

ISABELA BANZON

## Rindu

For Rob

Last night, when you were missing love  
as I was,  
we were lying on a huge bed,  
each with nobody beside.  
I will slip under  
your mosquito netting  
and you may, if you wish,  
find your way  
into me.  
*Aku cinta padamu,*  
but it is morning  
before I understand  
what you say in the dark.

We can't go on meeting like this,  
suspended  
on wire, post  
to post, through cable, under ocean,  
under ground.  
Fated to each other  
but living without,  
we rendezvous in a language not our own.  
*Aku ingin*  
*mencitaimu dengan sederhana.*  
I want  
to love you simply,  
without fear, without metaphor,  
but it is difficult

in English.

It is difficult to imagine how we are  
together,  
gecko to the other in the permeable air.  
You live in me,  
outside me.

*Kamu hidup di dalam  
dan di luar diriku.*

The river rushes below.

What are we in the hands of the *dalang*,  
emotion, our puppet master.

*Kita tiada sebelum kita bertemu lagi.*

We are shadows in a show not of ourselves.

Who are we

that to leave you in the island of the gods  
is difficult.

We do not exist.

*Di bahasa Inggris, kita tiada.*

## Robert's Corpses

Robert tells me  
he's come back from the Bridge Hotel  
his mum's old place, where he dug up corpses  
because although he's moved on  
the stench follows him.

It's not like there's blood on his hands,  
him only twelve when his daddy  
walked out and into the Murray River.  
His dad kept sliding off the bank, his mum said,  
until the weight of two sons she'd left behind  
was too heavy even for her.

It's not like there's blood spilled.  
Gran was a dingo and no-sort of brother  
could come close to making the point,  
not that anyone cared,  
that like in the Meryl Streep movie  
dingoes could tear you apart  
and the heart breaks in Wagga Wagga.

Robert shows me his blisters,  
the body bags he's been lugging around.  
But there's only dust, I say.  
I don't buy his story, only a glass of lemonade,  
because they now don't get along so well,  
he and grog, his baby drink.

## Radio

There was once a man  
who sang all the love songs  
I had forgotten and sad  
and happy I couldn't make up  
my mind fell in love  
with him under the cover  
of a midnight sky.

Next day  
at the hotel lobby  
I listened to the voices. Was that him  
humming to himself  
or laughing with a guest  
or letting go  
like the couple at the exit?

Love, no matter who you are,  
your tenderness was my home  
in many cities  
dulled by the cold.  
And when at the front desk I ask  
for the key,  
my song is still for you.

## Reflections

*What might connect "Rindu," "Robert's Corpses" and "Radio" are: first, they are in English, two, they are set in the Asia-Pacific region, and three, they are about people. These connections can easily be taken for granted since the first alludes to the language situation in the Philippines, the second to its geography at the very least, and the third to the matter of poetry. I think that one of the challenges to anyone writing in English in the Philippines today is how to put all these in a poem.*

*We are much aware of our postcolonial existence, but one reality that seems to escape us is that the Philippines is part of Southeast Asia. "Rindu," a tentative exploration of "Southeast Asia," is set in Bali in Indonesia, and is a play on two realities: one in English, the other, almost its mirror image, with the addition of Bahasa. What is apparent might not be what is real, and human activity, like love, while universal, might also be understood as a kind of wayang kulit. The sweep of emotion in Bahasa, and which is intended to accompany the poem, might also help to understand our connection with the Malay world as well as why we took so well to Hispanic culture.*

*In "Robert's Corpses," set in Australia because it too is in the Asia-Pacific region, the lines "...like in the Meryl Streep movie/ dingoes could tear you apart/ and the heart breaks in Wagga Wagga" are intended to indicate that heartbreak is personal as it is borderless. The movie has unquestioned global reach and appeal, and while the active presence of dingoes in the Meryl Streep movie further situates it in Australia, it is ultimately about family and loss.*

*While language plays a prominent role in "Rindu" and an Australian landscape in "Robert's Corpses," in "Radio" the intended emphasis is on human connection. Tenderness is a much sought-after quality in human relationships although it seems not much given or given as freely. Set in an hotel, be it in the Asia-Pacific region or elsewhere in the world, the poem is meant to*

*describe how a radio or tender music from a radio connects us not only with others but finally with our own selves. It would seem that to understand our selves is to understand our world and to understand the world is to understand the essential human self. Thus, the matter of poetry.*