



Biography, Islam and the Translation of Modern Indonesian Poetry

Marshall Clark

Introduction

This article will argue that when translating and interpreting the texts of a poet from Indonesia, the largest Muslim country in the world, we must be extremely mindful of the cultural phenomena underpinning the manner in which the poetry was originally composed, produced, and interpreted. The particular poet to be discussed here is Binhad Nurrohmat, an emerging force in contemporary Indonesian poetry. By viewing both Binhad's poetry and his biography as a window on his nation's biography, our translation of his poetry must attempt to reflect the historical dimensions of his work. This is especially the case nowadays with the rise of 'world literature', with its attraction towards specific cultural contexts. According to David Damrosch, "No longer privileged chiefly for their universal qualities, more and more works of world literature are now favoured for displaying specific ethnic identity or cultural difference."¹

Ironically, despite the recent trend towards reconnecting writers with their ethnic or cultural roots, our translations must also appeal to our new, global audience. This is especially the case if the aim of translation is to shift the work of writers from a national context to a global audience. This article will explore the tension between producing a marketable 'universalist' translation of Binhad's poetry and a translation of his work that can only be read in the context of Indonesian culture at large and post-authoritarian Indonesia in particular.

I will begin by examining key aspects of Binhad's biography, including his exposure to radical Islamist elements in his youth in rural Lampung, southern Sumatra. The body of this discussion will then be devoted to examining to what extent Binhad's work must be translated and interpreted in light of the growing critical interest in the emerging global perspective, with its emphasis on ethnicity, local roots, and the historical. Ultimately, the conclusion of this article will suggest that we need to translate, read and interpret Binhad's work with "detached engagement," in Damrosch's phrase.

¹ David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 187.

That is, with an informed understanding of what the work means in its original Indonesian context, even as we attempt to mould it to our own context and purposes.

On Binhad Nurrohmat, Lampung and Radical Islamism

Binhad Nurrohmat was born in inland Lampung, South Sumatra in 1976. Two years earlier, Binhad's parents, ethnically Javanese, had moved from East Java to the Lampung province under the Suharto-era transmigration program. Transmigration was designed to lighten the population burden of the densely populated islands of Java, Madura and Bali. Sparsely-populated provinces in Sumatra such as Lampung were the chief beneficiaries. Besides aiming to reduce the considerable poverty and overpopulation of Java, a key purpose of transmigration was to provide a ready-made workforce to better harness the natural resources of the outer islands. Critics of the program felt that it was little more than an attempt by the central government to reduce the proportion of the native population of outlying regions, thus weakening the possibility of separatist movements. Indeed, nowadays it is quite possible to visit small towns and villages in Lampung where, in an informal context, Javanese is the dominant language. Among other things, this is a sure sign that the local population consists almost entirely of first and second-generation Javanese transmigrants.

Throughout Indonesia, tensions and controversies often arose between settlers and indigenous populations. After the pressure-cooker atmosphere of the New Order regime was broken with Suharto's resignation in 1998, violent conflict amongst transmigrants and their indigenous neighbours erupted in several regions. The program was officially suspended in 2000 after the fall of Suharto's government and the impact of the Asian economic crisis. Yet there are enduring tensions, usually over land tenure and employment. Lampung's influx of Javanese settlers has also led to a fair share of violence and intrigue over the years, and Binhad and his family have not been untouched by this.

When they first arrived in Sumatra, Binhad's family settled in the East Lampung transmigrant village of Sidodadi. Here, as Binhad grew up, his parents involved themselves in local trade, as well as tending to a coconut and clove plantation nearby. Binhad's mother, from a strict Islamic background in Banyuwangi in East Java, also taught Arabic recitation lessons to local schoolchildren in a small mosque. This rural idyll was broken in 1984, when Sidodadi—and several neighbouring transmigrant villages—were ordered to close down for 'reforestation'. Although the transmigrants were ordered to move to another village in northern Lampung, Binhad's family chose to move instead to Sidorejo, a nearby village in East Lampung. Here his parents worked as cloth traders in village markets, no longer working on a plantation.

