

The cockroach trilogy

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Abstrak

The three plays translated in this volume, *Time Bomb*, *Cockroach Opera*, and *Julini's Opera*, share the same setting and cast of characters. Through their songs, colloquial language, and raunchy humor, they illustrate a blending of the energy of indigenous folk expression and the style of a Western musical. The mixture creates a kaleidoscopic presentation likely to appeal to sophisticated urban audiences but these plays, with their graphically literal representation of the dark “underside” to elite prosperity, subvert rather than affirm middle class assumptions. On the set of *Time Bomb*, directly below the chairs of a group of oblivious restaurant diners, sits a slum on the banks of a fetid canal where the victims of Jakarta’s transformation into a rich urban center play out their struggle with life. The diners, representing government officials whose role it is to clear the slums, are depicted as corrupt, weak, and hypocritical individuals who are constantly uttering fatuous statements. Meanwhile, the speech and action of the slum-dwelling “cockroaches”—prostitutes, transwomen, and thugs, as well as hardworking newcomers to the city—is tough, lively, and down-to-earth. For all their humor and fun, however, these plays are not “mere entertainment,” but rather purveyors of a stinging critique of the social injustice found in the “real world” just outside the theater doors.