

Afrizal Malna

Since the early 1980's, Afrizal Malna has been an active and well-respected poet, theater-maker, performance artist, and critic, writing in Indonesian and performing his works nationally and internationally. Formally marked by repetition and variation, collage, parataxis, punning, dark humor, and alliteration, Malna has been regarded variously as an avant-gardeist, a postmodernist, and an obscurantist. What's clear to everyone is the originality and irreducibility of his work.

This selection of poems is taken from Malna's 2013 poetry collection, *Museum Penghancur Dokumen/Document Shredding Museum* (originally published by Garudhawaca in Yogyakarta, English translation forthcoming from Reading Sideways Press in Melbourne).

—Daniel Owen

SPICE BRIDGE

Agarwood * Anise * Basil * Bay leaf * Black pepper * Black temu * Candlenut * Caraway * Cardamom * Cassumunar ginger * Chili pepper * Cinnamon bark * Clove * Coriander * Copal * Dammar gum * Daughter temu * Bridge from kitchen seasonings to the blood of Columbus * Eucalyptus bark * Fragrant pandan * Frankincense * Gambier * Garlic * Ginger * Greater galangal * Indigo * Joke temu * Kaffir lime * Key lime * Key temu * Laurel * Lemon pepper fruit * Lemongrass * Mace * Massoy bark * Mango temu * Mustard * Nutmeg * Onion * Bridge from perfume to the blood of Vasco da Gama Tabasco * Peppercoorn * Red ginger lily * Rose * Safflower * Sand ginger * Sandalwood * Sappanwood * Scallion * Screwpine leaf * Shallot * Shampoo ginger * Sour mangosteen * Suji * Sweet lime * Tamarind * Temu giring * Temu rapet * Turmeric * Vetiver * White temu * Ylang-ylang * Bridge from medicines to a fortress of ladies wreathed in red roses * Anise * Cassumunar ginger * Chili pepper * Clove * Dammar gum * Ginger * Lemon pepper fruit * Mace * Sandalwood * Sesame seed * Sour mangosteen * Tamarind * Temu tis * Vanilla * Vetiver * Bridge from Diogo Lopes de Mesquita to the blood of Ternate * Agarwood * Black pepper * Candlenut * Caraway * Cardamom * Cinnamon bark * Coriander * Eucalyptus bark * Frankincense * Gambier * Ginger * Key lime * Safflower * Sand ginger * Turmeric * Ylang-ylang * Bridge of fire forever sending ships to your archives.

FIRE IN A BRIEFCASE

“A cold beer,” between two separate sentences, and
“a cold beer,” between two shooting targets.

I'm a politician. He always carries
his briefcase from office to office. Cities, conflict statistics, and
blood thinners. He sees the public as pulsing
earth, a trickle at the neck, protein threat nearing sleep.
I'm a politician, I mean, without the slightest doubt. Calculations
of divisions of opinion either within or without my briefcase.

He closes his briefcase, like a bullet separa-
ting two sentences.

“A cold beer,” he says, between those two separate sentences. I
don't want a condom and a beard trimmer in my briefcase. Once
again in my briefcase, a speech ratifying a measure against
making a state outside the state. Thumbs up brand. Against
debasing humanity in a house of prayer, between two separate
sentences looking at a needle and a pair of scissors
on the dining table.

A bullet, he says, like intelligence lost
among political theories and a bottle opener.
Sound of gunshots barraging words. A pillow swallowing the b-
ed. A briefcase burning all it contains.

He runs to save his briefcase, that politician,
with a fire still ablaze inside.

ACTIVITIES OF ICE BLOCKS

The kids know their bodies are unnumbered
blocks of ice. They melt to
fall in love. They melt to get a job.
They melt to buy shoes. And turn
back into ice blocks. They melt to be
ice blocks. They become ice blocks to melt.
They become ice blocks to go home.
Become ice blocks to go to school. They freeze
and melt like water kept in
an ice box.

At 6 in the morning they start melting in order to become ice blocks
around 1 in the afternoon. They want to make
a sun in the middle of the night. A sun below political
weather. A night roof that tosses history like
electricity that's gone out. Don't think you're a hero just because
you hurt others. A country like a stomach full of
stones. At 8 in the evening the ice blocks flow, seeking the
lowest temperatures, so as to freeze. Little by little, their brains and
hearts start turning to ice. Kidneys. Bile.
Ice blocks.

