

POEMS  
PUISI



Toeti Heraty

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## Introduction

Professor Toeti Heraty Noerhadi Rooseno is one of Indonesia's foremost poets. She was born in 1933 in Bandung in West Java, Indonesia where she was first educated before moving on to Yogyakarta and Jakarta, where her father took up a political career. Her oeuvre as a poet is not prolific, but the poems stand out for their personal appeal along with their strong intellectual purpose. Her writing is open but not self-pitying and it is always tinged with a feeling of regret and loss. Toeti's voice is uncompromisingly female.

Toeti graduated in psychology and philosophy from Bandung (1955) and Jakarta (1962). After establishing her family (she is a mother of four), she resumed her university studies with a Master in Philosophy from Leiden University in the Netherlands in 1974, and a PhD from the University of Indonesia in Jakarta in 1979. She lectures in philosophy at the University of Jakarta and for many years was in charge of the postgraduate training programme in philosophy there. She has also held a series of senior academic appointments at various Indonesian institutions of higher education. Toeti continues to lead Indonesia's oldest and most respected law firm which specializes in intellectual property rights. The firm was founded by her father, and today two of Toeti's daughters practise in it.

Appointed a member of the distinguished Jakarta Academy, Toeti is a highly regarded collector and patron of the arts. Her penetrating analysis of the emotional identity of women and their social place, her distinctive feminism, her strong social commitment and empathy with the oppressed are expressed in her poems and also in practice. In the final year of the Soeharto era, for instance, she provided very important public support as well as an intellectual framework to *Suara Ibu Peduli*, The Voice of the Concerned Mothers, a 'maternal feminist' movement which was led by some of her

former students. Ostensibly helping to provide milk powder to mothers who could no longer afford to feed their children during the economic crisis of 1998, *Suara Ibu Peduli* argued the case for the marginalised Indonesian women who had been systematically disenfranchised during the Soeharto years.

ULRICH KRATZ

## LUKISAN WANITA 1938

Lukisan dengan lengkap citarasa  
giwang, gelang, untaian kuning hijau  
selendang, menyembunyikan kehamilan

kehamilan maut yang nanti menjemput  
luput diredam  
kehamilan hidup yang nanti merenggut  
goresan dendam  
gejolak dan kemelut keprihatinan  
gagal direkam  
pada sapuan dan garis wajah yang  
menyerah, pada alur sejarah

Lukisan dengan sapuan akhir  
yang cemerlang, kelengkapan wajah  
diperoleh dalam bingkai kenangan

*Juli 1989*

A WOMAN'S PORTRAIT 1938

The painting conveys her exquisite taste:  
ear studs, bracelets, green and yellow *selendang*;  
the sash conceals her pregnancy.

The death she is carrying can't be disguised.  
The life she carries will grasp and cling on.  
Yearning, restlessness and the turmoil of fear  
are not recorded in the brush-strokes,  
pencil outline of a face  
surrendering to the flow of history.

The painting, with its final brilliant gesture,  
only fully reveals this face  
when it is framed by memory.

July 1989

DUA WANITA

*untuk Dewi Rais*

silakan-silakan masuk

senyum ringan dan berat isyarat

— ada topeng di dinding belakang

rumah ini rumah terbuka, terbuka hatiku

lihatlah segala kembang-kembang di meja

— telpon berdering, putuskan saja —

luas nyaman, kita dapat berdamai di sini

dekat anak-anak yang bermain di lantai

tanggalkan senjata perlengkapan hidup

— keriuhan kota di luar pagar —

di sini luas, nyaman dengan hidangan di meja

dan saling terbuka dimulai pertaruhan kata

hidupmu, hidupku, warna meriah dalam

corak kelabu dan endapan-endapan

lembayung-hitam dikibaskan dari baju

dan kabut wangi meliputi adegan

lingkaran berwarna meluncur, berputar antara

cetusan, ungkapan, renungan

terpapar di meja, antara cangkir, kunci mobil

dan rencana yang tak jadi dilaksanakan

— keriuhan kota di luar pagar —

rencana-rencana yang harus dikejar

sejam, sehari, nukilan hidup

yang diperas sebentar . . .

ah, sandiwara ini pun

sudah terlalu lama, bila

dua wanita bicara

TWO WOMEN

*for Dewi Rais*

Please – please come in.

