybe I didn't win, but at least I was the funkiest finalist") ("*Dewi Supernova*" 12, trans. mine).

The book positions itself as contemporary and highly accessible "literature" (the classification is prominent on the back cover) but of a rather popular kind. Its cover is bright blue and garish, bearing a postmodern scientific collage. Compared to Ayu's rugged portrait, that of Dee is both tasteful and alluring. Similarly, the novel carries the obligatory praise from established writers (having been, in fact, launched at the Jakarta Arts Centre, in February 2001), but on a page inside the back of the book. These "expert commentators" include the important but perhaps less prestigious journalist and novelist Arswendo Atmowiloto and playwright Putu Wijaya, as well as the major poet Taufiq Ismail who writes: "One of a number of works of creative renewal published in Indonesian literature over the past three years. An intelligent, unique and shattering exploration of values through science, spirituality and love." The critic Jakob Soemardjo states: "An interesting novel from a writer of the younger generation. This is an intellectual work of literature in pop art form, fully played out in the real world. It opposes old values through the presentation of new arguments, so that readers can gain new perceptions of their own existence." But there is also another page of "comments from non-experts." These include Dee's friends (including one undergoing an identity crisis), her production team, her sister, and Arian, a friend and musician who insists, in English: "You rock, girl! UNDERGROUND RULES!!" Even Dee's father is there too, unfortunately not wearing his glasses: "I never thought my little girl could write a book like this. But why did you make the print so small?"

In some ways, perhaps the most apt comment might be that of Dewa Nur Hakim, not quoted in the book itself. In the glossy *Djakarta Magazine* (September 2001), he describes *Supernova* as "a debut novel impressive not just for its vitality and assured flow, but mostly for the sheer audacity of its scope and moral statements, its eclectic nature and shameless ambition" (10).

SUPERNOVA

The youthful, parodic defiance of serious literature which I have already described as being characteristic of the outside of *Supernova* is also evident on the inside. *Supernova* is a story within a story, told by two homosexuals, Dhimas and Ruben; something completely unknown in Indonesian literature. Dhimas is a graduate in English Literature from George Washington University in Washington DC, a lecturer and a poet. Ruben, perhaps even

more remarkably, is an Indonesian Jew. He is a graduate of the Medical School of Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, and a “quantum psychologist” with a boundless interest in “theories about cosmology, which only he can understand” (Dewi *Supernova* 9). The two men first met at a drug party in Washington, while they were both still students. At this meeting, Ruben believed Dhimas to be a rich young Indonesian with far too much money, while Dhimas’s first impression of Ruben was that he was a scholarship student, a “nerd,” and a cynic. Ruben’s impression turned out to be wrong; Dhimas’ apparently was not. Their relationship continued after they returned to Jakarta and the story they create is written in honor of their tenth anniversary as “best friends” and “partners in life” together (74).

The story within the story grows from a further story (24-5), a myth which might be translated into English as follows:

A Knight fell in love with the youngest Princess
who came to earth from the land of the fairies.
One day the Princess returned to her home in the sky.
The knight was sad.
He knew how to ride a horse and how to fight with his sword,
but he didn’t know how to fly.
The Knight left his castle and asked the butterflies to teach him to fly.
But the butterflies could only help him to fly to the top of the trees.
So the Knight asked the sparrows to teach him to fly.
They could only help him fly
to the top of the church steeple.
So he asked the eagles to teach him to fly.
They could only take him to the top of the mountains.
There was no winged creature who could teach him to fly any higher than that.
The Knight was sad, but he didn’t give up.
He asked the wind to teach him to fly.
The wind taught him to fly around the world,
to fly over the mountains and above the clouds.
But the Princess was still much higher in the sky,
and the wind couldn’t fly that high.
The Knight despaired and this time he did give up hope.
One night a Falling Star heard him crying.