It was also in this region that we can trace a seminal episode in the genealogy of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), the Southeast Asian militant Islamic organisation allegedly responsible for the Bali bombings of 2002.² Although Jemaah Islamiyah was not known as a terrorist organisation until the 1990s, or indeed as a structured organisation at all, events in Lampung in the late 1980s were seminal and influential.

² See Greg Barton, *Jemaah Islamiyah: Radical Islamism in Indonesia* (Singapore: Ridge Books, 2005), pp. 50-51 and Martin van Bruinessen, "Islamic State or State Islam? Fifty Years of State-Islam Relations in Indonesia," in *Indonesien am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Igrid Wessel (Hamburg: Abera-Verlaag, 1996), pp. 19-34.

Besides tens of thousands of transmigrants from Central and East Java, in the New Order era Lampung had also attracted rogue elements of various radical Islamic groups. Looking for an out-of-the-way retreat, members of outlawed groups had fled government attention in Java. It was in the isolated village of Talangsari in Way Jepara, East Lampung, where one of the two masterminds behind JI, Abdullah Sungkar, teamed up with a radical preacher, Anwar Warsidi, who had established an Islamic community or *jemaah*. Sungkar in particular had close underground links with the outlawed Darul Islam organisation. Darul Islam was a regionally-based Islamist insurrectionist movement established in the late 1940s. It was disbanded in the early 1960s, with the arrest of its leaders. Surprisingly, right until the late-1980s Warsidi's group had managed to operate without drawing any undue attention from local authorities, who were quite suspicious of the activities of any Muslim groups with links to Darul Islam. Abdullah Sungkar, however, had already served several years in jail for his links with Darul Islam, and was thus a marked man. Indeed, quite a few of the newcomers had close links with the vestiges of the Darul Islam movement in West Java and Aceh, as well as the influential firebrand cleric, Abdul Qadir Baraja, who was at the time serving a jail sentence for his involvement with radical Islamic organisations.

By the end of February 1989 Warsidi's *jemaah* had well and truly attracted the attention of the local authorities. Indeed, there are unofficial rumours that between two hundred to three hundred people living in Talangsari were massacred by the Indonesian military. The massacre occurred soon after local authorities informed the regional military command of the activities of Warsidi's group. The group, allegedly, no longer considered themselves as being citizens of Indonesia, and had armed themselves for violent confrontation. After rejecting an order to report to the local military authorities, nine of Warsidi's followers were arrested. Feeling threatened by another deputation of soldiers, the sub-district military commander was hacked to death when he went to meet Warsidi in person. Hoping to send a strong message to radical Islamists, a large force of police and military under the command of a Colonel Hendropriyono responded with extreme force. Attacking at dawn, many of Warsidi's followers were killed, hundreds more than the official estimate of twenty-seven dead. There are also suggestions that many of the radicals killed were women and children, as the men had already fled before the military arrived.

Of most relevance to this article is the fact that one of Binhad's high-school classmates was killed in the massacre. Although Binhad's school, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, was twenty-five kilometres away from Talangsari, several members of Warsidi's group were from Sidorejo. It is also important to note that before the Talangsari massacre members of Warsidi's group had also crossed paths with local authorities, resulting in the violent deaths of a local police chief and Sidorejo's village headman.

Ultimately, the impact of this episode on Binhad's psyche is difficult to quantify. Although significant events in one's teenage years are normally extremely influential, it should also be noted that for the last decade or so Binhad has been studying and writing outside the context of rural Lampung. For several years he studied at Pondok Pesantren Krapyak Yogyakarta, a well-known Islamic boarding school in Central Java. After a brief stint as a scholar of Islamic studies, Binhad also enrolled at the Akademi Komunikasi Yogyakarta, eventually studying philosophy at the Sekolah Tinggi Filsafat Driyarkara in Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia, where he now lives as a free-lance writer, essayist and poet.

