

... as far back as I will remember

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Abstract:

... as far back as I will remember is a monologue written in the form of a *prosopopoeia* from the point the view of the *Ziziphus zizyphus* plant, growing in the botanical garden of Montpellier in the south of France. Written in the future tense, the plant describes its direct environment in the botanical garden, its nomenclatural history, its geographic and cultural expansion as well the chemistry and benefits humans extract from its species. Progressively it also describes a future where a sixth mass extinction has taken place and where the *Ziziphus zizyphus*—or the Wild Jujube in its common denomination—becomes a “superspecies” colonizing the planet earth.

Jardin des Plantes, Montpellier, South of France

... as far back as I will remember, I will have always been growing here, on this remote part of the earth, constantly creating the conditions of new germinations—where the living is showing itself over the ordering, blossoming in a non-sterile and daring order (Fig. 7.1).

In 1593 the soil I am expanding and flourishing on will become the botanical garden of Montpellier. The *Jardin des Plantes* will be founded by the French botanist Pierre Richer de Belleval (1555 or 1564–1632). He will create the garden on orders from Henry IV (1553–1610), the King of France from 1589 to 1610. The *Jardin des Plantes* in Montpellier will be one of the oldest botanical gardens of Europe, alongside the *Orto Botanico di Padova*, the botanical garden of Padua in Italy, which will have begun two generations earlier, in 1545. The *Jardin des Plantes* in Montpellier will encompass more than 2,500 plants and will cover nearly five hectares next to the very centre of the city. Comforted by the warm Mediterranean climate of the south of France, the garden will become an area of stunning natural beauty.

The site, with its ponds, an arboretum and landscaped areas, will be owned by the University of Montpellier, and will be used for study and research. I will be growing in the garden's Systematic School neighbouring a Judas tree (*Cercis siliquastrum*) planted by the garden's founder, a majestic Phillyrea tree (*Phillyrea latifolia*) planted in 1620, and a Ginkgo tree (*Ginkgo biloba*) that will be planted here as a tribute to the French Revolution in 1795. I will be surrounded by busts of important medical naturalists, such as Pierre Magnol (1638–1715), a French botanist born in the city of Montpellier. He will be known as one of the innovators devising the scheme of classification that all botanists adopt hereafter. He will be the first to publish the concept of plant families as it will be understood from then on as a natural classification of groups of plants that have features in common. He will become Professor of Botany at the University of Montpellier and Director of the botanical garden of Montpellier in 1697, then called the Royal Botanic Garden or *Hortus montpelienis*, in its Latin denomination. He will also briefly hold a seat in the French Academy of Sciences, a learned society in Paris, encouraging and protecting the spirit of French scientific research, before founding the French Royal Academy of Sciences of Montpellier in 1706.

Over time, the garden's appearance will not vary excessively; only the flowers that will be planted and replanted each year will change, like a garment wrapped around a body, remaining the same below. I will have the chance to observe a range of flowers from originally different continents growing and blossoming here, including the Star of Bethlehem (*Agapanthus*), the Floss Flower (*Ageratum houstonianum*), the Flamingo Flower (*Anthurium*), the Bleeding Heart (*Dicentra*), the Snapdragon Flower (*Antirrhinum majus*), the Kaffir Lily (*Clivia miniata*), the Australian native Kangaroo Paw (*Anigozanthos manglesii*), the Ice Plant (*Delosperma*), the nightshade plant Jaborosa (*Jaborosa integrifolia*), the Black-Eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia*), the Desert Rose (*Dogbane*), the Wild Iris (*Dietes*), the Euphorbia (*Euphorbia* L.), the Mexican Fireplant Pointsettia (*Cyathophor*), the Flannel Flower (*Actinotus helianthi*), the Cosmos (*Asteraceae*), the Honesty (*Lunaria*), the Cherry Pie Plant (*Heliotrope*), the Honeysuckle (*Lonicera*), the West Indian Jasmine (*Ixora*), the Baby's Breath (*Gypsophila*), the Whirling Butterflies (*Gaura*) and the Protea (*Protea cynaroides*). The latter is one of the oldest flowers on earth, and its history, or so these scholars think, dates back 300 million years, long before grass evolved, let alone before any modern mammals began to develop.