The Star stopped and offered to teach him how to travel at the speed of light.
To travel faster than lightning and to fly higher than a million heavens.
But, there was one condition.
If the Knight didn't land right in front of the Princess,
he would die.
The dangerous speed at which he would be travelling
would smash him into a fine red powder, and that would be the end of him.
The Knight agreed. He was prepared to trust
his very life to the Falling Star.
And he was ready to surrender his soul
to a split second in time.
The Falling Star took his hand and whispered:
"This is a journey of True Love.
Close your eyes, oh noble Knight, and tell me to stop
as soon as you feel the presence of the Princess."
They sped through the sky.
The cold air seemed to tear the handsome Knight's heart into pieces
but his soul was warmed by his love for the Princess.
And when he finally felt that she was there, he shouted: "Stop!"
Looking down, the Falling Star
was stunned by the beauty of the lonely Princess.
The Princess shone like Orion in the darkness of her galaxy.
The Star fell in love with the Princess
and let go of the Knight's hand,
the Knight who was made from love and trust.
The Knight sped through the air
Towards his own destruction.
But the Star landed
and claimed the Princess.
The poor Knight.
As a reward, he became the Aurora in the North Pole,
a symbol of his elegance and honesty to this very day.

In sketching the personalities of the present day Knight, Princess and Falling Star,
the main characters of their story, Ruben and Dhimas turn their back on Indonesian

literature in general and Simatupang's work in particular. As Ruben insists: "It's a waste of time writing about tramps or a village setting with fake cultural artefacts. In reality, yuppies are the mouthpiece of the nation. They have the potential to develop this country and, at the same time, the greatest potential to destroy it" (11).

Supernova has no overt political content. The story the two men create is a conventional three-sided love story. In fact, it is a "cinetron" story, a television soapie taken onto the page, as they both explicitly recognise, cleverly forestalling any criticism from the reader (39). Having turned their backs on tramps and kitsch village settings, Ruben and Dhimas decide that "all the characters must be young, productive, urban, metropolitan, with good access to technological and information systems" (11).

Ferre, the Knight, is in fact only twenty-nine years of age. He is the Managing Director of a large multinational firm: "he is superior to his colleagues in his manner of thinking, the way he dealt with faxes, received the various reports, the telephone calls from here and there which never allowed him an opportunity to enjoy the view as he journeyed through life." Nevertheless, although he "could live the life of a jet-setter, spending his time at wild parties and engaging with the endless number of women who offer themselves to him for his pleasure" (18-9), he never does. His appearance is, in fact, cold and indifferent. This is the result of a childhood wounding: while Ferre was still a boy, his father left Ferre's mother for another woman, and the wife committed suicide. Re's childish response to reading the myth of the Knight, the Princess and the Falling Star was a commitment to protecting himself and trusting no one. He wanted to see the Falling Star punished and the Princess realise all that the Knight had done for her. Through the betrayal of his parents, and the imbalance of the myth, Ferre has closed off his own emotions and abandoned himself to his work. He is the wounded hero, who might be a poet (something Dhimas is very keen on) if only he could allow himself to feel his own emotions.

The Princess is Rana. Dhimas doesn't particularly like her, because her life seems to him to be so absolutely predictable: "birth—kindergarten—primary school—junior high school—senior high school—college—work—marriage—children—grandchildren—death—food for worms" (30). The daughter of the aristocratic Raden Ajeng Widya Purwaningrum, Rana has been emotionally damaged in a different way from Ferre. She has been increasingly confined by the social expectations which were placed upon her as she was raised to fit into a material and highly structured social world, the world of the new social elite of industrial Indonesia. A graduate of the Institute of Technology in Bandung, one of the best schools in Indonesia, Rana is married to Arwin, a highly successful contractor, with an even better social background than her own. She suffers the further constraints of feeling herself to be married to his family and his whole class (78, 104).

There is a vitality, and an innocence, to the way Dee writes about young love. This is evident in Rana's own memory of what she expected of marriage:

Rana didn't tell him how intoxicated she had been with love ... in love with the image of love in the form of a new home together: the young couple, with their own house together in some new real estate area, paying their car off together, pushing their shopping cart hand in hand in the supermarket, discussing which brand of detergent to buy, what sort of instant noodles, which type of chilly sauce was best. (27)

Naturally things have not worked out this way, and Rana reluctantly accepts the tedium of regular marriage—until she meets Re. For Ruben and Dhimas's purposes, Rana has the potential, once Ferre falls in love with her, to magnify his suffering to the point of complete personal disintegration.

