



Suprpto Suryodarmo in Five Poems

by Riwanto Tirtosudarmo

SUPRAPTO SURYODARMO (1945-2019) is my Javanese teacher. He is my moving meditation guru and interlocutor with whom I could discuss many issues related to Javanese culture. I have written several essays about him. Some of them are "Suprpto Suryodarmo" in Mencari Indonesia 4: Dari Raden Saleh sampai Ayu Utami (2022: 295-299). Malang MNC Publishing; "Suprpto Suryodarmo, 1000 Hari dan Selamanya" in Kronik Budaya dan Sejarah by Borobudur Writers & Cultural Festival BWCF; "Suprpto Suryodarmo and my quest of Javaneseeness" (unpublished article, 2025). On this occasion, I present five poems as my tribute to him. I wrote these five poems in different places and times, whenever I was remembering or thinking about him.

Poem 1

At Goa Gajah

At Goa Gajah before teaching, you invited us to meditate for a moment
The old banyan tree was like an eyewitness to the past which moved slowly
You taught us to feel those slow movements that are not seen

Beneath the old banyan tree whose roots spread out in all directions
You let us move slowly following what we felt in our hearts
Your soft voice seemed to lead us through tunnels of time
The past seemed to be slowly moving again, permeating the present
In movements, we twisted and turned with the rustling sound of the wind
and the warmth of the sun's rays
Intertwined and infiltrating, following the paths and tendrils of that old
banyan tree's roots
We moved inhaling the fresh air of silence and the soft swaying of life
In Goa Gajah, you made us aware life is a slow movement towards silence.

Sorong-Papua, 23 May 2023

At Las Sengok

It appears to me as if you are moving gently in Las Sengok. In the scorching heat of the sun that burns weeds. Among the nicely arranged stone. Is it really you who taught us to feel the green shoots of leaves? Feel the vibrating of blooming petals?

In Las Sengok, the stones glow because of the scorching sunlight, it's like waiting for you to say hello. They seem to be imagining you moving your body while humming murmurs like before. There is indeed something that feels lost in Las Sengok.

Maybe only your shadow is moving slowly, flashing in my mind. Your smile always expands before you teach us to dive into the depths of the universe. Opening the pores, exhaling and absorbing the heat of sunlight.

In Las Sengok, which was once said to be a forest of prohibition. Among those neatly arranged and luminous stones. In the vastness of that almost endless universe. I saw you move gently but as though something was unspoken.

You move but there seems to be something inexpressible. In Las Sengok, something feels missing. Are you the one who taught us to look down before wriggling, moving slowly to meet time?

Tubaba-Lampung, 29 October 2023.

Poem 3

Journey

This long journey never ends

Impossible to stop even if you are tired

Someone has been waiting for a long time

Something to be found there

This journey is tiring and in vain

Despair lingers, it comes many times

Want to stop for a moment but can't

These legs must continue to swing

In the border of conscious and unconscious

In the infinite and unseen boundaries

The soul or body is dragging each step?

The two are linked, not separate

Tonjong-Bogor 28 September 2024

Poem 4

Boundary

There will always be a limit that stops us

Although we both want and don't want to step over it

The boundary is often invisible but can be felt

The limit exists even though no one else knows

The boundary is like a fence that protects but confines

Could boundary be a marker of impermanent life?

Is the boundary a clue to impermanence?

At the threshold we are forced to stop and reflect

Only through contemplation will we find the way

A path that is able to penetrate that boundary

Only in empty silence, we will be able to float

Seek the wind's nest and the footsteps of flying egret

Tegal, 10 October 2024

Poem 5

Remembering You

When your body vanishes into the earth only memories are left

Memories of the body that must be constantly moving

In the memory of that movement, you come back to life

Embracing my dancing soul, singing an illuminating song

You taught me to dance near flowers and butterflies

Sensing the vibration of the sun-drenched leaves

Listening to the breath of the roots and shoots of trees

Blending into the natural motion felt in the pores of my skin

You shed your body but your soul is in my mind

You live in the deepest sense, of dancing in my soul

With the flowers, butterflies, roots, and shoots

In the movement of the universe that whispers through the wind

Rabbit Hole-Boston, 29 December 2024

Riwanto Tirtosudarmo is independent scholar.

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