Easy smile, pregnant with meanings  
– masks on the back wall –  
this is an open house, my heart is open  
see all the flowers on the table  
– the phone is ringing, just unplug it –  
spacious and pleasant, here we can sit in peace  
beside the children playing on the floor  
take off your armour, life's paraphernalia  
– the chaos of the city lies outside the fence –  
here there is space, ease, refreshments on the table  
and we can be open with each other, entrust ourselves to words  
your life, my life in bright colours  
against an ashen backdrop,  
specks of black and crimson brushed off our clothes  
a fragrant mist enveloping the stage;  
as coloured sparks circle, glittering words,  
reflections, are displayed on the table between the cups, car keys –  
the good intentions that have come to nothing  
– the chaos of the city lies outside the fence –  
plans to chase up  
an hour, a day, the essence of life  
squeezed for an instant . . .  
Ah, this charade  
has been going on far too long  
whenever two women talk.

GENEVA BULAN JULI  
*untuk J.H.*

akhirnya  
pasrah kepada musim  
dan hidup jadinya seperti buku  
(yang tidak terlalu tebal tentu)  
dengan halaman berurut  
untuk dibalikkan satu per satu

bila tidak  
tiba-tiba gadis di Geneva itu  
menyeberang jalan begitu saja  
sambil berlari tidak peduli tapi  
hati-hati membawa bunga di tangannya

memang kuingat  
perempuan tua berkerudung hitam  
dengan keranjang mawar melewati meja  
dan kau bertanya sederhana:  
“apakah suka bunga-bunga?”

seperti biasa  
kujawab dengan keseimbangan panjang  
dengan jari  
pada daguku kau palingkan mukaku penuh  
kepadamu

janji pun  
terkalahkan oleh musim yang  
rebah-rebah pada hari tanpa angin  
mawar pun  
tinggalkan debu, malam Geneva hangat nafsu  
akan tinggalkan kantuk dan terlalu penat nanti

GENEVA IN JULY

*for JH*

Finally  
I surrender to the passing seasons  
and life becomes like a book  
(not a long one, certainly)  
with numbered pages  
to be turned one by one –

what if  
that girl in Geneva  
hadn't suddenly crossed the road  
running, without paying attention  
carefully holding flowers in her hands?

I clearly remember  
the old woman in a black headscarf  
passing the table with a basket of roses  
and you asking simply,  
'Do you like flowers?'

As always  
I replied after a long hesitation  
and you cupped my chin and turned my face  
fully towards you.

All promises  
were defeated by a time  
of windless days;  
the roses would turn to dust  
and the passionate Geneva nights  
would leave us yawning.

sedangkan  
gelisah, terganggu risau tak pasti lagi  
siapa engkau siapa aku ini

mungkin sekali  
engkau dalam kereta antara Paris  
dan Geneva menutup jendela, janganlah  
angina mengganggu rambutku

atau waktu  
pernah suatu kelancangan telah terjadi  
turun dari kereta api, sekali lagi kau  
rayu singgah di kota tanpa nama  
untuk menikmatinya bersama-sama

mengembara  
adalah menanggalkan nama, melepaskan bumi  
benda-benda kemilau dipermainkan angin

dan sangsi  
mana pula yang lebih nyata, berjalan  
merunduk karena angina kencang, atau  
gemerlapan lampu di Amsterdam

bunga, malam, dan kota-kota  
tersisip antara yang sengaja dikenang  
merata, seperti kata-kata di hari senja  
meski  
semakin menjurang ruang antara  
uscapan yang bertumbukan

There would be disturbance, nervousness, uncertainty  
*Who are you? Who am I?*  
You would probably have closed the window  
on the train between Paris and Geneva  
in case the wind ruffled my hair.

Or, when something untoward had happened,  
you would have persuaded me to step off the train  
to stay in a nameless town,  
enjoy it together.

To travel  
is to shed one's name, to become ungrounded,  
a glistening object played with by the wind;

and what is more real – walking  
with head bowed against the force of the wind,  
or the dark lights of Amsterdam?

Flowers, night, towns and cities  
slip in between things one wishes to remember  
spread out, like words at dusk,  
a deepening gulf between conflicting utterances.

bila tidak  
tiba-tiba kelepak sayap angsa putih  
berlima perlahan terbang menyongsong bulan  
tinggalkan danau menggenang sunyi  
kita terdiam  
sejak dahulu memang, yang  
tidak terucapkan, lebih berarti

1968

What if  
with a sudden flapping of wings  
five white swans  
had not flown slowly towards the moon  
leaving the lake filled with solitude.  
We remain silent.

Yes, there has always been  
more meaning in what's left unspoken.