There is an ambivalence about the central myth, which reflects the queerness of the two narrators. Indonesian words do not show gender. We know that the Knight is a man, and the littlest Princess a woman. But is the Falling Star a man or a woman? Does the Star befriend the Knight out of motherly kindness or masculine friendship? Does the Star fall in love with the Princess as a man or a woman? The ambivalence can serve to underline the strangeness in Indonesian literature of any sympathetic treatment of a homosexual couple, and it creates further possibilities for the three contemporary characters who are caught up in the drama of their own sexualities.

There are many aspects to *The Falling Star*. Diva is the most complex (if that is the right word) of all of the characters. Diva is a high class prostitute. She is beautiful, intelligent, rich, absolutely independent, and as Ruben says, completely "self-actualised," following the term proposed by the psychologist Abraham Maslow. (For those not familiar with Maslow, Dee provides a brief explanation of his ideas in a footnote. Beside footnotes, the book also has a bibliography—and an index!) Diva is also hard, cold and indifferent with her clients and those with whom she must deal in everyday life. But, of course, she also has a heart of gold and is extremely kind to her driver and to children in general. She is also very wise and runs her own web-site from which she dispenses advice on the good life and the nature of reality. Diva, as it turns out, also had a troubled childhood and was raised in an orphanage. Despite her immoral lifestyle, Diva's moral certitude makes the reader feel as though it is the "respectable" male clients who are prostituting themselves in their daily lives.

There are three stages in the plot of *Supernova*. The first is the story of Ruben and Dhimas themselves. The second is the story of Re and Rana. The third is that of Re and Diva. In a conventionally moral way, Rana finally decides that she loves her husband more than she loves Ferre. Re and Diva are destined to be together only briefly, because Diva's independent nature will not allow things to be otherwise. The third is, of course, that of Ruben and Dhimas themselves.

The novel is strongly moral. Re and Rana's affair is lived out with passion but also with consistent uncertainty as Rana refuses to damage the good standing of Arwin's family. Her problem is that she has "a husband whom she must keep for the stability of the social order, and a secret lover whom she loves half to death" (104) —not an issue which would take very long in a western soapie, one feels. Eventually, Rana decides that she will indeed leave her husband to be with Re. Remarkably, it is Arwin who finally encourages Rana to leave. "If you really love him, I'm ready to let you go" he tells her after her operation in hospital for a heart condition. "I won't make things difficult for you. For us. We've both suffered too much already. Don't you think so?" (152)

Rana's response is not what he expects:

The sentence carried Rana into a completely different dimension. It moved her to see the face of the man she had married three years ago in a completely different way, no longer with distaste. There was a strange meaning in his gaze, a love that liberated. Arwin clearly loved her in that way. She couldn't, nor could her lover

It was Arwin's turn to be surprised when his wife's tears began to fall and she held him tightly. This was obviously not a farewell embrace, but the opposite, the embrace of someone who had just come home.

In her tiny little nest, Rana had found the meaning of freedom. She flew ... just at the very moment she had never expected to. (152)

The scene is completely corny, deliberately so no doubt, and Ruben and Dhimas have already foreshadowed this in their undercutting comment when Arwin first learns of the affair earlier in the book:

“It’s amazing,” Ruben whispered, “I never expected him to think like that.”

“He really loves his wife. When love reaches a certain point it can extinguish the ego.” (106)

And it therefore raises what is surely one of the central issues in the novel: the importance of love as a maturing force in the lives of independent mature adults.

There is an interesting brief scene in *Supernova* where Rana asks her mother: “during all the time you’ve been married to daddy, have you ever felt bored, or that something is wrong, or something is missing” (119). The mother’s answer is, on the surface, one that sits uncomfortably with Rana: “Later, when you’ve been married for ten or fifteen years, you’ll understand for yourself. Then you won’t ask about the sort of happiness you’re talking about now” (120-1). Maturity is the key to *Supernova*, and the novel’s thinking on this topic is more complex than its pop surface suggests.