On Binhad's childhood in Lampung, perhaps the most relevant observation to make is that even for a Muslim poet, from a strict Muslim background in a predominantly Muslim region, the discourse of Islam, and radical Islamism in particular, can be justifiably regarded with suspicion, and indeed as a latent threat. It might also help us to better understand why an ostensibly Muslim poet has chosen to direct his poetic energies away from religious matters to the politics of the erotic.

Inadvertently, it is as a poet of the erotic that Binhad's life and work can tell us a great deal about the state of Islam in Indonesia. For instance, the critical reception of Binhad's erotic texts can be viewed in terms of the frustrations of the Islamist-inclined segments of the Indonesian population. This element of Indonesian society appears to be losing patience with the ongoing crises in the country and the global dominance of non-Islamic and anti-Islamic forces. Liberal Muslim artists and intellectuals such as Binhad have become the unwitting focus of much Islamist consternation, quite out of proportion to their cultural impact on wider Indonesian society. One would assume that this awareness must also suffuse our attempts, as translators, to bring Binhad's message to a global audience. Yet the fact that Binhad's poetry does not explicitly concern itself with Islam or radical Islamism makes it quite difficult for a translator to adapt his poetry to its new readers' presumed interests. Before discussing this in more detail, it might be useful to provide some sort of contextual background to Binhad's poetry.

Framing Binhad's Poetry in the Context of Contemporary Indonesia

For a poet so young, in recent years Binhad has become a major new force in Indonesian poetry, a noteworthy achievement. This is especially so considering the elevated status of many of his poetic predecessors, not to mention the cacophony of literary voices competing for attention in contemporary Indonesia. With a dramatic relaxing of Indonesia's freedom of expression laws since the fall of Suharto, in the post-New Order era literature has flourished in Indonesia. Publication permits are no longer required and cultural activities such as poetry and short story readings are flourishing, both in the regions and in major cities.

Literary culture has flourished in the Indonesian archipelago for centuries, despite periods of government censorship. It is in this context that Indonesia has produced several poets of global stature, including Chairil Anwar and Rendra. Chairil Anwar's brief years of literary activity coincided with the social and political turmoil associated with the end of Japanese rule in Indonesia, as well as the guerrilla war against the returning Dutch after World War II.³ Rendra's dominance in the field was also closely tied to historical events: he emerged as a prominent cultural activist and dissident under the shadow of President Suharto's often brutally cruel authoritarian New Order regime, from 1966-1998. When so many other writers were exiled, detained or banned, Rendra's poetry provided a satirical human slant to the many injustices of Suharto's rule, often at great personal cost.⁴

³ Denise Levertov, "A Force in Indonesian Poetry," in *The Poetry of Our World: An International Anthology of Contemporary Poetry*, ed. J. Paine (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), p. 424.

⁴ See Harry Aveling, "Introduction," in *Secrets Need Words: Indonesian Poetry, 1966-1998*, ed. H. Aveling (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 2001), pp. vii-xix.

The emergence of Binhad's poetry has also coincided with important developments in Indonesian history, most notably the fall of Suharto's regime and the social, economic and political instability concomitant with Indonesia's embrace of democratisation. Binhad's poetic activity has also appeared after the crumbling of government censorship in the form of a dramatic relaxing of Indonesia's freedom of expression laws.⁵ Yet Islamist elements of the population have also become increasingly frustrated by Indonesia's slow political and economic progress, as well as the moral lassitude of Indonesia's increasingly liberal media. Thus, somewhat paradoxically, Indonesia's transition away from authoritarianism has also led to a rise in censorial interference and religious puritanism, spearheaded by Islamist-inclined groups.⁶

It is in this context outlined above that Binhad's first collection of poems, *Kuda Ranjang* (The Bed Horse),⁷ was published. The collection caused a great deal of debate in the Indonesian mass media, a good proportion of it negative. Why was there such a polarised reaction to Binhad's poetry? First of all, Binhad's poems are a brave exploration of the ongoing tensions between social decay and the politics of the erotic, in the culturally specific context of a traditionally conservative predominantly-Muslim society.

