

Mutia Sukma (translated by Ida Puspita, Helen Moore and Kathy Alderman)

Herb Seller at the Tomb

Knowledge I've long held
is that roots descend from heaven
through the bubbling spittle of the holy ones.

Turmeric, like the tang of heartache
in a life that's lost all hope.

Java ginger, *temulawak*, fresh as the bud
of milk in my fourteen-year-old chest,
to rinse ulcers from the bellies of our lonely days.

Betel nut, key to self-awareness,
with bitter leaves to hold life's harshness,
and face its trials, which grow our wisdom.

Hands tighten, squeezing out the essence,
as the herb seller recites incantations
foretells illness in the furrows of a brow.

From the shell of a coconut adorned with symbols –
like *lontar* miniatures etched on palm-leaves,
I sip a herbal brew.

My roots strengthen –
I stand firm like the banana tree.

Notes to poem:

Temulawak, or 'Java ginger', is a rhizomatous plant (*Curcuma xanthorrhiza*) native to Indonesia. It's known for its medicinal properties and is often used in traditional herbal remedies. *Temulawak* contains compounds that are believed to have anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, and hepatoprotective effects. It's commonly consumed in various forms, such as herbal drinks or supplements, and is valued for promoting health and wellness.

ECOPOETIKON

www.ecopoetikon.org

Lontar miniatures: In Balinese culture, sacred knowledge is recorded on miniature manuscripts known as '*lontar*'. Characters are scribed with a sharp instrument into dried palm leaves and then rubbed with a black dye, which contrasts with the pale beige leaf.

Mutia Sukma

Pedagang Jamu Depan Makam

Sudah lama aku tahu
Bahwa rimpang-rimpang diturunkan dari surga
melalui gelembung ludah orang suci;
Kunyit asam bagai nyeri ulu hati yang bersedih
pada kehidupan yang sedepa dari harapan

Segar kencur seperti putik susu ranum dadaku
di usia 14 tahun yang akan membebaskan temulawak
dari tukak perih lambung hari-hari sepi

Kunci sirih mengunci inti diri
Pahit sambiloto brotowali yang tahu bahwa
Hidup begitu pahit dan perlu percobaan untuk menghadapinya

Urat-urat tangannya mengencang
Memeras sari-sarian
Membaca rapalan
Atau sesekali meramal sakit yang tergambar pada lapang dahi

Seperti hamparan lontar
Dengan simbol-simbol yang khusus diciptakan baginya
Pada tempurung kelapa
Aku hirup jamu lebih kuat dari sandaran ke badan pohon pisang