In simple terms, this issue of love as a maturing force in human life is also at the core of the second plot, the story of Re and Diva. For much of this story, Re is oblivious of Diva’s existence, even though she lives directly across the road from him. During this time, we see Diva both as a professional model and a prostitute—hard, cold, calculating and uncaring—but also as the warm, affectionate woman who gives large amounts of her money for the welfare of children, protects her chauffeur’s drive from poverty, and shops at the local market, where she regularly buys plants for the orderly garden at the back of her house. We see her with her customers, and we see her with the one man who gives her sexual pleasure, Gio, a rich Portuguese-Chinese (Timorese?), who spends his life climbing mountains, rafting rivers and visiting unexplored lands. (Diva speaks fluent Portuguese with him, of course.)

We also see Diva as “a cyber Avatar” (12; 127-8), *Supernova* herself, dispensing psychological and spiritual advice through her computer. Within the novel there is also a complex New Age metaphysics which grows from chaos theory underlying the development of both the embedded plots. (Dee presents them earnestly and at length, but, like everything else, also mocks them.) The theories owe as much to Deepak Chopra, Father Manguwijaya, Maslow and Krishnamurti, as they do to Schrodinger, Bohm and Brodie. Some scientists have considered Dee’s knowledge of physics to be weak. I personally am of the opinion that science in literature need be no more accurate than history in literature, but I shall not pursue that here.

Diva tells one of her correspondents:

I am simply offering a new perspective. Untying the knots I see you all suffering. You decide what happens next. I have absolutely no interest in whether the knowledge I present fits with the rules, norms, culture and ideology in which you and most people believe. My aims are not comparative. I offer analogies for you to think about, to create a better life and world. That is all. (76)

And another:

I am “post” everything you believed last year, yesterday, in fact just a moment ago. We are still evolving. (75)

Dee can even undercut this philosophising too: “So that’s it, our Avatar preaches over the internet” Dhimas comments with enormous obvious disappointment (130).

It is only after the “point of bifurcation” has been reached, that Rana has left Re and he is locked in his own house in enormous despair, that Diva and Re finally meet. She joins the group outside his door, gains immediate access, sends him off to bathe (like a naughty child), and returns with the best *macaroni schotel* he has ever tasted. Thereafter they meet on a daily basis, in her garden, enjoy her cakes and discuss such passing matters as “the free market, e-business, the third world debt, labour and even Marxism,” all of which Diva understands extensively, and can back up with appropriate facts and figures (181). They are, of course, “just good friends” (188). Until finally Dhimas decides to finish the story, by letting it take its own automatic course (190).

This is how it develops. Re is drawn to Diva as she sits before her computer. In response to his question as to who she really is, Diva answers: “I am your last lesson in how to fly. Beginning from the flapping wings of the tiny butterfly (a reference to Rana and Re’s first meeting—H.A.) ... and ending with the brightness of a falling star. You have experienced a beautiful and most magical metamorphosis, Ferre ... and now you are a real Knight. You fell, but you rose again, you slipped but you were not destroyed” (196).

Re’s initiation into maturity is indeed sexual (“The blood pounds. Energy dances. An elemental harmony of love,” says page 205 dramatically). And it is also Diva’s initiation as well, in answer to his earlier question: “has Supernova ever fallen in love?” (197). But clearly, for both of them, love and sexuality are not the same thing. The crucial element is the awakening into true self awareness. Following which, they both move on, to lead their separate, adult, lives. (Can we imagine Re marrying Diva? It is as unlikely as Dr Sukartono marrying Yah in the earlier novel to which *Supernova* bears some interesting parallels:

Armijn Pane's *Belenggu*, in which the prostitute also leaves the hero to travel overseas.)

Ferre, Rana and Diva are all changed by their experiences. But, in a way, they also continue being who they originally were, but with a new awareness. In the end, the story of Dhimas and Ruben also goes nowhere. They too finish as they began: "two men with no surnames"¹ holding hands and in love (210), except that they eventually realise that they too are characters in a book and will disappear as soon as the reader closes the last page. (Ruben does in fact have a surname, Ruben Ehad, perhaps short for "Yahudi" Jew [65].)