Among all these spectacular plants, and being myself a tiny, thorny scrub, I will not attract too much attention. In fact, I will hardly be noticed. Growing here, in a removed part of the planet, in the botanical garden of Montpellier, I will remain surprised about the longevity and sustainability of my family: I know that we will be the survivors in history. At some point, my family's lineage and origin will be an object of curiosity, even a mystery. Individuals of my family will have their

hour of glory and inspire portraits painted by widely renowned artists. We will appear in poems, in essays and on medallions, and we will be acclaimed in religious and medical literature. We will continue to exist, without respite. In front of everybody's eyes and yet hidden from the view of all, we will become ubiquitous. Some will call us a weed. Our omnipresence and what they think of as our banality will be our best allies. We will be botanical hitch-hikers, masters of long-distance dispersal, ready to ride along with anyone credulous enough to serve us as an agent of dispersal. Our fruits will be carried along from pond to pond, from oasis to oasis, with thousands of miles between one suitable habitat and the next. We will be the perfect example of what botanists and ecologists will mean by their term 'cosmopolitan species'. Because of our tenacity and willingness to adapt—because we are not really natives anywhere but are at home almost everywhere—I will tell you less about the past and a whole lot more about the future of our planet.

Call Me by My Name

I will be called by many different names. Due to a combination of botanical naming regulations and variations in spelling, my family will have a curious, confusing nomenclatural history. My name will be often truncated, misspelled or transformed in some way. It will be translated from Arabic or Persian writing into Greek by means of the Greek alphabet. The Arabic-Greek bilingual lexica will establish the equivalence of the terms. Transliterations of my name will result from the fact that, when Arabic texts will be rendered into Greek, the translators will not always know the exact Greek equivalent of my name and will keep the Arabic form, just reproducing it letter by letter from Arabic into the Greek alphabet.

In the Greek world, they first will speak of me as the *lotos* or *lotus*. I will be mentioned in the famous *Odyssey*, which they say was written by the great Homer. They believe these words will be composed near the end of the eighth century BCE, somewhere in Ionia, the Greek coastal region of Anatolia. The oldest known extract of the *Odyssey* will be found near the remains of the Temple of Zeus, on an engraved clay plaque in Olympia, Greece. That, though, will be believed to date only from the third century CE. There, my fruits will be described as being food of the *Lotofagoi* (this is, literally the eaters of *lotos*), and my fruits will be credited with a strange property: whoever eats my fruits will be savaged by an unruly forgetfulness. He or she will no longer want to sail home and not even give news of their adventures. The location of the *Lotofagoi* will never be clearly established: usually it will be located somewhere on the North African coast, but it will also tentatively identified in the Adriatic region, specifically Dubrovnik. Most sources will say that the island that Odysseus lands on with his soldiers will

be Djerba, the largest island of North Africa. But Odysseus, the main character, will tell of what happens to three of his companions when they meet the Lotus-Eaters and partake of my fruits:

I was driven thence by foul winds for a space of nine days upon the sea, but on the tenth day we reached the land of the Lotus-eaters, who live on a food that comes from a kind of flower. Here we landed to take in fresh water, and our crews got their mid-day meal on the shore near the ships. When they had eaten and drunk I sent two of my company to see what manner of men the people of the place might be, and they had a third man under them. They started at once, and went about among the Lotus-eaters, who did them no hurt, but gave them to eat of the lotus, which was so delicious that those who ate of it left off caring about home, and did not even want to go back and say what had happened to them, but were for staying and munching lotus with the Lotus-eaters without thinking further of their return; nevertheless, though they wept bitterly I forced them back to the ships and made them fast under the benches. Then I told the rest to go on board at once, lest any of them should taste of the lotus and leave off wanting to get home, so they took their places and smote the grey sea with their oars.¹