1968

## JOGGING DI JAKARTA

Ahhh,  
subuh jalan-jalan di kota  
tanpa peta, asing juga —  
nama-nama jalan telah diganti, sampai  
kehabisan pahlawan mati  
jalan dan lorong, jalur-jalur kota  
seperti pesan dan janji-janji  
yang tidak dipenuhi, torehan di hati —  
jalur-jalur kota di peta tua  
berwarna coklat sepi

Ya,  
jalan-jalan masih lengang  
orang berlari-lari, membebaskan diri  
dari kelebihan beban mati  
terinjak bunga tanjung, langka  
bertebaran, terawa harum dan sedikit embun  
Kini  
kota terbangun di songsong hari  
yang mulai terang, lampu-lampu jalan  
tiba-tiba padam, mobil satu-satu  
belum peduli, meluncur kencang malanggar  
rambu-rambu dan arah terlarang

Minggirlah,  
ada becak sarat ditimbun sayuran  
didayung kaki cepat-cepat  
mengejar jualan di pasar pagi  
Lihat —  
di simpang kakilima pisang dan ubi  
Mulai digoreng untuk buruh bangunan  
yang jongkok, bergumam —  
laju pembangunan pesat, akselerasi dan

## JOGGING IN JAKARTA

Walking at dawn through the city  
without a recent map seems strange.  
The streets have been renamed until  
all the dead heroes have been used up;  
roads, alleyways, streets  
are commands and unfulfilled promises  
incisions into the heart;  
the city's streets on my old discoloured map  
are lonely.

Yes  
the streets are still empty of traffic.  
People hurry along, eager  
to rid themselves of the dead weights they're carrying.  
Mimosa flowers are trampled, scattered,  
their fragrance dispersed with the dew.  
Now  
the city wakes up to a brightening day  
street lights suddenly pale  
the odd anarchic car speeds in violation  
of road signs and regulations.

Get out of the way –  
here is a trishaw loaded with vegetables  
feet pedalling urgently  
to catch the morning market customers.  
Look –  
on the pavement at the junction, bananas and sweet potatoes  
are being fried for the construction workers  
who squat and murmur  
*'development is rapid, accelerating, sustained'*  
as long as there's a kick-back.

kontinuitas terjaga, selama ada komisi —  
kebersihan kota pun terjamin: puntung rokok  
dipungut cermat, tak ada yang tersisa

oleh lasykar membawa keranjang  
sosok-sosok bayangan menelusuri pohon  
tempat sampah dan selokan  
mata tertambat ke bawah, cekatan  
puntung terangkat oleh semacam jepitan

Ai,  
terang sebentar lagi, diburu  
tuntutan berkarya sepanjang hari — peta sepi  
antara Monas, pancuran, jembatan, arah  
Kebayoran atau Kuningan  
peta lapuk, seperti jantung tua  
dengan sudut-sudut gelap di mana arus  
terhambat, kemudian terhenti —  
Karet, Menteng, Pulo, Tanah Kusir, apa pun jadi  
asal terlentang, jangan sampai ditanam berdiri  
karena tanah pekuburan semakin langka —

Tapi —  
paling risau nanti, kiranya bila entah  
karena apa, tidak jadi dimakamkan di Jakarta  
dan dini hari  
atau lain ketika, roh dengan nostalgia  
akan mencari-cari, tidak mengenal kota kembali —  
mana peta sepi Jakarta, dengan  
tanda silang, catatan dan coretan, garis-garis  
torehan luka kehidupan

1980

The city's cleanliness is guaranteed: cigarette stubs  
are picked up carefully, none left behind,  
by the basket-carrying brigade  
shades, silhouettes sticking close to the trees,  
rubbish dumps and open drains  
eyes fixed on the ground, expertly  
picking up stubs with makeshift tweezers.

It will be broad daylight any moment, traffic relentless,  
driven by the demands of work. The forsaken map  
between the National Monument, the Fountain, the bridges  
towards Kebayoran and Kuningan,  
is tattered, like an aged heart with dark passages  
where the flow is blocked, then stops.

Karet, Menteng, Pulo, Tanah Kusir . . . whatever happens  
may I be laid to rest – may it never come to the point of being  
buried standing up, because land for graves has become so scarce.  
But,  
more worrying still,  
suppose for whatever reason one is not buried in Jakarta  
and in the morning, or at some other time  
the nostalgic spirits come looking, searching  
and do not recognise the city –  
where is that abandoned map  
with its markings, scribbles, crossings out,  
map of the injuries of life?