Indeed, Binhad's focus on the more sordid aspects of human existence—especially in the local context of the urban hell of Indonesia's capital, Jakarta, a teeming city of over twelve million people—opens a window on the stifling undercurrents of social and spiritual decay at the heart of Indonesia's chaotic political progress. One poem in particular, 'Broken' ('Pecah'), is a striking comment on the existential costs associated with life and living in the post-authoritarian era:

The top of my bloody head has broken off.
Tin-can lids, dead frogs, and torn underpants
are seeping out from my broken skull.
I dump the rotten overflow into the street.
My face shoots out darts of metal.
Lacerating the eyes of people passing by
and causing the sun's forehead to bleed.
The smell of blood covers my hands which are gripping machetes
which are shaking from the sharp pointy end of my heart.

*Cangkang comberan kepalaku pecah.
Sobekan kaleng, bangkai kodok, dan cincangan celana dalam
meluap dari rekah tengkorak.
Kuarak ceceran busuk ke jalan.
Mukaku mengelupas selaput seng.
Mata orang lewat tersayat.
Kening matahari berdarah.*

⁵ See Krishna Sen and David T. Hill, *Media, Culture and Politics in Indonesia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁶ See Pam Allen, "Challenging Diversity?: Indonesia's Anti-Pornography Bill," *Asian Studies Review* 31 (2007): 101–115.

⁷ Binhad Nurrohmat, *Kuda Ranjang* (Jakarta: Melibas, 2004).

*Amis mencemari tangan penggenggam tangkai parang
dan berguncang dari setombak ulu hati.*

Inscribed in many other poems are chronically embattled anti-heroes and overly-dependent lovers, bunkered down, locking themselves away from reality. Thus there are several aubades, where lovers resist the rising sun of daybreak and the jangling of alarm clocks, or make the most of public holidays, or, in the absence of their lover, miss the smell of freshly-brewed coffee.

In juxtaposition to this, the recurring imagery of animals, trees, forests, lakes and the sea can be regarded as a symbolic reflection of a repressed desire to escape from the harshness of urban living. No wonder then that so many of Binhad's poems are imbued with the themes of lovers nostalgically yearning for the peace of contemplation, poetry, love-making and laughter. One poem, 'Gay', set in the distant and orderly streets of Paris and revolving around the impressions of a couple of gay lovers, is an extension of this theme.

Binhad's poems have a flowing style, a distinctive embodiment of his examination of the politics of the erotic. Consider 'A Prostitute' ('Pelacur'), where a strong sense of physicality pervades:

Days of endless passion
our clothes placed to one side
as we rub the walls of a mossy cliff
the roots of a cactus seeping out sap
the travellers' horse neighs
making your nipples and clitoris quiver
for a season, until it ends
as the candles melt.

*Hari-hari melulu birahi
melorotkan lilitan lapisan kain
menggosoki sisi tebing berlumut
urat akar kaktus meneteskan getah
kuda musafir meringkik
menggeletarkan ujung puting dan kelentit
hingga satu musim garing
bersama lelehan batang-batang lilin.*

This bustling vision of the erotic is all the while overshadowed by the title of the poem. The sexual escapades alluded to above are deeply evocative, yet are nevertheless between a prostitute and her client, limited in time. The references to a mossy cliff, cactus sap, a horse's neighing and melting candles are also distinctive of Binhad's poetry, foreshadowing the spiritual and sexual isolation of the lovers, trapped between the physical pleasures of love-making and the moral bankruptcy of their undeniably commercial transaction.

The polarising tension between agony and ecstasy, the heavenly and the sordid, nature and the metropolis, is a recurring theme in Binhad's poetry. Indeed, Binhad's upbringing in rural Lampung, and his later move to Java and Jakarta in order to sustain a modest income as a poet and writer might well explain his comfortable references to nature, not to mention his ambivalent attitude towards the city. The

pervasive sense of spirituality—and spiritual isolation—embodied by Binhad’s protagonists might also reflect the influence of Binhad’s years of religious training in rural Islamic boarding schools, as well as the abiding influence of his mother, who among other things taught Islamic studies to young children in various Muslim village schools in Lampung.