Ice blocks give off cold air. Ice blocks. So
cold, ice blocks. A cold that cripples the current
of ice blocks' electricity. A cold that makes you ignorant:
Am I, am I inside or outside of that
cold air? Am I a panicked ice block? Am
I a stone quarreling with stories
in the middle of freezing?

Time beats so cold in your city.

DON'T FORGET THE SHALLOTS

The electricity was dead. That morning. I don't need electricity to plant rice in the fields. That morning. I was sure that birds made my ears, together with the wind coming in from the South. The wind dramatized my ears so they'd listen in to insects and jackfruit sap, like an 18th century opera in the folds of my hat. I planted rice, liquid earth beneath the soles of my feet, soft fields where animals leave night. And seeds that loyally look after this planet.

Hey Pak Kerto, Mbah Surip, hey Mbah Harjo, Bu Kerto, cow's moos and jackfruit have made the fragrant earth and insects in a hat's folds. Water from Merapi has carried in black stones, scraps of the gods' bodies after the war. That morning. Hey, water and the smell of sulphur, tempeh and tofu cadavers in the river. Cadavers from the parties of city people who eat from 500,000 rupiah plates.

Hold this, feel it, how morning makes your throat orange. Time doesn't choose a religion to differentiate your body from the birds. Hold it, what are you working on right now? Hold it, can't you see for yourself what i'm doing right now? Hold it, are you sure of what you're doing right now? I've cluthced it tight, deeper and deeper into my palms. Are you unsure of what i'm doing right now? So deep into my palms that there I am between silence and emptiness. The electricity was dead. That morning.

Batik clothing, batik cloth, leaves to feed to the goats. Are you sure the electricity was dead, that morning? I'm sorry, are you sure of what you're working on? It's like there's a dry season in my hands. That's why i'm asking you. That morning. Ask, what are you doing right now. Hey batik clothing. Hey. Electricity. Dead. See for yourself, am I planting rice right now? Not an electric carcass.

If there weren't hotels suddenly standing on our fields, if there weren't airplanes hauling goods from the city, hold our hands, and the rainy season comes with grey plastic panchos, we'll harvest 100 days from now, 2 km distance from

here. You'll taste the scent of red rice. Red rice that doesn't require chitchat of politics in order to be poor. Clutch my hand tight, where the sun plants vitamin C. There's no one in my hands, except for reddened vitamin C.

Oh, Lento screens the battle of Surabaya film, Tuan Malaby shot at close range. The provocateur who seized the RRI radio mic. Don't bring that history to our rice fields. Careful, the electricity's dead. Oh, Radhar tells of the evils committed in the Ramayana. Making Hanuman into a white monkey on account of the betrayal he faced on Sri Lanka. Southern nations leaving ships and their seas in history's storms. Why does his excellency doubt my honorable behavior? Mataram of yore left the palace, that morning.

Hey, *Your Excellency of That Morning*, don't uproot my rice plants, don't read my rice like you're reading the paper. This isn't that morning's printing, this isn't that morning's paper. 2Km before lunch. 21,000 feet above sea level, from Yogyakarta to Surabaya. Hey Ram, Mei, Sari, funny, huh, how rice plants can be read like the paper, right. Have the fields already turned into the paper, ya know. Maybe in a minute our fields'll turn into a TV, right. Funny, huh. That morning. I see the electricity sauntering around the city, bathing in morning sunlight. We'll eat the newspaper after the harvest, right, the harvest of scrap paper politics.

That morning. That morning. You always make us unsure of what we're doing.