1980

## THE MOON IS HIGH<sup>1</sup>

Bulan tinggi di langit  
Ini kali bukan bulan sabit  
di pulau Gilimeno, di pasir pantai  
di seberang pengalaman, tangan  
yang luput menggapai

Bulan tinggi di langit  
memang putih bulat gendeng  
bertalu, bercak perak cemerlang  
cemara berderap, ombak berderai  
nafsu hidup, cinta makna  
keping-keping yang perlu  
dirangkai

Bulan tinggi di langit  
madu Sumbawa di Mataram!  
tanya-jawab menyentuh sengit  
bulan madu yang geram  
dalam senandung kesenjangan  
bila tivi sudah mati, percakapan  
terhenti, bila perahu sudah karam

Ini kali kau memang mahir  
mengulur tali tambang penyelamat  
dari pulau ke pulau, aku  
tenggelam belum, terapung tidak  
tanpa jangkar tertambat

<sup>1</sup> Larik pertama lagu tahun tiga puluhan: the moon is high/  
the sky was blue/and here am I/but where are you.

THE MOON IS HIGH

*The moon is high, the sky was blue, and here am I, but where are you?*  
(Popular song, 1930s)

The moon is high  
Not a crescent this time.  
    On Gilimeno island, on the sandy beach,  
    it glides beyond experience  
    beyond the reach of my hand.

The moon is high  
Pale and round, the drum  
Beats, speckled silver-bright.  
    The casuarinas dance, the waves lash out;  
    The passion of life, love, their meaning  
    Pages that need  
    To be sorted.

The moon is high.  
Honey from Sumbawa in Mataram!  
Questions and answers are a bitterness –  
An angry honey moon  
    Very late, a distant, intermittent hum  
    After the TV has been switched off, and conversation  
    Has died down; after the boats have foundered.

This time you have mastered the skill  
Of throwing the safety rope  
    From island to island.  
    I have not yet drowned, I have not drifted  
    Even though I have no anchor.

Bulan sihir membelai  
properti Melbourne & Sydney di atas pantai  
menopang pendopo dengan bugenvil  
    alang-alang dan puring, cemas roboh  
    sebelum naskah selesai  
    karena usia diterpa badai

Bulan tinggi di langit  
Terang berderang seperti gemberincing  
    Bunyi mata uang asing, menyebar  
    Karang tercemar dan mimpi turis  
    Petualang  
Bulan madu, lirik lagu dan sisa melodi  
Dicari dan nyaris ketemu

A bewitching moon beckons  
Melbourne and Sidney-style property on the beach  
Verandas draped with bougainvillea  
    Tall grasses and crotons will collapse in fear  
    Battered by storms  
    Before this manuscript, this life story  
    Has reached its final age.

The moon is high  
Clear as the tinkle of a bell  
    The sound of foreign cash spreads  
    The corals are desecrated, and the tourist's dream.

Wanderer, honey moon,  
Lyrics of a song, fragments of a tune  
Searched for and nearly found.

## SURAT DARI OSLO

Sudah kuterima surat undangan  
Terima kasih, jadi anakmu akan menikah?  
Baru ini kali terima berita, ah, ternyata  
anak-anak kita telah merasa cukup dewasa.  
Katakan saja sebagian tugasmu selesai sudah  
dan tentu selamat saya ucapkan, terbayang, kalian  
mendampingi penganten "*jejer-jejer ngagem sinjang*"  
tak sempat terharu barangkali, terlalu sibuk  
semua harus berlangsung sesuai rancangan.  
Pasti kalian juga merasa sangat dekat, — saat itu —  
terikat lagi oleh peristiwa khidmat, — lebih dari biasa —  
Bagaimana, apakah memang jadi  
menikah dengan yang dulu itu pacarnya?  
Sayang, aku tidak dapat hadir apalagi membantu  
meringankan dalam kesibukan yang meriah  
sekaligus mengukhuhkan suatu keberhasilan.  
Bukankah orang tua ikut mencetak nasib anaknya  
meski Khalil Gibran agak berbeda pendapatnya.  
Aku ingat sekali waktu masih kecil,  
ia berbaju biru kotak-kotak, dengan rambut tebal  
dikepang dua, sehat, bulat dan manja –  
ikut bertamu dengan ibunya, menarik-narik baju  
berbisik merengek: 'mama pulang!' –  
Apa masih tetap manja, apa mereka dengar nasehat,  
bahkan masih mau menurutinya  
Lalu kini, siraman air kembang dahulu, *midodareni*  
sebelum esok menghadap penghulu —  
*Tarub janur, gamelan dang ending kebo giro*  
*penganten bertemu, berlempar silih, wijidadi,*  
*sindur ibu, pangkon ayah, dulangan, kucar-kucur*  
sesuai adat upacara Jawa.  
Aku mohon pada yang Maha Kuasa supaya  
Terkabul semua keinginan mereka, dan . . .