Often, in the interludes between fleeting episodes of carnal pleasure, Binhad’s poetic characters are haunted by existential doubts. Many of them, like young men and women the world over, seem frozen by a vague and faceless sense of threat, randomly emanating from the outside world: sometimes in the form of a poster or a rusty nail in the wall, sometimes in the slashing of rain against a window-pane, other times by the ring of a phone or the alarm of a clock. The true nature of this world, even for those with the most minimal knowledge of contemporary Indonesia, is easily guessed. Indeed, as revealed in ‘The Nightwatchman’ (‘Penunggu Malam’), it is a world where marginal economic progress coincides with a morass of urban and environmental decay:

A power pole
a filthy sewer
a muddy road
have memorised your dirty sexy talk all night long
and hundreds of ghosts
with enraged leeches crawling out of their eyes
haunt you
every time the rain falls.

*Tiang listrik
selokan busuk
jalanan becek
hapal kata-kata cabulmu sepanjang malam
dan ratusan mata hantu penuh lintah marah
mengincar kau
setiap kali hujan turun.*

The fact that Binhad has attempted to write about socially risqué themes with a fresh and seductive narrative force has been eclipsed by the vociferous protests over the ‘vulgar’ content and colorful language of his work. Indeed, Binhad’s poetry has been negatively linked with a number of other post-New Order writers, mostly young women prose writers, who have also written about sex and sexuality in an explicit and up-front fashion.

Binhad’s unabashed Islamic leanings—coupled with his interest in the erotic—have also provided extra ammunition for his detractors. In print form, Binhad has developed his own unique and innovative style of poetic delivery: all of his poems are printed right-justified. This ostensibly mirrors the manner in which the Arabic script is justified to the right, Arabic being the language of the sacred text of Islam, the Qu’ran. Binhad has also published poems in Arabic, reinterpreting verses from the Qu’ran.⁸ The fact that Binhad studied at an Islamic *pesantren* and grew up with a

⁸ See for example, “Ketikamu,” in *Maha Duka Aceh*, ed. E. Senggono (Jakarta: Pusat Dokumentasi Sastra H.B. Jassin, 2005), p. 37.

strict Islamic upbringing has also served to inflame hitherto latent Islamist fears in Indonesia regarding the rise of liberal Islamic intellectuals.

As might be assumed, the various controversies surrounding Binhad's poetry have also led to a great deal of interest in literary circles. For example, Binhad has been invited to read his poetry at the Taman Budaya Lampung, Bandarlampung (2002); Graha Bhakti Budaya Taman Ismail Marzuki, Jakarta (2007); and Teater Utan Kayu, Jakarta (2007). Yet within months of the furore surrounding his first collection of poetry, *Kuda Ranjang* was withdrawn from sale from the shelves of Gramedia, Indonesia's leading publishing house and bookseller. Nowadays, it is quite difficult to obtain a copy of the poems, as they are out of print.

Translating *Kuda Ranjang*

It was during a serendipitous meeting with Binhad in Jakarta in December 2004 whereupon Binhad gave me his permission to translate *Kuda Ranjang*. I was informed at the time of the impending difficulty for the average Indonesian to obtain a copy of the text. Therefore, as translator, an important aim was to publish the translated poems as a bilingual collection. The model for this format was an excellent bilingual collection of poetry: Dorothea Rosa Herliany's *KILL THE RADIO Sebuah Radio, Kumatikan* (2001) edited and translated into English by an Australian academic and translator, Harry Aveling. In *KILL THE RADIO*, each translated poem appears alongside its original, and Aveling's introduction in English also appears in Indonesian. In the case of Binhad's *Kuda Ranjang*, it was envisaged that a bilingual presentation would make Binhad's poems available to the largest possible audience, both international and national.

But is an international audience prepared for a Muslim poet's erotic slant on the world? In Indonesia, Binhad's most notorious poem, 'Taking a Crap' ('Berak'), proved to be particularly controversial. It is easy to see why, with arresting lines like the following:

Your nice anus
every morning spreading over the toilet bowl
patiently awaiting your crap.
Your penis is as wrinkly dull as the neck of an old hunch-back
shyly peeking out at the pile of crap
squeezing out of the brown cheeks of your backside.