Around 430 BCE, I will be seen in Herodotus's second book of *The Histories*, devoted to Africa. Herodotus will speak of me as a mythological tree that gives the Lotus fruit. The *Lotophagi* will be described as a Libyan tribe and their country as in the Libyan district bordering on the Syrtes, either of two shallow sandy gulfs on the coast of Libya, proverbially dangerous to shipping. When Odysseus will reach the country of the Lotophagoi, many of his sailors after eating the lotus will lose all wish to return home. The Lotus will be said to constitute the only food of the natives, who will also be believed to make a wine of my fruits:

There is a cape that protects into the sea from the land of the Gindanes, and there dwell the Lotophagi, who live solely from the enjoyment of the lotus fruit. The fruit of the lotus is about as big as a mastic berry and in sweetness is like the fruit of the palm tree. The Lotophagi also make wine of this fruit.²

And those who will write about Herodotus will offer information about my fruits:

Herodotus is precise in describing the lotus, because of its legendary fame in Homer as causing forgetfulness of home and family; Polybius describes it even more fully. It is a species of thorn tree, the jujube (*Ziziphus vulgaris*) of the genus *Rhamnescea*, to which the English buckthorn belongs, with a fruit like a plum

in size and shape, which is eaten, especially when dried. The Egyptian lotus is quite distinct [...] A sort of wine is still made from the fruit.³

In Theophrastus's *Enquiry into Plants* or *Historia Plantarum* (Greek: Περὶ φυτῶν ἱστορία, *Peri phyton historia*), I will be listed as an Indian plant. Theophrastus (371–287 BCE) will be a Greek native of Eresós in Lesbos, the successor to Aristotle in the Peripatetic school and will be considered being the 'father of botany' for his works on plants. Theophrastus will not know my name and will describe me by comparing me to the Cornelian cherry tree. From the fourth century BCE, I will become more widely known in the Greek world, thanks to the soldiers serving Alexander the Great (356–223 BCE) and the scientists who will accompany them in their adventure to India (327–225 BCE). But the Greeks will have a word that will become my name, and it will refer to several different plants, based in part on Herodotus's assertion, and will include species of *Trifolium*, Melilot or *Trigonella*; the *Lotus corniculatus*; the fellbloom or *Medicago arborea*; the sweet persimmon fruit of the date-plum *Diospyros lotus*; a water-lily, either *Nymphaea lotus*, *Nymphaea caerulea* or *Nymphaea stellata*; the blue water-lily of the Nile, *Nymphaea caerulea*, also known as the blue lotus; the nettle-tree (*Celtis australis*) and *Zizufos*, that will be taken to be the plant meant in the *Odyssey*.

In Latin literature at the turn of the first century BCE/CE, I will first appear as *Ziziphus*. This name will be believed to derive from the Persian name *Zizifum* or *Zizafun*, and the very name *Zizufos* in Greek is of unknown etymology. Its Latin adaptation *Ziziphus* will not provide any clear indication on my origins: I am without origins or destination. For Pliny (23/24–79) who will write about me as well, I will be an exotic tree who has only 'recently arrived to Italy'. He will explain that I will have been introduced to Italy by Sextus Papinius, the consul during Pliny's life, and that I will have been brought from Syria in, the year of Augustus's death, in 14 CE. Pliny will tell the world I will be also called *Cappodocia*, a plant from central Asia Minor.

Twenty-one thousand months later, I will be named again. Carl Linnaeus (1707–78), a Swedish naturalist contends that I am really *Rhamnus ziziphus*, when he will write *Species Plantarum* in 1753. A little later, in 1768, Philip Miller (1691–1771), an English botanist of Scottish descent, will conclude I am sufficiently distinct from *Rhamnus* to become a new genus with a new name. He will name me *Ziziphus jujuba* Mill, using Linnaeus's species name for my genus and *jujuba* for my byname, as in the Western part of the world I will be called commonly the 'Wild Jujube'. And now I have two names, as my peers do, and just as humans have taken to do for some time. A little later the French botanist Bernard de Jussieu (1699–1777) will write about me again but spelling my genus name *Zizyphus* using a single letter different, by accident. And in 1882 the German

botanist Hermann Karsten (1817–1908) will give me a name of his own—I will become the majestic *Ziziphus zizyphus* (L.) H. Karst.