## LETTER FROM OSLO

I have received your invitation –  
thank you.  
So your daughter is getting married?  
I get news from you after so long – and it turns out  
our children feel they're grown-ups already!  
Now you can say part of your duty is finished  
and I certainly congratulate you, imagining  
how you will escort the bride to the sound of gongs  
probably unable to show your feelings –  
far too busy; everything must go according to plan.  
I'm sure you'll feel closer than ever at this moment  
bonded by the solemn occasion.  
Tell me – is the man she's marrying the boyfriend I remember?  
I'm sorry I can't be there, and even more sorry that I can't  
share in the hard work of this joyful get-together,  
and celebrate your achievement –  
isn't it true that parents shape the fate of their children  
even if Khalil Gibran thinks differently?  
I have a vivid memory of her as a child  
wearing a blue checked dress, her thick hair  
in two plaits, healthy, chubby and naughty;  
she was visiting with her mother, tugging at your dress  
whispering and nagging *Mama, let's go home!*  
Is she still that wilful? Children – do they ever listen to advice  
let alone follow it!  
I'm imagining the sprinkling of the flower water,  
before they face the priest tomorrow;  
the wedding platform – the young coconut leaf,  
gamelan instruments, the *kebo giro* tune;  
and the meeting of the bride and groom, the sprinkling of betel leaves  
mother's red and white handkerchief, father carrying  
the food tray and the sweet cakes – all the Javanese traditions.  
I pray that they get everything they wish for, and. . . .

Aku sendiri, dahulu sesudahnya merasa sangat kehilangan  
Waktu anak gadisku menikah, kemudian diboyong pergi  
Di rumah lengang, kamarnya kosong tak tega kujenguk  
di meja makan setiap kali, setahun lamanya  
piring-gelas tetap tersedia  
Lalu apa kerja kita selain tenang menjadi tua  
sedangkan tenang itu soal kepuasan, tetapi  
merasa waswas dituntut terus, entah oleh siapa —

Sementara itu hidup sehari-hari belangsung terus  
di Norwegia cuaca mulai dingin, dan kesibukan biasa  
untuk membuat manisan framboos, arbei, tak berhenti  
memburu waktu mengejar musim dingin dengan cuaca keruh  
beda jauh dengan kesibukan kita di Indonesia  
Lalu, aku akan melukis pandangan alam salju  
tapi dengan pancaran terang aneka kembang tropika  
teriring hampa mendambakan kehangatan khatulistiwa . . .

Kami telah terima undangan, terima kasih, sedangkan  
lukisan hadiah untuk penganten akan dikirim segera  
dengan doa selamat bahagia, serta maaf, tak dapat  
mengunjungi pernikahannya.

*Iowa, 1985*

I remember it myself – how, afterwards, it was a great bereavement.  
When my daughter got married and was taken away  
the house felt too large.  
I couldn't bring myself to look into her empty room.  
For a whole year a plate and a water glass were set for her.  
But then, what can we do but grow old calmly –  
though calm depends on contentment, and I feel  
uneasy, constantly pursued – who knows by whom.

Meanwhile, life goes on.  
The weather in Norway is getting cold, and there's the usual  
scramble to make raspberry and strawberry jam in time,  
before winter sets in, with its turbulent weather.  
So different from our lives in Indonesia.  
I shall paint a view of this world of snow, but with a bright  
burst of tropical flowers  
to convey my hopeless longing for the Equator . . .

I have received your invitation – thank you.  
The painting is a present for the bride, and it will be posted soon  
with prayers for their happiness – and apologies  
for not being at the wedding.

*Iowa, 1985*

## POST SCRIPTUM

Ingin aku tulis  
sajak porno sehingga  
kata mentah tidak diubah  
jadi indah, pokoknya  
tidak perlu kiasan lagi  
misalnya payudara, jadi bukit,  
tubuh wanita = alam sangat  
senggama = pelukan yang paling akrab

yang sudah jelas  
tulis sajak itu  
antara menyingkap dan sembunyi  
antara munafik dan jati diri.

## POST SCRIPTUM

I want to write  
an erotic poem  
in which raw words, unadorned,  
become beautiful  
where metaphors are unnecessary  
and breasts, for instance,  
do not become hills  
nor a woman's body a sultry landscape  
nor intercourse 'the most intimate embrace'.

It's quite clear  
this poem is written in the space  
between exposure and concealment  
between hypocrisy and true feeling.