Is *Supernova* "good literature"? That depends, as the critics say. Like Tristram Shandy, for example, it is an extremely enjoyable, intelligent work, which does not take itself terribly seriously but does have some important moral things to say about the human condition. It also casts interesting lights on other works of the years after 1998 and after, and on how we respond to them, by indicating, for example, the ruthlessness and despair of Laila and her friends. In any case, the idealist politics of the earlier authors, Helvi Tiana Rosa and Ayu Utami, has significantly been replaced by a conservative assertion of bourgeois social values, and the function of religion modified by a New Age spirituality that is part of a global counter-culture.

CONCLUSION

I would like to conclude with another poem, "Ziarah Batu," by Dorothea Rosa Herliany. Many of her works written between 1996 and 1998 increasingly emphasized the constraints of the lack of free speech which marked the approaching demise of New Order. She noted how hard it was under the many restrictions then in force (including the threat of arrest and imprisonment) to express personal opinion, and to affirm a belief in literature as a way of still speaking the personal and the ethical in a state which had grown authoritarian and corrupt. Yet she spoke with a force and preciseness that no male author could match. In a book entitled *Kill the Radio: Sebuah radio kumatikan* (2001), Dorothea wrote:

A Pilgrimage to a Rocky Place
To our Orators

stones speak in silence,
hard in the roaring, aimless currents,
wounds form in the air, blood flows,
dripping for hundreds of years, sweeping away

the sweat of our silent consciences.
rocks speak in cold words,
squeezing thousands of years of longing
into hard shapes, searching for room
in the emptiness filled with the harsh breathing
of wild animals,
searching for land
in a small space within the soul.
i choose the language of rocks
as a way of breaking
the arrogance of your being.

In their different ways, the works of Helvy Tiana Rosa, Ayu Utami, and Dewi Lestari all use “the language of rocks” as a way of attacking the hypocritical “arrogance” of the society in which they live, and to assert the rights of the tongues of women to speak in an honest, frank and unrestrained manner. Their writings present us with a more violent, more difficult, more complex, more sophisticated, and more ambiguously Islamic, Indonesia than we have known before. The challenge is to learn how to respond to these works and adjust to the post-modern, and post-Reformation, humanity which they represent.

NOTE

- 1 Ruben does in fact have a surname, Ruben Ehud (65), perhaps short for “Yahudi” Jew.

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APPENDIX: ORIGINAL INDONESIAN TEXTS

Agus Sarjono: "Sajak Palsu"

(1998)

Selamat pagi pak, selamat pagi bu, ucap anak sekolah
dengan sapaan palsu. Lalu mereka pun belajar
sejarah palsu dari buku-buku palsu. Di akhir sekolah
mereka terperangah melihat hamparan nilai mereka
yang palsu. Karena tak cukup nilai,
maka berdatanganlah mereka ke rumah-rumah
bapak dan ibu guru untuk menyerahkan amplop berisi
perhatian dan rasa hormat palsu.
Sambil tersipu palsu dan membuat tolakan
tolakan palsu, akhirnya pak guru dan bu guru
terima juga amplop itu sambil berjanji palsu
untuk mengubah nilai-nilai palsu dengan
nilai-nilai palsu yang baru. Maka sekolah
demi masa sekolah berlalu, mereka pun lahir
sebagai ekonom-ekonom palsu, ahli hukum palsu,
ahli pertanian palsu, insinyur palsu.
Sebagian menjadi guru, ilmuwan
atau seniman palsu. Dengan gairah tinggi
mereka menghambur ke tengah pembangunan
palsu dengan ekonomi palsu sebagai panglima
palsu. Mereka saksikan ramainya
perniagaan palsu dengan ekspor
dan impor palsu yang mengirim dan mendatangkan
berbagai barang kelontong kualitas palsu.
Dan bank-bank palsu dengan giat
menawarkan bonus dan hadiah-hadiah palsu
tapi diam-diam meminjam juga pinjaman
dengan ijin dan surat palsu kepada bank negeri
yang dijaga pejabat-pejabat palsu. Masyarakat pun

berniaga dengan uang palsu yang dijamin
devisa palsu. Maka uang-uang asing
menggertak dengan kurs palsu
sehingga semua blingsatan dan terperosok krisis
yang meruntuhkan pemerintahan palsu
ke dalam nasib buruk palsu. Lalu orang-orang palsu
meneriakan kegembiraan palsu dan mendebatkan
gagasan-gagasan palsu di tengah seminar
dan dialog-dialog palsu menyambut tibanya
demokrasi palsu yang berkibar-kibar
begitu nyaring
dan palsu.