In the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries, there will be scientific quarrels about my identity and naming as scientists will constantly discover new variations of mine and will invent new bynames for my family members—epithets describing where they will have found us, whom we will make them think of or in which shades we will appear to them. The classification invented by Pierre Magnol will have been thought up before the appearance of Charles Darwin's (1809–1882) theory of evolution and will be built around the certainty of the fixity of species. Consecutively scientists will have to proceed in readjustments—a constant ballet of the naming and renaming of my kin that will draw a portrait of these scientists' time and their world. They will identify my presence all over the surface of the planet and call me *Ziziphus saporifer*, *Ziziphus sororia*, *Ziziphus spinosa*, *Ziziphus abyssinica*, *Ziziphus sinensis*, *Ziziphus lucidus*, *Ziziphus rotundifolia*, *Ziziphus microphylla*, *Ziziphus paliurus*, *Ziziphus amphibia*, *Ziziphus umbrellatus*, *Ziziphus insularis*, *Ziziphus xylopyrus*, *Ziziphus mucronata*, *Ziziphus oenophila*, *Ziziphus spina Christi*, *Ziziphus jujuba* and *Ziziphus zizyphus*—some among many other Latin denominations that will specify my variations. *Ziziphus zizyphus* will be a name creating controversy. It will be rejected by scientists of the beginning of the twenty-first century, during the International Botanical Congress in Melbourne, Australia, in 2011. They will take the decision that *Ziziphus zizyphus* should be considered being a tautonym—a scientific name of a species in which both parts of the name have the same spelling, such as *Rattus rattus*. The then current rule for botanical nomenclature will explicitly prohibit tautonyms, and this rule will be applied retroactively. Only some years later, however, in 2019, the then appearing edition of the International Code of Nomenclature for algae, fungi and plants will stipulate that instances that repeat the genus name with a slight modification, such as *Ziziphus zizyphus*, had been contentious but will be in accord with the new Code of Nomenclature once more.

Across the other side of the world, I will be known differently. In China, they will take me and transform me into the most wondrous formulas. I will appear there as *Da Zao* (Chinese: 枣), 'the red date', for many thousands of years, over a thousand years before Pliny. Around 200 CE, I will be mentioned as *Sheizaf* (Hebrew: שֵׁיזַף הַיְשׁוּי) and as *Rimin* (Hebrew: רִימִין) in the part of the Talmud called *Mishnah*, a written collection of the Jewish oral traditions authored by Rabbi Yehudah ha-Nasi (135–217) originally from Lower Galilee. In the Christian lands, I will be known as 'the Christ's thorn', and be considered as the very tree from which Jesus's own crown of thorns will be made. In the Arab world, I will be called *Sidar*, *Sidr*, *Sing*, *Sidrah* and *Sidrat al-Muntaha* (Arabic: بَسْدَرَة المُنْتَهَى): the 'utmost extremity or the very end of something or boundary'. My name will be synonymous with the many Arabic words for 'end'.

From Alexandria to Carthage

The memory of Djerba being a place where the *Lōtophagoi* lived will be still vivid within the twentieth century. A film will be made where the crew want to find "the otherworldly atmosphere of the Land of the Lotus-Eaters."¹¹ Those in China will imagine I am a native of their lands because they have used me in medicine for so very long, in fact some 2,500 years. In the Arab world, I will grow in the Jordan Valley, in Israel around Jerusalem, all along the coastal plain. My cousins will last and their longevity be a source of amazement; in Ayn Husb in Palestine, they will age gracefully and live for some 800 years.

In Africa, I will be known as a fruit tree to be found far and wide, in both the arid and semi-arid areas, whether west, east or south of Africa. In sub-Saharan Africa, I will be preserved in farmlands because of my nourishing fruit; I can act as a barrier to protect other plants and vegetation during the dry season. Their farmers will cherish me as I have strong, agile roots that can fetch water from a great depth under the earth and withstand extreme temperatures. They will name me a 'pioneer species' in preventing all of these lands becoming vast deserts. In Egypt, I will be already known when the Pharaohs live and humans will eat my fruits, their physicians will turn me into medicines and their carpenters build with me. My fruits will be made into bread by Egyptian farmers for many centuries, until the beginning of the twentieth century.

