Vignettes: The Emerging Writers’ Festival Podcast

Season 1, Episode 1, ‘Grain’

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| Ruby-Rose Pivet-Marsh: | Welcome to *Vignettes*: *The Emerging Writers Festival Podcast*. My name is Ruby and I’m the Artistic Director at EWF. I am coming to you from the land of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation.  With live events not really being a thing in 2020, we really wanted to have a space where writers could share their work with our audience - kind of like they would at a live reading.  So that’s what we’ve decided to do with *Vignettes*. In each episode, we’ll invite a few writers to share some new work, guided by a loose, nature-based theme.  Our first season is titled ‘Summer’, with five fresh episodes coming to you throughout November and December as we head into warmer weather.  For this first episode, we asked Philip Marri Winzer and Victoria Alondra to respond to the theme of ‘Grain’. To us, ‘grain’ speaks to the smallness of something at its beginning, which is why it felt like a perfect opener for this new podcast. But it’s also sustenance, building, the fibres of being and, of course, going *against* the grain.  We hope you enjoy hearing from these two spectacular artists. Now, to get us started – here’s Philip Marri Winzer. |
| Philip Marri Winzer: | Yaamagara ngindaniir, yadja Marrii, Ngarabul Wirrayaraay. Hello everyone, my name is Philip Marrii, and I am a Ngarabul and Wirrayaraay Murri from so-called New England. I am an Aboriginal writer and storyteller and general troublemaker, and I'm passionate about protecting country, reviving language and culture, and bringing our people's stories to life.  Today I'm recording this piece from Ngurrambaa, which means homeland in our language, and is the name I've given a small piece of Ngarabul Ngurrambaa I take care of. Thanks to the generosity of hundreds of people, I was able to buy this beautiful property back earlier this year. Right now I'm sitting by my campfire, the moon is bright overhead, and I can hear the occasional night bird in the gum trees and wallabies shuffling around in the ferns by the pond. Behind me is a big shed I'm working to turn into a barn with communal sleeping, cooking and living spaces to turn Ngurrambaa into a space for resistance, recovery and cultural revival.  Today for Vignettes by EWF, I'm going to be reading my piece Scorched Earth. If you want to read more of my writing, you can find me on Twitter @pmarrii or on Instagram @hotchilliphilly  \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*  **Scorched Earth reading:** Paradise. When white eyes took in the sight of our ngurrambaa for the first time, paradise was how they described it: a paradise that sustained our lives for a thousand generations. A paradise painstakingly made and faithfully maintained by gentle burning for lush green withaan, by gunii turning soil to plant and dig milaan, by our ancestors learning country’s song.  But then the invaders came, and they could only see our paradise through colonisers’ eyes. Where we grew guluu to bake the world’s first bread, they saw a shortcut to keep sheep and cattle fed. Their eyes lit up with greed at the sight of our clean rivers and creeks, the sacred waters that hold our identity, our ceremony, our soul. Dreaming paths forged along sacred waters, desecrated by routes that lead stock to slaughter.  And so began two centuries of violence, fuelled by the white man’s genocidal desire to silence country’s cries, to suck it dry and turn our paradise into something they could recognise. A campaign of scorched earth, determined to force our people to our knees, but without the foresight to see how it would hurt their children and their children’s children.  The first land thieves showed no embarrassment about their actions, freely bragging that they burnt our people’s traps, smashed maramban and barrgan in calculated attacks. As our people fled, they burnt the ngurra where our children laid their heads to rest. They built fences and gates, to lock the stock in and the blacks out. Their foreign beasts with hard feet, voracious appetites never satisfied, destroyed the land and water upon which we relied.  Our warriors, cut off from every means to feed their families, speared the thieves’ cattle and sheep for food to eat. Their efforts at self defence were met with brutal retaliation, the life of a sheep justification for the attempted eradication of our entire nation. Our food system’s decimation laid the foundation for what came next: poisoned flour left hundreds dead.  These men were not shy about their involvement in genocide: “We were doing the work of the government, dispersing the blacks”, they proudly proclaimed. Their names survive in a nation whose foundation is genocide - as streets, as towns, as bridges, as rivers - yet the names of their victims are lost to history forever.  It may seem like ancient history, but make no mistake, the scorched earth campaign that they began continues today. Coal mines desecrate ancient song lines. Fracking drills, like spears, pierce the heart of our mother. Irrigators drain our waterways, country’s arteries and veins, and they run dry as global temperatures rise. Droughts like our ancestors never knew turn into fires that burn everything in their path. Country is littered with millions of bodies, starved and burnt, of our non-human family. But still the colonisers refuse to learn: when country suffers, we all suffer. And so, with ruthless efficiency they incinerate all that surrounds them, fantasising of an escape to a distant place that exists only in their imaginations.  As the violence and destruction that have dominated this landscape since colonisation rage on, I find hope for its end in a prophecy, one hundred and thirty years old: “The droughts will not end until all the sheep die, and the whitefellas leave this country. Then, as long ago, blackfulla country will have plenty.” |
| Ruby-Rose Pivet-Marsh: | Thank you so much, Phil!  Next up, we’re going to hear from Victoria Alondra. |
