

Muhammed Haji Salleh

Poem Notes

This is a humorous take on a report in the New York Times in 2007 that Thailand was experimenting ways to extract the smell of the durian from the fruit. The durian of course is the famous fruit of heaven for Malaysians, its smell, the odour of divine realm. To non-Malaysian it is something else!

Poet Notes

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Sajak kepada raja siam tentang nasib durian

The poem original in Malay

tuanku,
kami, penanda tangan semua
dari seluruh selepang khatulistiwa
ingin menyuratkan belasungkawa
terhadap nasib buah syurga
walau berwajah neraka ini,
yang sudah dihilangkan baunya
oleh peniaga dan petani
di negeri tuanku.

pertama hak kewarganegaraan durian
telah dimajmukkan
menjadi rakyat berbagai-bagai negeri.
durian itu rakyat malaysia
di hutan kamilah tembaganya
berbinar dan mengghairahkan selera.
jatuh sendiri sewaktu matang
tidak dikait dan disimpan di balai.

apalah makna durian
 tanpa baunya
apalah makna blue cheese
 tanpa busuknya
apalah makna ros merah
 tanpa warnanya
apalah makna melur
 tanpa kehadirannya untuk dihidu?

apalah makna rambutan
 tanpa rambut merahnya
atau pulasan
 tanpa jemputan untuk memulasnya.

tuanku,
kami membantah
rakyat tuanku yang memandai-mandai
menghilangkan bau nikmat dari buah firdausi,
dan tajam durinya dari kulit,
lebih baik makan lai,
laici yang lembut seperti bontot bayi
lebih baik makan jambu!

ada yang boleh diubah
ada yang boleh berubah
kerana alamlah yang merubahnya.
di antara pohon hutan,
dalam sejuta tahun.

ada biji yang ditabur di lahar
di lereng bukit yang merah besi,

atau di tepi paya tergenang hujan,
kerana yang berduri itu dekat kepada
hati.

yang berbau itu dekat kepada ingatan purba.

harap tuanku,
memberhentikan eksperimen
yang tak perlu,
dan mencatatkan martabat
raja buah,
menjadikanya makhluk sederhana
lebih rendah dari biasa.

sekiranya tidak
kami akan
menutup sempadan
dan tanam durian wangi di sepanjangnya
pulauan semua pakaian tiruan
addidas, ballet, jersey manchester united
dan choli tiruan dari itali.

kami tidak akan
membalas senyuman
wanita thai di belakang kaca
atau di depan cermin,

kami akan
berhenti mengupas mangga dari utara
dan mengaul sambalnya.

tomyam
akan kami curahkan
kepada ayam,
dan kari hijau
untuk membiakkan tungau.

kami akan membeli sutera cina saja
bila kulit menggerutu asmara,
dan pulaukan kain siam
yang menggaru di tangan dan siku.

hinggalah
nyaman syurga
dikembalikan ke bukit,
ke kota
dan ke nikmat isi buahnya.

Translation

Letter to the king of siam on the sad fate of the durian

your majesty,

we the undersigned,
from the sash of the tropical world
would like to record our condolence
over the fate of the fruit of heaven,
though it sports the face of hell,
whose fragrance has been erased
by peddlers and farmers
from your kingdom.

firstly, the rights of citizenship of the fruit
has been pluralized,
now a citizen of many lands.
the durian is pure malaysian.
in our forests, the copper variety
shines and seduces tastes.
falling to the ground when ripe,
not plucked green.

your majesty,
we protest
your conceited citizens
who have annulled the ecstasy
from the fruit of heaven,
and the tingle of thorns from its skin,

we might as well choose the pear,
or *laici* with its skin as soft as baby's bottom
it's better to bite the flesh of the guava!

what is a durian

without its smell
what is blue cheese
without its foul odour
what is a red rose
without its blushing colour
what is a frangipani
without its gentle fragrance?

there are things that may be altered
there are others that can change
for it is nature that changes it,
in the forest
over a million years.

seeds sowed in the lava soils
on the hill sides as red as hematite,
or by the swamps that gather the rains,
for the thorny is closer to my soul.

we demand that your majesty
stop all unnecessary experiments
that strip the durian's dignity
as a sovereign among unequals,
and transform it into a lowly creature,
humbler than the law.

if you don't
we will
close the borders
plant the fragrant variety along boundaries,
boycott all your imitations of the
addidas, ballet, manchester united jerseys,
and bras that peak like the italian.

we shall
never return
the naughty smiles of your girls
before or behind the glass.

we will
stop peeling the mangoes from the north
the *tomyam*
we will feed
to the chicken
and the green curry
to the bacteria

from now on we shall buy only chinese silk
when romance tingles our skin
and avoid the thai variety
that scratches the arm and elbow.

till
the sweet smell of heaven
is returned to the hills
to the city
and to the ecstasy of the durian.