Writers will know me. One such will say this of me:

Whether it originated in China or Syria is not clear, but it is cultivated for its fruits right across this range: in Japan, China, Afghanistan, Iran and westwards to the Mediterranean region. And so many will describe the plant as a set of thorny shrubs for which no one really remembers their place of origin. It will occur at desert oases all along the Hadhramaut region of Yemen to Damascus in Syria, across the Silk Road from Baghdad to Samarkand to Canton in China and across the Western spice route from Alexandria to Carthage and Fez. It will be found in Tucson, San Diego and Mexicali. Its fruits will have been carried by camel or horse across the deserts to be planted wherever the salty soil was wet enough to embrace it. This process will have occurred for so long that no one will discern where its natal ground is located.⁵

Life's Rich Pageant

In the Arabic world and India, their stories will centre on me. The Bedouin, Druze and Arab peoples will shape tales that I am a tree protected by benevolent spirits or dead saints. They will believe I have supernatural powers whether it is blood instead

of water flowing in my 'veins', that I make a sound if I am cut, or that I am the abode of a saint's spirit. In Pakistan, in the Himalaya and Karakoram regions, they will say the power of my scent can make two teenagers fall in love. Their men will take a stem of my sweet-smelling flowers with them to court their women. I will be recorded by Muslim pilgrims generation after generation. It will be reported that pilgrims will see me in the mosque containing Muhammad's tomb in Medina and in a garden dedicated to Muhammad's daughter Fatimah. It will be said that my fruit will be sold to pilgrims, and my leaves used for washing dead bodies. By the eighth century, when the Islamic empire will spread, I will be praised in the Koran where it will say:

¹⁰ So did Allah convey the inspiration to His Servant what He (meant) to convey.

¹¹ The heart in no way falsified that which he saw.

¹² Will ye then dispute with him concerning what he saw?

¹³ For indeed he saw him [Gabriel] at a second descent,

¹⁴ Near the Lote-tree beyond which none may pass:

¹⁵ Near it is the Garden of Abode.

¹⁶ Behold, the Lote-tree was shrouded (in mystery unspeakable!)

¹⁷ (His) sight never swerved, nor did it go wrong!

¹⁸ For truly did he see, of the Signs of his Lord, the Greatest!⁶

This passage of the Koran will be commented by Abd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī (Arabic: عبد الرزاق القاشاني), a Medieval Sufi leader (d.1329) who will say of me:

The Sidrat al-Muntahā (Arabic: سِدْرَةُ الْمُنْتَهَى [lit. Lote-Tree of the Utmost Farthest Boundary] is said to signify the greatest intermediate realm at which all knowledge and activity terminates. It is said to be the last of the named spiritual ranks without superior.⁷

And the British-Indian scholar Abdullah Yusuf Ali (1872–1953) will comment:

[this tree] marked the bounds of heavenly knowledge as revealed to men, beyond which neither Angels nor men could pass.⁸

I will appear in the Koran as an emblem of revelation of knowledge, perseverance and nourishment; I will have the reputation of growing in the harshest environments. They will believe my roots may be bound in the soil of this world but my branches reach upward towards perfection. The Persian poet Saadi (Abū-Muhammad Muslih al-Dīn bin Abdallāh Shīrāzī; Arabic: أبو محمد مصطفي بن أبي عبد الله شيرازي) will eternalize me in the famous *Bustan* (c. 1257), a book of poems

written in 1257, where I will be praised in the chapter 'Isra and Mi'raj and the Lote-tree'. And in the Christian world, as jujube, my branches will be platted as a crown for Jesus to suffer; three gospels will name me and tell of how Romans twisted me to torture him:

And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head.⁹

Many will see me in pictures, where I adorn his head thus. My cousins will become relics, venerated by pilgrims who believe my wood touched his head. Followers will write:

With regard to the origin and character of the thorns, both tradition and existing remains suggest that they must have come from the bush botanically known as *Ziziphus spina-christi*, more popularly, the jujube tree. This reaches the height of fifteen or twenty feet and is found growing in abundance by the way-side around Jerusalem [now preserved in] Capella della Spina at Pisa, as well as that at in Triet.¹⁰