| Victoria Alondra: | *Cualli Tonalli.* My name is Victoria Alondra. I come from Anáhuac also known as Mexico. I have lived there for a short amount of time before my family and I were forced to move to Canada as refugees. I spent a lot of my time growing up in Canada and I've been in so-called Australia for seven years. I usually live on Arrernte country – sovereignty was never ceded there. But I'm recording this from Pitjantjatjara Anangu country where sovereignty also was never ceded.   I’m currently an essential worker, and I get to exist in a space that is Covid-free – our town doesn't have any Covid, we don’t have any cases, so life is sort of operating as normal, which is such a privilege and I'm very grateful and I send my love and solidarity to everyone out there who isn’t experiencing those circumstances because it’s really hard, particularly people who are in the big cities and lockdowns across the world.  My recording today is about maize, mostly. Maize is a grain that’s very sacred to us as people from so-called Central and South America. It is the foundation of who we are as people. It’s a food and it’s a staple food but also we dedicate so much of our creation stories to this plant, and it is a really sacred one to us.  So, *Tlazocamati*. I hope you enjoy this poem.  The language you heard me speak in today is not Spanish but Nahuatl, where my roots are from. I’m still working to learn my language as we’ve been colonised for a very long time but there are many people who are amazing and reclaiming it and offering classes and it’s been such a privilege to me as someone who didn’t grow up around language to have that.  So that’s a little about me. I hope you enjoy this poem.  **Maize:** This heart of mine  Processed like maize with lime  Nixtamalization  The foundation of our civilisation  Food sovereignty is key to liberation  The stagnation of our identity reduced now only to blood relation  Land becomes secondary to so many of us through indoctrination  This confrontation of the psyche  A fractured vibration  A causation of colonised affirmations  Spiritual sedation  I once did not understand why plants were worshipped  Disconnected from my Self  God is a grain  Found in the small things  Our colonisers taught us to worship invisible men  Instead of the women who made miracles over the comal  God is a woman's hands  Held together by prayer for the land  Surviving demand after demand and violent commands  The burdens that they withstand  Akin to the motherland that understands there is no gender  Patriarchy expands the wasteland of the damned  Lead by blind self-proclaimed visionaries with no regard for body or land  God is a grain  Nourished by rain  But the same water that cleanses can drown  Tlaloc  Home is complex  Connection to the land fractured when you grow up in the projects  Diaspora leaves the spirit perplexed  ID checks, treated as numbers and subjects  White mentality respects only the good immigrant  Assimilation was imminent  Young and ignorant  I too steeped my spirit in a proud disconnect  I prayed to their God  Found nothing  I ask my country  Why we assimilate into erasure  Mestizo mirage  Thirsty for illusions  Striving to be the image of those who tried to kill us  We honour only half truths of ourselves  Grasp onto what's left after 501 years  Relatives handed me rosaries and bibles  False idols  I rejected this with instinct they called tribal  Atheist after my sister died  I tried to find meaning in everything but myself  Went everywhere only to find my answers by the riverside  By the ocean at low tide  By the desert countryside  Between the archway of my sides  The next time I am asked to pray  I will tell them  My skin's curves and marks are scripture and blessing  My braids more holy than rosaries  My tongue speaks miracles when Nahuatl leaves it  This body needs no reminder that it is sacred  And I need no building to tell me how to worship myself  I pray to no god that comes through bullets  Through the broken flesh and blood of my people  Continuing today  Monsanto, Bayer  God is a grain  Corrupted by chemical castration  Seeds with one life only  Poison fields  Promises of harvest  Sweet nothings  Mass production  Sugar coated lies  Programmed consumption  Artificially produced dysfunction  Based in the destruction of our lands  The seduction of our people  There is one species of maize for every language in Anahuac  Appearing and disappearing as our languages are lost and revived  I wonder what colour I will rise  When my ancestors tongue returns to me  God is maize  The foundation of who we are as people  A sacred plant for sacred bodies  So powerful they had to dominate with their religions  And they could still not explain or contain our brilliance  God is a grain  Hope after broken chains and bloodstains  Liberation from poison and pain  Critique of the colonised mundane  The sound of Coltrane in the rain  The memory of our ancestors engrained in our spirit and brain  What we regain when we remember  And hold holy  The land and our relations |
| Ruby-Rose Pivet-Marsh: | That was Victoria Alondra and before [her], Philip Marri Winzer.  Thank you so much for listening to *Vignettes: The EWF Podcast*. If you enjoyed this episode, please drop us a review, recommend us to your friends and hit ‘subscribe’. And of course – stick with us as we bring you a soft, summery vibe with more readings over the next few weeks! Maybe you’ll even find yourself inspired enough to write to the themes we present in each episode and to share your work with us on social media.  Before we go – applications for EWF 2021 are now open! If you’d like a bit of insight into what we’re looking for with our Open Artist Call Out, you can watch our Artist Information Session at emergingwritersfestival.org.au or on our YouTube channel. We can’t wait to read your wonderful applications for the 2021 festival!  This podcast was produced by EWF Program Coordinator Millie Baylis. Our audio producer is Jon Tjhia, and our theme music was created by Thu Care. You can find out more about the team behind this podcast and the artists featured in this episode on the EWF website.  This podcast was created and edited on the lands of the Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation. We acknowledge that First Nations peoples are the first storytellers of this land, and that their sovereignty has never been ceded. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and to the Elders of the lands this podcast reaches. It always was, always will be, Aboriginal land. |