



I Am a Tree: A Monologue on Tropical Ecotourism

Reddy Anggara

Universitas Singaperbangsa Karawang, West Java, Indonesia

• <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7376-8633>

Abstract

This ecospiritual poem is a lyrical monologue from the perspective of a tropical tree within the landscape of rainforest ecotourism, symbolizing resistance against the commodification of nature and the expansion of capitalist tourism. Through a contemplative voice, it exposes the paradox between the promotion of “natural” destinations and the silent destruction of ecosystems beneath their surface. Framing an ecocritical and spiritual narrative rooted in the ancient Javanese–Balinese cosmology of *Kahyangan*, a sacred realm where divinity and nature coexist, the poem presents a decolonial critique of how the tropical environment is aestheticized and marketed. Imagery such as “a saw that doesn’t know poetry” and “breath piercing the sky” serve as metaphors of both ecological devastation and hope. This piece functions as an ecological prayer, a quiet resistance from the rainforest’s forgotten voices amidst the machinery of global capitalism.

Keywords: tropical ecotourism, tropical rainforest, Kahyangan cosmology, ecocritical poetry, ecospiritual poetry, capitalist tourism, lyrical monologue

I am a tree of stone and breath,
a stream that glimmers with humid clarity.
I befriend the chirping birds
that perch lovingly upon my branches.
I grow wilder as the mountain mist seeps warm into the pores
of my tall, unmoving body,
sculpted, cloaked in bark,
alone and helpless.

I have become part of what was prepared,
a site for tropical nature tourism
that is no longer natural.
Yet it seems so "authentic"
when I'm framed in glossy ads
and rotten testimonials of my beauty.
I'm promoted like a heavyweight fighter,
managed and marketed across the globe,
my charm, my wilderness, my "purity,"
sold at a fantastic price
to touch what they label
as timeless world heritage.

Apparently, I have been groomed
to become a new kind of aesthetic.
My greenness exhales oxygen
for you and every living creature.
I walk with you throughout life.
I dwell and flow within your breath,
pumping your heart and lungs,
never once asking for your payment.

I am still fortunate, friend.
I stand tall, untouched,
not falling to the blueprints of
tourist architects
who saw no beauty in my green.
Yet now, I stand in silence, mourning
those deemed "unnatural."

Not so for my friends,
stones, rivers, birdsong,
roots that once embraced the earth,
all swept to dust
by saws that never learned poetry.

They were slowly expelled
for the sake of ambitious developments,
reimagined as more "natural,"
highly aesthetic,
marketable.
"But they have uprooted
entire habitats and ecosystems,"
whispers a dragonfly perched on my twig,
offering me a greeting of sorrow
before shedding a tear
and flying off to find its fallen kin.

Go ahead, look at me. Observe closely,
you beauty-hunters of nature.
I have been polished,
groomed to attract millions
to this place.
I am a rainforest spirit,
dancing with grace,
descending from the mist of Kahyangan,*
welcoming you with open arms and smiles,
but my heart is a grenade
waiting to ignite in silence.

See them,
crammed at the gates,
desperate to capture
my wounds.
Hundreds of cars snake for miles,
yearning to touch what once was sacred stillness.

They thirst for the green of my body,
but never know the tears of roots
cut off from silence.

This tourism has become a sacred space
for humans,
a temple of coin-worshippers.
Slowly, it murders
the green prayers rising from the earth.

We continue to meditate,
lifting prayers
for peace, for the earth's wholeness.
Though our bodies are shackled
by worldly capitalism,
our breath and our hopes
always rise to the skies,
like the oxygen I breathe for you,
until we shake the universe awake.

Afterward

* *Kahyangan* refers to a sacred cosmological realm in Javanese–Balinese spirituality symbolizing the harmony between nature, divinity, and humanity within the tropical environment.

This poem does not begin with theory. It begins with discomfort.

The discomfort of seeing how tropical forests are praised, showcased, and advertised while slowly being rearranged to suit tourism needs. Forests are called "natural", "native", "sustainable", but roads are opened, viewing platforms built, and silence is managed. The ideas of ecocriticism and environmental communication are present in the background, but this poem is not intended to explain the theory. More important is the tension between what is shown and what is secretly sacrificed.

In the poem, the decision to let the tree talk is not a metaphorical decoration. This is an attempt to reverse the touristic view. In the discourse on tourism, nature is almost always seen, framed, and circulated. Here, the forest is not a backdrop. It spoke up. This choice is in line with the ecocritical tradition that views literature as a space for ecological testimony, especially when damage is disguised by the language of beauty, sustainability, and progress (Buell, 2005).

The rainforest in this poem is not offered as a space for enjoyment. It is a living entity trapped in the machinery of tourist capitalism. The practice of ecotourism often promises to be caring but at the same time rearranges lands, bodies, and non-human life so that it can be consumed. Environmental communication studies call this a paradox: nature is celebrated symbolically but materially weakened (Pezzullo & Cox, 2017; West & Carrier, 2004). The shiny advertisements, crowds of tourists, and the mechanical saws that "never learned poetry" emerged from these contradictions not as grand symbols, but as everyday experiences.

The entry of *Kahyangan* provides another way to understand the forest. In Javanese–Balinese cosmology, forests and mountains are not neutral spaces, let alone mere resources. They have a living presence and demand ethical relationships. Bringing this cosmology into the poem is not intended to explain tradition, but rather to disrupt the dominant view that aestheticizes the tropics while erasing local knowledge and humankind's long-standing relationship with the land. (Benitez & Lundberg, 2022). This attitude resonates with the decolonial critique of extractive and tourist perspectives on nature (Nixon, 2011).

This poem also moves into an ecospiritual realm. Breath, prayer, and silence are not interpreted as escape but as a way of survival. The voice of poetry does not speak from above nor from a position of domination. It remains low, close to the roots and

soil. From there, the poem points to forms of violence that grow slowly, often go unnoticed, but continue to eat away at non-human ecosystems and lives.

On the border between creative work and critical reflection, this poem treats poetry as a way of knowing and not just a way of explaining. Ecological truths are difficult to capture using numbers, policies, or promotional slogans. In the tropics, when nature is repeatedly reduced to images and promises, poetic voices become one way to restore the presence, vulnerability, and ethical urgency of the living world.

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Reddy Anggara is an academic and researcher in the field of communication. He completed his bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees at the Faculty of Communication Sciences, Padjadjaran University, Bandung. Since 2011, Reddy has been listed as a permanent lecturer at the Universitas Singaperbangsa Karawang. In addition, he is trusted as a part-time lecturer at several universities in Jakarta, such as Mercu Buana University Jakarta and Dian Nusantara University. 2011-2012 he actively conducted research with the CAPAS UNPAD (Center for Agrifood Policy and Agribusiness Studies, Padjadjaran University). Reddy is interested in the research themes of communication, development communication, marketing communication, and environmental communication.