The Europeans will have artists who will show me in their imaginings, again and again, all across the continent. The painter who will be called Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472-1553) will obsessively picture me, over and over, showing me as a crown of seven or eight branches. In the city of Venice, I will be seen in the *Scuola Grande di San Rocco*, on the ceilings, where light will radiate from within me. The Greek painter Doménikos Theotokópoulos (1541-1614), better known as 'El Greco', will show my green leaves still sticking in a crown made of three woven branches. The Flemish painter Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) will show me lying neglectfully in a bowl placed on the ground, bathing partly in a liquid, most likely blood. The Dutchman Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn (1606-1669) will show me atop Jesus's head. And the Spaniard Diego Rodriguez de Silva y Velázquez (1599-1660) will paint me as a crown woven out of four branches, where each thorn is clear. In the monuments, museums and churches of almost every city on the planet, I will be there.

Better Living through Chemistry

I will be transformed, again and again. For some, I will be a source of afflictions. For others, I will aid them. My family will be treasured kin and despised pests, both honoured and subject to inventive, bearers of medicine and food, as well as carriers of disease. They will say I have all manner of qualities that can aid

humankind. That I am antibacterial. Or antifungal. That I am an antioxidant. That I can become anti-hyperglycemic. Or that I can be anti-nociceptive. Others still will believe I can be an anticonvulsant, or even an antidepressant, as though I was nature herself in her entirety in one place. There will be no limits to the experiments with my matter and my fruits.

To humans, the fragrance of my flowers will be experienced as obsessive and obnoxious (Fig. 7.2). In the high mountains of Kyrgyzstan in Central Asia, men will ornate their hats with my blooms in order to cloud the consciousness of women they want to conquer thus. The humans will boil and ferment me to assuage their anxiety. But they will find that I make them forget, and that they will forget that they have forgotten. I will offer them amnesia and they will take it, gladly or unwittingly. In traditional Chinese medicine, I will be classified within 'The Five Fruits' that 'provide support' along with the peach, plum, *Prunus mume* and apricot. I will be known for numerous benefits:

1. enhancing cellular communication;
2. combating cellular damage from free radicals;
3. easing sore throats;
4. nourishing the blood;
5. aiding in digestion;
6. supporting liver and spleen function;
7. detoxifying the body;
8. calming the mind;
9. moderating nervousness;
10. helping to overcome fatigue and weakness;
11. speeding recovery from illness;
12. inhibiting gastrointestinal infections;
13. soothing the stomach;
14. providing energy;
15. enhancing metabolism;
16. supporting cardiovascular health;
17. strengthening blood vessels;
18. providing relief from the heat;
19. boosting libido;
20. destroying parasites in the intestinal tract;
21. suppressing appetite;
22. supporting heart, lung and kidney health;
23. enhancing the immune system;
24. slowing the effects of premature aging;
25. inducing apoptosis in skin cancer cells;

26. impeding tumour growth;
27. assisting weight loss;
28. counting effects of poison;
29. remedying boils and sores;
30. relieving bronchitis;
31. reducing fevers;
32. acting as a diuretic;
33. helping in extracting energy from food;
34. alleviating allergies;
35. facilitating sleep.

Pansexuality

In time, my first name will have more than eighty second names, all of which will name spiny shrubs and small trees. And they will all live throughout in the warmer and subtropical regions of this world. Some will say my leaves will grow a pair of stipules at their base which will turn into hard thorns, with one straight and the other hooked. They will say that my zigzag branches will be very dense and that my leaf will be dentate and ovate. Time will be my friend: when I will live in a fine home, I will live a long, long life, and become great, so that some of my cousins will be 30 feet tall like the humans' houses. How our trunks will be broad and our crowns so large! Some of us will be majestic. My fruit will be eaten, and sweet to the taste, like an apple or a date. It will be yellow-brown, red or black, globular or oblong, and small. These fruits will bloom through the spring, summer and into autumn. My flowers will be small; indeed, they will be inconspicuous. They will be of both sexes at once and in a green-yellow colour. I will secrete lots of nectar and draw forth many, many insects, and especially honey bees who will feast on it.