*Anusmu yang bagus
saban pagi mengangkangi mulut kakus
yang tak bosan menunggu tahimu.
Zakarmu sekuyu gelambir leher jompo
bungkuk dan malu-malu
mengintip puing tahi
terjepit bongkah coklat bokongmu.*

Binhad suggests that those who fail to grasp the underlying metaphoric symbolism of 'Taking a Crap' will probably find the lines quoted above quite distasteful. This became a problem when 'Taking a Crap' appeared as the very first poem in *Kuda Ranjang*. For many this was the only poem that was quoted in reviews or read

while browsing. Indeed, the prominent position of this poem in the original *Kuda Ranjang* led to it becoming Binhad's 'iconic poem', and most of his other poetry was simply glossed over or ignored. It was felt that a Western audience might be as equally unprepared as an Indonesian audience to be 'dumped' with such an arresting poem at the start of the collection. Why not, say, begin the collection with the title poem, 'The Bed Horse' ('Kuda Ranjang'):

The red drill eye glistens
erect at the end of a pile of spongy muscles
penetrating what lies between the valley:
the mouth of the poet's pen spills ink
and sharpens wavering words.
Passion rapes our mouths leading us to froth and sizzle:
the quarry's mouth is sucked dry by hundreds of worker's mouths
their bodies filthy and oily.

*Mata bor merah berkilat
teracung di ujung sehimpun otot liat
menujah celah ceruk lembah:
muara pena penyair mengguyur tinta
dan meraut pengucapan yang berkelejat.
Birahi memerkosa mulut hingga mendesis membusa:
liang pertambangan disedot ratusan mulut pekerja
wajahnya berlemak dan berjelaga.*

In the very first stanza of this poem (as quoted above) the reader is introduced to some of Binhad's recurring themes: masculine sexuality, the task of the poet, and the ever-present hordes, be they rapacious critics or the urban poor. The imagery seems more socially acceptable than that of 'Taking a Crap', and equally iconic. Yet one could prosecute me, as editor and translator, with the charge of making undue structural changes to *Kuda Ranjang* in an attempt to tone down the bilingual translation. My co-translator, Cucu Juwita, would be complicit in the charges, despite her lack of involvement in the editing of the collection. Thus the decision was made to replicate the structure of *Kuda Ranjang* as faithfully as possible. Indeed, there is a very good reason why Binhad chose 'Taking a Crap' to be the first poem in *Kuda Ranjang*: like an unused toilet, his poetry means nothing until it is read. By 'dumping' his poetry on the unsuspecting reader, Binhad also 'dumps' on us his take on Indonesia.

Despite this conciliatory move, my editing of other structural aspects of the translation was a deliberate attempt to tame Binhad's poetry for a Western audience. Two of his longer, more rambling poems, better characterised as epics, were eliminated from the collection. One of these, the meandering 'The Hermaphrodite' ('Hermafrodit'), about the nightmarish ruminations of a person endowed with both male and female genitalia, was felt to be neither universal in its themes nor a particularly representative insight into Indonesian culture. Also, our keen awareness of Binhad as a heterosexual Indonesian male, married with two children, suggested that Binhad's 'hermaphroditic world view' was not exactly authentic. Thus, the poem, although fully translated, was excised from the collection as I felt it would have little meaning for the book's English-language readers, as well as the Indonesian-language readers.

