



The True Fighter of Tropical Melancholy: Poetic Reflections beneath the Paradise Brochure

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Abstract

This poem is a lyrical reflection on the melancholia and paradoxes of tropical tourism: beneath the glossy imagery of paradise lies the silent endurance of those who sustain its beauty with their bodies and breath. *The True Fighter of Tropical Melancholy: Poetic Reflections beneath the Paradise Brochure* gives voice to rural and informal workers who remain unseen in brochures but are the living core of the tropics. Rather than beneficiaries of tourism, they are its invisible custodians, displaced, overworked, and overlooked. Through a poetic and ethnographic lens, this piece explores the emotional and structural dimensions of *tropical melancholy*, revealing the inequities, symbolic erasures, and loss of livelihood beneath the promise of paradise.

Keywords: tropical melancholy, tropical tourism, poetic ethnography, tourism inequalities, rural workers, tropical paradise brochure

Never think
you are weak
even when your days
feel too hard to bear.
Yes, today
you are weary,
restless,
gripping
the sharp edges
of countless burdens.
But believe,
trust,
that you are not *Hayati* —
not the passive heroine from *Siti Nurbaya*,
bound by fate and silence —
for truly, you are the true fighter.

Your teeth now
grind with strain,
your blood
boils and rises,
on the edge
of bursting
into words
too fierce for speech.
But still,
you must be aware,
stand strong.
Cast aside your anger,
release your fire,
for it was provoked
from all directions,
from every side.

You no longer need
to hang your sorrow
on their sweet talk,
on the babble of those
with swollen tongues,
who chatter endlessly,
like caged thrushes
hung before a house,
as if their song
was truth itself,
claiming to be
of noble breed.

You are
the true fighter.
A piece of your soul
you have placed
upon the rice fields
stretching
to the edge of sight,
your hands inhaling
the scent
of golden harvest.

And the other piece
you left
in the hollow spots
of your bamboo home,
where your wife and children
in silence
take shelter,
surrender,
and seek solace
in prayer.

Reflective Afterword

This poem arises from the quiet struggle of rural lives, of those who never speak on podiums, but whose resilience is carved into fields and floorboards. It is an ode to those left behind by the mirage of modern development: farmers, informal laborers, and the women who bear entire households in silence. Across the tropics, these lives are increasingly eclipsed by the expanding shadow of tourism. Once sacred fields become brochures. Rice paddies and ancestral lands are transformed into resorts, golf courses, and “natural escapes.” What is sold as paradise often conceals stories of quiet dispossession. Communities are displaced, sometimes subtly, sometimes violently, to make room for others' leisure (Hitchcock et al., 2009). Forests are cleared. Coastlines privatized. Culture repackaged.

Behind the aesthetics of travel lies a tropical melancholia—a sorrow shaped by beauty, dispossession, and longing. As West and Carrier (2004) argue, the tropics are reimagined not for those who inhabit them, but for outsiders who consume their images. The true fighters, like the voice in this poem, are seldom heard. They do not fit into narratives of escape, but into realities of endurance.

This poem, then, speaks from the margins of the tropical imaginary. It asks us to see beneath the surface: to witness the hands that plant, the walls that shelter, and the breath that sustains life beneath paradise. It belongs to the sad tropics, this *Tristes Tropiques* (Lévi-Strauss, 1955)—not as romantic ruin, but as lived resistance.

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