My flower, as I say, will be male and female. My parts will ripen alternatively, male then female then male again, to pollinate, sometimes just with the help of the wind. Two of my cousins will meet in Israel. One is *Ziziphus spina Christi*, who may be tropical or Sudanese and loves warmer, humid places, and who may have arrived in Israel from the south. And the other is *Ziziphus lotus*, more likely from the north. It is said that this one of us will 'deliberate' whether to shed leaves in winter. We will change. New variants of me will be found all the time, like *Ziziphus odysseus*, located in Mali in the year 2018. It will have densely pubescent leaves and floral buds. And many of us will never be seen by human eye and never be named, existing for some only for a tiny moment of earth's history. We

will self-domesticate when we relocate. We will adapt. We will live happily in those areas that humans disturb and which fires and floods upset.

At some point, my family will have domesticated humans, who will provide another means to disperse our seeds. We will have no hostility to warmth or to dry climates. We will survive; we will prosper. When the Earth warms again, we will draw water from deep underground. In the heat we will still feed on the sun's rays greedily. We will be one of the few that can live on slopes with nothing on them.

I, post-specimen

I am using the term 'species' to name myself; but this will be a part of your language, not mine. This word will not appear written on any tree or animal. I will have been born 350,000 years ago and will have no need for this word. Life will always continue to be unstable. I will need to be versatile, to be resourceful, to be flexible. I will entangle with unexpected companions, maybe replace them and relocate. I will partner with no starting point and will remain in contact zones that are ubiquitous. I will undergo continuous change. Becoming-with or not becoming in a constant come and go will be and will always be the name of the game. Oh, I will have slept around, I readily admit it: My children will be many.

In the deepness of time, from the distance of my own birth, I will come to think of myself as a 'post-specimen', as a continuity, such as fish and human, that will appear as one vast ageing organism: a morphing, a diversification, or an impoverishment. But a survival, at least for me; but for others ...

I, superspecies

Cycles come and go. Some are brutal, others gentle. There will be talk of another mass extinction, a sixth, after the mass extinctions in those long-gone times that will be named the Ordovician, Devonian, Permian, Triassic and Cretaceous. Each will require some time for biotic recovery afterwards. Perhaps five to ten million years: not too long. This geological process will, in the end, always be relatively rapid. Even though recovery will not be able to begin until after the causes of the extinction will have gone.

Before my birth, the Ordovician and Devonian extinctions came and went. The first of these was a horrifying time. Four-fifths of all diversity in plants and animals—gone. The second, worse. The third as bad. How bad? Some 95 per cent of the plants and animals: all dead. In my lifetime, it has been less brutal. The

fourth, the Triassic, was maybe 208 million years ago. I am not counting. The fifth, the Permian, lost the dinosaurs and others.

And now. Some will say that half of all living organisms may disappear in a century—or maybe even half a century. Just desert across much of the planet, and the heat—too much to bear. Some will survive—of course. The most versatile, or the most aggressive, will get through. The most prolific and nomadic, those of us ready to travel: we will be fine. Those who become omnipresent will be named as a superspecies. Those who can counter the extremities they will face will have some things in common. We will need to reproduce quickly; we will need to disperse widely, when given a chance; we will need to master different habitats, contrasting conditions, and take hold in strange places. We superspecies will be the generalists rather than the specialists: the opportunists, if you will. Some will say we will become plagues on the land. They will call us monopolists, exploiting the opportunity to expand when others fail. We will replace them; we will relocate. I will then have accomplished what I will have begun to dedicate myself to, some ten thousand years earlier. This is making each distinctive place on earth more like each other. Through constant change, through permanent diversification and adaptation, I will cover all parts of the earth. My roots will have penetrated every millimetre of earth; my genes will be found in every cellular organism.

