



"We walked many nights through
beds of flowers
telling each other that
mountains move secretly stars
betray their order
rivers and flowers
are women in love"

Etel Adnan



Annie's hands

She carried water and salt
to cast spells
and empty vessels

1...2...3...the pendulum circled
Capricorn appeared from dark moon
dehorned.

Our intentions met invisible patterns
Lemon butterflies waved through grassy veils

Heeding a protector's sting
we changed course
to encounter Achira

Upward
spirited flare
Outward
with purpose

And yet...
I remembered those roots
a community
massaging the earth

They rise together
and greet difference
with unassuming confidence

My belly burns
Discomfort ascends
Words stall at my chest

'Three drops, twice daily'
she confirms with her hands
A potentised mother
imprints possibility
of essence to essence

I got stuck in a web
weaving nuance between opposites
I want to stay entangled
In the safety of threads

The whole of her is a leaf

Drive,
the mother at the wheel,
the daughter silent,
contemplating her arrival.

Finding their way back to the soil,
gliding on the warm breeze,
they branch.

After sometime,
she decides to speak up.
Her blood spills,
onto her mother's lap.

Caressing the pain,
in unspoken apricot,
She allows florescence.

The vagal mother aspires
to health,
spooning the green soup
into her daughter's mouth.

A sneeze.

Tongue and effort
dilate the reed.
Bifurcation,
trifurcation,
diversification.

Acerbic results
in outstanding colour.
Slighter, cultivated, discerning,
the wanting should not forget
the pulse of the hummus.



Removed

In February, 2020, I moved to the edge of Turrbul and Jagera country. I nest in a valley enclosed by forested hills, where the headwaters of Moggill Creek emerge. It was along the brooks and untended paddocks of this valley that I encountered you, again, and again, and again.

'What's your name' I eventually asked.

I did not listen. Brisbane City Council tells me you are a "weed of waterways"⁽¹⁾ and your name is *canna lily*, or more scientifically, *Canna indica*. Although, you are not a lily and you don't originate from India. What defines you as a 'weed'? Perhaps your independence, the way your tuberous roots weave through soil, even when torn. The way you stay close to one another? Are you smothering others with your lustrous leaves or are you healing mistreated earth, or simultaneously both?

In more recent records, you have been named *African Arrowroot*, *Sierra Leone Arrowroot* and *Queensland Arrowroot*. But those seem far too nationalistic and extractivist names for a plant that is now naturalised in every continent and has come to be known in a variety of ways. In South East Asia and China, your relatives are cultivated for the tuber starch which is used in making cellophane noodles.⁽²⁾ In Réunion, seeds are used as the moving element in *kayamb*, a rectangular musical instrument made from reed.⁽³⁾ In Zimbabwe, seeds are contained inside a gourd rattle called *hosho*.⁽⁴⁾ I hear seeds are also used for jewellery in many places and, historically, for rosary beads in the monasteries of Spain.⁽⁵⁾

'What's your name.' I ask again.

I did not listen. Instead, I traced historic records to try to understand you - records of conquistadors, explorer-botanists, physicists, missionaries, plant hunters, gardeners and aristocrats. They led me to your Andean origins where you are called Achira.

Archaeologists have found evidence of Achira's cultivation in Peru some 4,500 years ago.⁽⁶⁾ Your ancestors were included in early botanical lists of men striving to bring order to the plant world through taxonomy and illustration - an order that is constantly shifting, expanding and, at times, crumbling. Horticulturalists transformed some of your relatives into ideal 'designer' versions to decorate 18th-19th century private gardens and

References

- ¹Brisbane City Council (n.d.), *Brisbane City Council Weed Identification Tool*, retrieved 17 January 2021 from <https://weeds.brisbane.qld.gov.au/weeds/canna-lily>
- ²The Gardens Trust (2016) *Canna*, retrieved 17 January 2021 from <https://thegardenstrust.blog/2016/02/20/cannas/>
- ³Maas-van de Kamer, H. & PJM Maas. 2003. *Cannaceae*, cited in *Canna indica* (2021, January 8) in Wikipedia, retrieved 17 January 2021 from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canna_indica
- ⁴Ibid.
- ⁵Curtis, W. and Sims, J. (2013, October 1) *The Botanical Magazine*, Vol. 13, The Project Gutenberg EBook retrieved 17 January 2021 from <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/43858/43858-h/43858-h.htm>
- ⁶*The lost crops of the Incas* in FAO Review on Agriculture and Development, CERES No.99, May-June 1984, retrieved 17 January from <http://www.nzdl.org>

I went walking

Scarlet flowers meet my stance. Sheaths split and curl, revealing heat. Some pose as another, complicating classification. A speckled tongue offers itself with wild abandon. A sweetened path to inner chambers. Below, inflamed fruits are taut with protection. I peel barbed skin from pearlescent seeds. They taste of spring. Cadence exists in all its parts. Possibility rests in a brittle case crumbling between fingers. A blackened seed tumbles. Its collision with bitumen confirms vigour. Impenetrable darkness is not as it seems. I enter the mouth of a cave to find triadic patterns, converging, replicating. A spider crawls from the papery rubble over the heart line of my palm.

pleasure grounds. Some were also among the many crop plants taken without permission and transported across oceans to find ideal conditions for exploitation, in an effort to expand empires. That is likely how you arrived on these shores and late 19th century settlers began cultivating and mechanically processing your tubers for starch on unceded Yugambeh land.