WINTER SEMINAR

His stomach's made of fried noodles. It's not cold out tonight, he says. Then he puts on a jacket. I'm waiting for you to die, and I'd like to sleep with you, he says. His hands are made of plastic straws. I don't have any plans tonight, he says. Just want to sleep and forget all my work. Then he puts on a jacket. His stomach's made of palm oil, and night air caught in his large intestine. My girlfriend doesn't know that I'm a poet, he says, putting on a jacket. But poetry drives me to hate language teachers, as he puts on a jacket. As he puts on a jacket, my stomach's made of fried noodles and it's not too cold out tonight. It's not too cold out, I tell him, and don't wear a jacket to find out just how hungry I am tonight. 4 hours from Denpasar, drowning myself in sleep. At a coffee shop, young prostitutes on Braga. A photo of Mick Jagger, huge, hung up at the intersection. A train station from Holland. Sitor's seminar at Erasmus Huis, Rendra's seminar in *Pikiran Rakyat*. Wianta's book is still being edited. I never think about culture inside your jacket, he says. Look, all this is just raw material. Nothing's happened yet. Nothing's meant yet. The cold is only in your jacket.

CRYPTIC NEWS FROM DARMO GANDUL

He said 100 years, i've wanted to be a good person he said. And I keep my tongue in a branch of the kapok tree in my backyard I said. He said 100 years, i've wanted to be a lovely person he said. And I keep my eyes in a neon lamp in my backyard I said. He said 100 years, i've wanted to be a person who says *welcome* to everything that comes he said. And I keep my feet in a stone where ghosts reminisce about humanity.

I've wanted to be a person who says *I wish you health and happiness* to everyone I meet he said 100 years. And I keep my hands in a river where the fish and the sand reminisce about humanity. Nowadays my body, without eyes tongue feet hands, I keep in the rain in my backyard. I whisper to my kidneys and lungs I whisper to my heart and intestines I whisper ... *you're the rain of a dusk that's yet to be created*.

Now you bring that dusk an ear of clearest silence. An ear made from demolished homes from soil that stiffens the wind that can no longer blow. Leaves make a tree from the clouds. I place cryptic news inside it in order to forget myself. And tomorrow — *let's go* — I've become the one who forgets language.

SEMINAR ON LUNTO KLOOF

Iron from coal. Cement factories from coal.
Houses from coal. Trains from coal. Underground
hollows from coal. Prisons from coal. Hospitals
from coal. Laborers from coal. History from coal.
Cars from coal. Language from coal. Bay harbors
from coal. Wives from coal. Markets from coal.
Keroncong from coal. Swimming pools from coal.
Sate Madura from coal. Death from coal.
Mohamad Yamin from coal. Tan Malaka from
coal. Sujatmoko from coal. Lovers from coal. WH
van Greve from coal. The year 1892 from coal.
New year's parties from coal. The Ombilin River
from coal. Hugs from coal. Salt from coal.
Corruption from coal. Hills sawed apart from coal.
Hilltops fallen from coal. Drains drifting away
from coal. Jungles collapsed from coal. Tomorrow
... I've been atop it all, 21,000 feet above the
morning radio broadcast.

CLAPPING BEHIND A FENCE

for Cabyo, the guitarist who always plays from his tears

It is forgotten. Picked up again. Done again. In 50 more steps, pick up a new pebble. 50 steps ago's pebble is put down. Like standing. Resembling squatting. Walk another 50 steps looking out for a new pebble. Put down another pebble from 50 steps ago. Someone claps their hands behind a fence. Like walking. Almost squatting. Choosing a pebble. And 50 steps not walked again. Like a ceremony. My body is like a ceremony of baffling silence.

Every 50 steps one pebble is put down and another pebble picked up. A crowd, alone and clapping. It's not the fence that claps its hands. A crowd, alone and clapping behind the fence. As if remembering the long ago. Memorizing how people learn to walk, to squat, 50 steps and pick up another pebble and put down another pebble. Feel the new with the old. Feel again the movement and the step, forgetting what must be asked and answered. Forgetting in order to remember what's not frozen. Solitude claps its hands in the middle of a crowded fence.

People live clapping their hands behind a fence. A pebble comes from each decaying clap — from the decay of hand claps. The crowd doesn't see there's someone crying behind the fence. The lone someone sees that fellowship has been felled behind the fence. The crowd drives motorbikes. Doesn't know about 50 steps and about the pebbles and about the lone someone weeping behind the fence. And this is about how the pebbles exchange themselves for one another. Not building a fence and not building hand claps.

About someone walking 50 steps forward 50 steps backward 50 steps to the side 50 steps inwards. Ever more inwards than forward and backward. Song of a me that's here.