Living in the Homogocene

They will think this time as one of homogeneity. It will be a time following extinctions, genocides and exterminations; if all of this diversity is gone, they will name it the Homogocene. Forests and most of my kin will have disappeared. When large quantities of my fruits ferment they will create a whole geological layer. My residues will overlay without being decomposed first, but then, due to its massive accumulation of its organic compounds and other soluble constituents, will create an entire 'biomantle'. This 'biomantle' of compost will uniformly cover the terrestrial earth. My compost will irrigate the water and the plants that will grow on it with my chemical compositions. They will accumulate and keep accumulating in the soil during this time. They will be impregnated by my mass expansion.

This era will also be known as the Amnesic, due to intense and important layering of my genetics and pharmaceutical qualities in the earth's soil. Fertile ground will be soaked by my soothing and calming medical quality. Due to the consumption of plants growing on this ground, the few highly aggressive superspecies of mammals, notably humans, rats and cats, that will have survived the latest mass extinction, will undergo an alteration of character. The extreme concentration of

my agents in water and biomass, and therefore in all their food, will slowly create brain alterations. My alkaloids will actively block hormonal stress production in mammals' brains. Many of the last living organisms will have then similar qualities and traits. Amnesia and memory loss will spread throughout all vertebrates. Only plants—getting first of all nurtured by the sun, will remember; and a selection of insects, spiders, fungi, viruses and bacteria fetching their food from minerals or deep enough underground. They will become my closest companions. For those, I will be the way, the road, the matter to be overcome. But this will not be the end. It will just be a repeat point. A point within a long, violent cycle—one following which even I will have forgotten everything. As far back as I will remember ...



FIGURE 7.1. *Ziziphus zizyphus*, plant sample, collected on 10 July 2017, Carré de systématique, Jardin de Plantes in Montpellier, collection Caroline Loup and Nadia Lichtig N°645, Botanical Collection of the University of Montpellier, France. Courtesy of Nadia Lichtig.

FIGURE 7.2. Hand blown and hermetically sealed glass spheres containing *Ziziphus zizyphus* fragrance extract. The liquid filled glass spheres are optically distorting the surface on which they are placed, a silkscreen print on fabric. Part of the artwork *Parfum d'Oubli* (Perfume of Forgetting), in: *A Scientific Encounter: On Intersubjectivity* curated by Alistair Robinson, University of Montpellier, 2017. Courtesy of Nadia Lichtig.

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The text ... *as far back as I will remember* is part of a corpus of artworks across media that is questioning the construction of knowledge.

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Poetry and the Pathology Museum: A Model of Difference

Christy Ducker

(with photographs by Phyllis Christopher)

Abstract

The Wohl Pathology Collection, Edinburgh, houses one of the largest collections of pathological anatomy in the world. Its human remains offer an index of catastrophe but also embody redemptive possibility. This chapter explores that possibility, in the encounter between historical fragments and my practice as poet and essayist.

Crucial throughout is the volatile nature of the fragment: the Wohl Collection operates as an archival space, full of objects which weigh something beyond themselves. These exhibits unsettle the orthodoxies of museum encounter and linguistic response. As Linda Nochlin suggests, any general theory of the fragment must be established on 'a model of difference': To this end, my chapter destabilizes the conventional boundaries between critical and creative. It adopts a fragmentary form and becomes an aggregate of poetry, prose and photography. As a result, the chapter enacts my mode of encounter with the museum. Its form suggests frictions between past and present, death and life, absence and presence. This invites the reader to enter into a process of meaning-making, by opening up a negotiation of textual fragments. My writing offers an interactional experience, reflective of an encounter with the Wohl Collection itself: neither the exhibits nor any writing about them can be immured.

I suggest here that creative practice can function formatively and generate new ways of encountering the world. Key to this are 'play', the use of imagery and juxtapositions which shock the reader into seeing anew. In the museum, there is play between the living and the dead: the exhibits become entangled with our contemporary sociopolitical context. Such play is mirrored in my writing, in the entanglement of different forms and in the use of metaphor to convey the 'dual vision' of an embodied response.

The Wohl exhibits offer an immediate and uncomfortable dialogue with the past. This chapter and its poems provide a site for how that past is encountered, rather than offering an interpretation. Taking a creative critical approach, I offer new ways of modelling meaning, knowledge and social relations: my discursive momentum is regenerative; my use of metaphor