I read that your seeds can be viable for up to 600 years. They float. Is it arrogant to assume humans had a hand in all movements of your ancestors?

My head is full of information about you. Mystery remains. I smiled when I came across this description sourced from the local community in the Huíla region of Colombia:

The word *Achira* comes from the quechua "achuy" which primarily signifies "sneeze" but also to "transport something between one's teeth or with one's mouth". In a deeper sense this word relates to what is expressed by the human soul, with spontaneity, thus being the word, the story, the tale that is shared.⁽⁷⁾

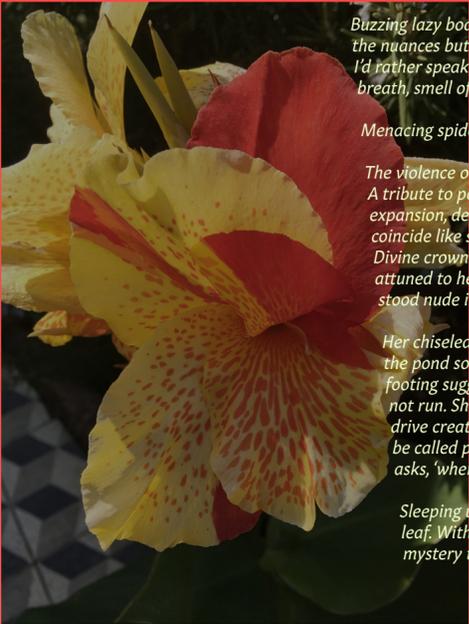
I remembered your tongue.

This morning, I spoke with Leticia Guevarra, a Quechua medicine woman and co-founder of *Hampi Mama* (Quechua for 'Medicine Mother'), a botanical sanctuary in Peru. Our conversation was generously translated by Carolina Putnam, founder and director of Reviveolution non-profit organisation. They tell me you grow on Indigenous lands and in *cejas de valle* (the eyebrow of the valley), where the forest and mountain meet. Leticia shared her deep ancestral, as well as occidental, knowledge of the ways that you heal both humans and the earth. She introduced you, Achira, as a plant that "cures slowly, but surely, and does not hurt other organs in the meantime"⁽⁸⁾. She described treatments: stem juice for mastitis and a dry cough; topical use of leaves for headaches, rheumatism and skin ulcers; leaves seeped and ingested for gonorrhoea and as a diuretic; crushed tender leaves as an antiseptic on wounds; and ground seeds for stomach ache.

Leticia tells me you are called *Pampach'i* in Quechua, which she translates as "reproducing from the ground".⁽⁹⁾

I'm reminded to sit with you, and quieten my mind.

- ⁷Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity (n.d.) *Achira Biscuits* retrieved 17 January 2021 from <https://www.fondazione Slow Food.com/en/ark-of-taste-slow-food/achira-biscuits/>
- ⁸Guevarra, L. (2020, December 29) personal communication over zoom, translated by Putnam, C. For further information visit <https://www.reviveolution.net/hampi-mama>.
- ⁹Ibid.



WiWa

Buzzing lazy bodies teaming with ills. I want to stay entangled in the nuances but I am tired of the emotional gymnastics. I'd rather speak without words, trust without fear, be grasped by breath, smell of plentitude.

Menacing spiders everywhere weave their own webs.

The violence of Achu is absorbed in the shock of the medulla. A tribute to potential torques, the principles of contraction, expansion, deviation, division, growth, disease, and healing coincide like sunkissed tissue paper at the top of her game. Divine crown. She showed up in the morning. My eyes, not attuned to her timing, did not see her coming. Shameless, she stood nude in her spotted skin. Wanting sex I imagine.

Her chiseled marble body stoically rising out of the center of the pond soon began to move. To edge towards the dance. Her footing suggests desire. Bound to the rock that made her, she will not run. She will, however, remember the embers of the fire that drive creation and smile. A smile so fragrant that it could never be called perfume. A smile that bears no grudge. A smile that asks, 'where are you now?'

Sleeping under the new moon, she bears a second thought. A new leaf. Without depleting the spire she branches generously, adding mystery to day. We all die.

Vitality becomes you

Let the shadows of her leaf rearrange your stem

Sing to your shame
and listen for the chorus
of mothers and gods

Bury your head
slowly, but surely
show your toes to the sky

The essence of the essence



Potted life

They pull over, prompted by a plastic clad greenhouse and a memory. The midday heat reminds them how far they've travelled and brings with it a waft of acacia. "Alo," she calls out and from an island in the Caribbean - a kind face replies "Hola". A language builds between them, interrupting the cemented fortitude of folklore. The continental and the archipelagic exchange breath. Translating each movement in smiles I gaze out over the countryside.

The Cordillera stands wide, purple in her sisterhood. Far from me, but easy to see, she reigns over the softly batting feathers of the peacock. On this side of the fence a palm tree, a rose bush, a tall eucalypt and Achira.

I sit in my abuelo's wooden armchair, where he spent years of his life gazing out at the farmland, and contemplate the matrilineal lineage. Carmen, Piampi, me. Each of us a leaf asserting her difference.

We honour the traditional custodians of the lands where we roam and learn including the Turrbal, Jagera, Yugambeh and Jinibarra people of South East Queensland and Picunches peoples of central Chile. We also pay our respects to the Quechua people of the Andean highlands, where Achira continues to grow and we honour the many plant custodians who keep traditional knowledge. We thank our mothers, for teaching us how to care for flowers and to forever be curious.