From "Jaring-jaring Merah"

Ngeri? Oi, tahukah anjing-anjing buduk itu, aku melihat tiga samai tujuh mayat sehari mengambang di sungai dekat rumahku! Aku juga pernah melihat Yunus Burong ditebas lehernya dan kepalanya dipertontonkan oada penduduk desa. Aku melihat orang-orang ditembak di atas sebuah truk kuning. Darah mereka muncrat ke mana-mana. Aku melihat tetanggaku Rohani ditelanjangi, diperkosa beramai-ramai, sebelum rumah dan suaminya dibakar. Aku melihat saat *Geuchik* Harun diikat pada sebuah pohon dan ditembak berulangkali. Aku melihat semua itu! Ya, semuanya. Juga saat mereka membantai ... keluargaku, tanpa alasan. (*Angkatan 2000*, 296-7)

Aku bernyanyi bersama bulan, awan dan udara malam. Bersama desir angin, burung hantu dan lolongan anjing hutan. Bersama bayangan Ayah, Mak, *Ma'e* dan *Agam*. Kami menyanyi, kami menari *bungong jeumpa*. Lalu aku tersenyum malu, saat Hamzah yang telah meminangku, melintas di depan rumah dengan sepedanya. Dahulu. Ya, dahulu. (298)

"Tidak!! Bagaimana dengan perkosaan dan penyiksaan selama ini, penjagalan di *rumoh geudong*, mayat-mayat yang berserakan di *Buket Tangkuruk*, Jembatan Kuning, Sungai Tamiang, Cot Panglima, Hutan Krueng Campli ... dan di mana-mana ... Lalu perkampungan tiga ribu janda, anak-anak yang terlantar ... Kenyataannya masyarakat takut pada siapa? Dulu, banyak yang terpaksa menjadi *cuak*, memata-matai dan menganggap teman sendiri sebagai pengikut Hasan Tiro dari Gerakan Aceh Merdeka. Tetapi sekarang semua usai. Tak ada tempat bagi orang seperti kalian di sini." (300)

"Ia hanya satu dari ribuan korban kebiadaban itu, Pak. Tolong, beri kami keadilan. Bapak sudah lihat sendiri. Oknum-oknum itu menjarah segalanya dari perempuan itu." (303)

From Saman

Di taman ini, saya adalah seekor burung. Terbang beribu-ribu mil dari sebuah negeri yang tak mengenal musim, bermigrasi mencari semi, tempat harum rumput bisa tercium, juga pohon-pohon, yang tak pernah kita tahu namanya, atau umurnya.

Aroma kayu, dingin batu, bau perdu dan jamur-jamur – adakah mereka bernama, atau berumur? Manusia menamai mereka, seperti orang tua memanggil anak-anaknya. (1)

Namaku Shakuntala. Ayah dan kakak-perempuanku menyebutku sundal.

Sebab aku telah tidur dengan beberapa lelaki dan beberapa perempuan. Meski tidak menarik bayaran. Kakak dan ayah tidak menghormatiku. Aku tidak menghormati mereka. (115)

From Tjahjono Widjanto: “Dari ‘Siti Nurbaya’ hingga ‘Saman’”:

Saman .. yang mencoba mengungkapkan fenomena terjadinya “revolusi seksual” di kota-kota besar. Terjadinya sebuah pergesaran nilai-nilai dimana perempuan merasa menemukan simbol kemandirian melalui kebebasan seks. Mereka justru perempuan-perempuan golongan atas. Novel ini dengan gamblang memberikan potret buram generasi produk Orde Baru yang merupakan korban kebudayaan modernisme, pembangunisme, dan kapitalisme yang serba permisif.