Nevertheless, accusations of undue meddling on my part are quite justified. After all, Binhad's poems are narrated from varying points of view: sometimes from

the perspective of a female exotic dancer, a male lover, a heart-broken girlfriend, or a pair of gay lovers. Who is to say which of Binhad's imagined perspectives or world views is 'authentic' and 'inauthentic'? Before writing the poems, Binhad spent several years interviewing the sex workers and their clients at a number of Jakarta's night-clubs and brothels. The interviews were then transcribed and ultimately interpreted in poetic form, thus explaining the multitude of voices inscribed in Binhad's poems. Such a creative process is by no means original or unique, either in the Indonesian literary system or in the context of world literature. Therefore, when considered in the context of Binhad's biography and the research and production of the poems themselves, the question of authenticity is a misnomer. It must be admitted that the other reasons why 'The Hermaphrodite' was deleted from the collection as mentioned above—were far more crucial. Binhad's opinion on my editing was also sought; fortunately, his response was accommodative: "For me, *Kuda Ranjang* is still *Kuda Ranjang*, even without 'The Hermaphrodite'".

Publishing *The Bed Horse*

In another important aspect, Binhad's involvement in the project was not quite as accommodating. Just as the book was being prepared for publication, I was belatedly notified of the cover layout and artwork, which had been commissioned and approved by Binhad himself. Unfortunately the cover—consisting of Herry Dim's acrylic on canvas entitled *A Parody of Verticalization* (2008)—is in my view distasteful and far too confronting for an international audience. Dim's painting consists of two key juxtaposed images: an upside-down clown hanging above a phallic drill-bit emerging from two testicular boulders. Apparently the image of the clown symbolises the '*kepolosan*' or 'innocence' of Binhad's work. The drill bit is said to be a literal depiction of the 'red drill eye' of the title poem; a little too literal for my liking. Furthermore, the image is a misreading of the poem, as the drill is nothing more than a metaphor. Also, considering that the power tool in question appears to be covered in blood, I regarded the overly-phallic imagery as being rather crass, perhaps even bordering on misogyny. Moreover, I viewed the image of the clown as an unnecessary cheapening of Binhad's work, which I believe is not clownish at all.

My attempts to veto the cover artwork fell on deaf ears. Although Binhad also reacted to Dim's work with initial distaste, apparently over time he grew to like it. Furthermore, at the time there were no alternative artworks, and apparently the printing presses were inked-up, locked-in and poised to run. Thus my right to veto the cover was denied. This in itself is no great tragedy, and many scholars might even regard the cover as yet another example of Bakhtin's culture of the carnivalesque.⁹ One could also argue that as translator and editor it is not my role to make any personal comment or judgement on the merit of a work of art. Beauty, as they say, is in the eye of the beholder. Furthermore, even if I personally consider Dim's imagery as being too 'confronting' for a Western audience, who is to say how a broader Western audience will respond?

I would argue, if anything, that Binhad's unwavering approval of Dim's *A Parody of Verticalization* says a great deal about his desire to present himself in a certain light to his local audience. That is, as an artist keen to elicit an emotional re-

⁹ See Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist, ed. M. Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

sponse, unafraid of evoking debate, and determined to challenge dominant social, cultural and religious ideologies within the Indonesian context. Binhad has consistently demonstrated a preparedness to ruffle the feathers of a good swathe of his potential readership. In relation to this, this unexpected twist in my tale also serves to starkly highlight the role of biography in translation, especially when the author in question is still alive, and actively involved in the translation of his work (and in this case, the publication of the translation).

Finally, with the assistance of a small research grant from the School of International and Political Studies at Deakin University, the bilingual edition of *Kuda Ranjang* was published in early June 2008 by Koekoesan, an emerging Jakarta-based publisher. Although the first edition consisted of only one thousand copies, reportedly a significant number of these copies were shipped to libraries across the world.

It remains to be seen whether this bilingual publication—gaudy cover and all—will appeal to an international audience. On the one hand, the introduction to the bilingual edition attempts to reconnect Binhad and his poetry with his biography, including his ethnic and cultural roots. On the other hand, the translation and restructuring of the collection is aimed to appeal to a new, global audience. After all, one of the key aims of the translation of *Kuda Ranjang* and its publication as *The Bed Horse* is to shift Binhad's work from a national context to a global audience. Ultimately, even if the finished product is a marketable 'universalist' translation of Binhad's poetry, one's reading of the bilingual edition can be greatly enhanced by reading it in the context of the dominant social and political forces of post-authoritarian Indonesia.

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