Sosok-sosok perempuan yang ditampilkan dalam *Saman* pada dasarnya menggambarkan betapa kaum perempuan menjadi korban carut-marutnya kebudayaan Orde Baru yang larut dalam kapitalisme dan materialisme. Perempuan-perempuan dalam novel tersebut adalah perempuan yang pada satu sisi mempunyai ruang publik yang lebih besar dibandingkan ruang domestiknya, tetapi di sisi lain perempuan-perempuan itu tetap merupakan tumbal kebudayaan yang mengalami depresi dalam menerjemahkan makna pemberontakan, kebebasan, dan kemandirian.

Mereka tetaplah Siti Nurbaya-Siti Nurbaya modern, yang menghadapi Datuk Meringgih baru yang lebih kejam dan lebih canggih, yaitu kapitalisme serba permisif dengan bentuk lebih gemerlap, lebih cerdas, lebih bebas, dan lebih culas.

From Supernova

Ksatria jatuh cinta pada Puteri bungsu dari Kerajaan Bidadari.
Sang Puteri naik ke langit.
Ksatria kebingungan.
Ksatria pintar naik kuda dan bermain pedang,
tapi tidak tahu caranya terbang.
Ksatria keluar dari kastil untuk belajar terbang pada kupu-kupu.
Tapi kupu-kupu hanya bisa menempatkannya di pucuk pohon.
Ksatria lalu belajar pada burung gereja.
Burung gereja hanya mampu
mengajarkannya sampai ke atas menara.
Ksatria kemudian berguru pada burung elang.
Burung elang hanya mampu membawanya ke puncak gunung.
Tak ada unggas bersayap yang mampu terbang lebih tinggi lagi.
Ksatria sedih, tapi tak putus asa.
Ksatria memohon pada angin.
Angin mengajarkannya berkeliling mengitari bumi,
lebih tinggi dari gunung dan awan.
Namun sang Puteri masih jauh di awang-awang,
dan tak ada angin yang mampu menusuk langit.
Ksatria sedih dan kali ini ia putus asa.
Sampai satu malam ada Bintang Jatuh
yang berhenti mendengar tangis dukanya.
Ia menawarkan Ksatria untuk mampu melesat secepat cahaya.
Melesat lebih cepat dari kilat dan setinggi sejuta langit dijadikan satu.
Namun kalau Ksatria tak mampu mendarat tepat di Puterinya,
maka ia akan mati.
Hancur dalam kecepatan yang membahayakan,
menjadi serbuk yang membedaki langit, dan tamat.
Ksatria setuju. Ia relakan seluruh kepercayaannya
pada Bintang Jatuh menjadi sebuah nyawa.
Dan ia relakan nyawa itu bergantung
hanya pada seserpah detik yang mematikan.
Bintang Jatuh menggenggam tangannya.

“Inilah perjalanan sebuah Cinta Sejati,” ia berbisik,
“tutuplah matamu, Ksatria. Katakan untuk berhenti
begitu hatimu merasakan keberadaannya.”

Melesatlah mereka berdua.

Dingin yang tak terhingga serasa merobek hati Ksatria mungil,
namun hangat jiwanya diterangi rasa cinta.

Dan ia merasakannya ... “Berhenti!”

Bintang Jatuh melongok ke bawah,

dan ia pun melihat sesosok puteri cantik yang kesepian.

Bersinar bagaikan Orion di tengah kelamnya galaksi.

Ia pun jatuh hati.

Dilepaskannya genggamannya itu.

Sewujud nyawa yang terbentuk atas cinta dan percaya.

Ksatria melesat menuju kehancuran.

Sementara sang Bintang mendarat turun untuk dapatkan sang Puteri.

Ksatria yang malang.

Sebagai balasannya, di langit kutub dilukiskan Aurora.

Untuk mengenang kehalusan dan ketulusan hati Ksatria. (24-5)

“Percuma pakai tokoh gelandangan atau setting desa dengan sok-sok pakai aksesoris kebudayaan daerah. Pada kenyataannya para yuppies tadi yang bakal jadi corong bangsa. Yang mampu membangun sekaligus paling potensial untuk merusak.” (11)

“... lahir—TK—SD—SMP—SMA—kuliah—kerja—nikah—punya anak—punya cucu—mati—dimakan cacing.” (30)

Rana tak menceritakan bagian saat ia benar-benar mabuk cinta. Mabuk akan imaji cinta yang terwujud dalam bahtera rumah tangga; pasangan muda, rumah milik bersama di **real estate** baru, kredit mobil ditanggung berdua, mendorong kereta belanja sambil bergandengan tangan di supermarket, berdebat soal deterjen merk apa, mie instan apa, dan sambel botol keluaran pabrik mana. (27)

“Kalau kamu benar-benar mencintainya, aku rela kamu pergi. Aku tidak akan mempersulit keadaanmu. Keadaan kita. Kita sama-sama sudah terlalu sakit. Bukan begitu?”

...

Kalimat itu membawa Rana ke dimensi yang sama sekali lain. Menggerakkannya untuk melihat

wajah pria yang dinikahnya tiga tahun lalu dengan pandangan baru, tidak lagi tawar. Ada satu makna yang secara aneh terungkap, cinta yang membebaskan. Ternyata Arwin yang punya itu. Bukan dirinya, bahkan bukan pula kekasihnya.”

Giliran Arwin yang terhenyak ketika isterinya malah menghambur jatuh, mendekapnya erat-erat. Rasanya bukanlah pelukan perpisahan, namun sebaliknya, pelukan seseorang yang kembali.

Di dalam sarang kecilnya yang pengap, Rana justru mendapatkan makna kebebasan. Ia terbang ... pada saat yang sama sekali tidak diduganya. (152)

“Menakjubkan,” Ruben mendesah, “aku sama sekali tidak menyangka dia akan berpikir begitu”

“Dia teramat mencintai isterinya. Cinta yang sampai di titik tertentu akan mengaburkan ego.” (106)

“... selama Ibu menikah dengan Bapak, pernahkah sekali saja Ibu merasa jenuh, atau seperti ada yang salah, seperti ada yang kurang ...” (119).

“Nanti, setelah kau menjalani pernikahanmu sepuluh atau lima belas tahun, kau akan mengerti sendiri. Kebahagiaan yang yang kau maksud sekarang tidak akan kau pertanyakan lagi nanti....” (120-1)

“Saya hanya menawarkan perspektif baru. Mengolah simpul-simpul yang saya lihat bagi Anda semua. Adalah yang menentukan selanjutnya. Saya tidak punya kepentingan sedikit pun atas cocok tidaknya pengetahuan ini dengan konstitusi, norma, budaya, atau ideologi apapun yang Anda dan orang banyak percaya. Tujuan saya bukan mengkomparasi. Saya menawarkan analogi untuk Anda refleksikan, demi kehidupan dan wajah dunia yang lebih baik. Itu saja.” (76)

“Saya ‘post’ terhadap apapun yang Anda pegang tahum lalu, kemarin, bahkan detik yang barusan lewat. Kita sedang berevolusi. (75)

“Jadi maksudmu, Avatar kita khotbah di internet, begitu?” (130).

“Akulah pelajaran terakhirmu untuk bisa terbang. Berawal dari kepakan sayap kupu-kupu kecil ... berakhir dengan kilatan bintang jatuh. Kau telah mengalami metamorfosa indan dan sang magis, Ferre ... sekarang kamu menjadi Ksatria yang sejati. Jatuh, tapi mampu bangkit. Melesat, tapi tidak hancur” (195-6).

“Debur darah. Tarian energi. Harmoni cinta nan elemental.” (205)

“Mereka lalu berpegangan tangan erat. Dua pria yang tak punya nama belakang di dalam sebuah kamar kerja. Saling mencintai.” (210)

Dorothea Rosa Herliany: "Ziarah Batu" – kepada Para Orator
(1996)

bahasa batu yang diam, keras dalam
dentum arus tak ke mana
udara luka dalam cucuran darah
menetes beratus tahun
mengikis keringat kebisuan nurani

bahasa batu yang dingin
beku meremas ribuan abad rindudendam
mencaricari udaraterbuka
kekosongan yang menyimpan dengus
nafas hewanhewan liar
yang mencari tanah
dalam sejengkal jiwanya

kupilih bahasa batu
buat memecah keangkuhan nuranimu.