**Vignettes: EWF Audio Readings Podcast**

*Season 2, Episode 1: Fungi*

Transcript:

**Ruby-Rose Pivet-Marsh:**

Hi there!

Welcome back to Vignettes, a podcast by the Emerging Writers’ Festival. My name is Ruby and I’m the Artistic Director at EWF. I’m coming to you from the land of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation.

Through season one, we loved bringing readings directly to you from some of our favourite writers. And we’re excited to do it again with Season Two. This time around, we’ll have five new episodes to carry you through leafy Autumn.

For this first episode, we asked Nardi Simpson and Aïsha Trambas to respond to the theme of *Fungi.*

Fungi are some of the largest (and some of the most microscopic) living organisms on Earth. The world wouldn’t work without them. So we asked three writers to reflect on fungi - the way they connect, live and give life - and the way they organise and sustain themselves in order to sustain others. We’re so excited to share these reflections of connection, community and weaving with you – starting with Nardi Simpson.

**Nardi Simpson:**

My name is Nardi Simpson, a Yuwuaakaraywoman from north-west New South Wales. I’m sitting in my home in Petersham, a stone’s throw away from Petersham train station, but also in the branches and treetops of a second floor unit with two big sydney Blue Gums out the front of our unit. The poem I’m about to read is called Dirt. I wrote it in response to the invitation to contribute but also in the knowledge that my father and his family who were born on the banks of the river used to eat dirt and I wondered what that was like and what that was for and what that did from someone from that place. So anyway, here it is.

**Dirt**

I eat dirt

It tastes like claypan

And agate and saltbush and sand

And the speed of gailmingaa’s legs.

Momentum is stalled

So, I become it.

I eat dirt

It tastes like drought

And carcass and burrs and sweat

And the lines of baawaangaa’s canvas.

Composition is disrupted.

So, I become it.

I eat dirt

It tastes like cloud

And sunrise and sinew and heartbeat

And the cry of nhanuwaaydji’s first breath.

Snot flows

So, I become it.

I eat dirt

It smells like meat

And flood and laughter and soaring birds

And the panic of dhaadhaa’s final breath.

Memory dissolves

So, I become it.

I eat dirt

It tastes like sap

And fights and thought and sleep.

And miyay’s crippling shame

Dignity retreats

So, I become it.

I eat dirt

It tastes like bark

And lizards and yams and frost

And birray’s broadening profile.

Prejudice fizzes

So, I become it.

I eat dirt

It tastes like charcoal

And spiders and leaving and skins

And the sting of wambanhiiya’s balled fist.

Hurt radiates

So, I become it.

I eat dirt.

It tastes like fences.

I eat dirt

It tastes like blood

And spears and wrinkles and teeth

And hatred in dhagaan’s eyes.

Tears coagulate

So, I become them.

I eat dirt

It smells like rain

And stones and shells and string bags

And the moons of baawaa’s nails.

I lick her skin.

So, to become it.

I eat dirt

It tastes like stars

And paddocks and clods and ant beds

And the clapping of walgan’s hands.

Rhythms pulsate

So, I become it.

I eat dirt

It tastes like feathers

And flowers and fruit and mud

And the slow fading of garruu’s worth.

Ambition declines

So, I become it.

I eat dirt.

It tastes like healing

And middens and smoke and song

And disremembered words of baagii’s tongue.

Silence suffocates

So, I become it.

I eat dirt

It tastes like giving

And bones and tears and afterbirth

And the flaked skin of a dhaadhaa’s heels.

I swallow his tracks

And become it.

I eat dirt

It tastes like home.

*YUWAALARAAY GLOSSARY*

galimingaa (YR, YY, GR) grandson

bawanngaa (YR, YY) granddaughter

nhanuwaaydji (YR) grandchild, son’s or daughter’s child

dhaadhaa (YR, YY, GR) grandson (daughter’s son)

miyay (YR, YY, GR) daughter (YY)

birray (YR, YY, GR) son (YY)

wambanhiiya (YR, YY) cousin

dhagaan (YR, YY, GR) brother

baawaa (YR, YY, GR) older sister, sister

walgan (YR, YY) aunt (any), aunt (man’s father’s sister)

garruu (YR, YY, GR) uncle (mother’s brother)

dhaadhaa (YR, YY, GR) grandfather

baagii (YR, YY) grandmother (mother’s mother)

**Ruby-Rose Pivet-Marsh:**

Thank you so much, Nardi!

Now we will hear fromAïsha Trambas, who helped pull the threads of this theme together, way back when Vignettes was still a tiny itch of a concept.

**Aïsha Trambas:**

Hi! My name is Aïsha and my work bio says that I’m an emerging Afro-Greek [stutters] arts worker and artist — [laughing] I can’t even say that! — but really I’m just out here existing, okay? I’m really blessed to live on Wurundjeri and Boonwurrung lands near the Maribyrnong River where I’m recording this now, and where sovereignty has never been ceded.

This is a preamble followed by a poem:

‘Net work.’ As an introvert, this word, spoken as a verb, is usually enough to repulse me in any social/pseudo-professional context, like *“let’s network!”*. But the term has become fresh for me, reacquainting with it through learning more about mycelium in the last few months. So, deep in one of 2020’s troughs I stumbled across an article/manifesto/framework written by an ANARKATA Black Anarchist collective in Turtle Island, called *Move like Mycorrhizae: Some Suggestions for Praxis*, and it outlined how this collective of organisers were using the structure and qualities of mycelial networks to inform their liberation work. I had to do a lot of googles and reading to catch up because I didn’t previously understand what mycelium or mycorrhizae are (the vegetative parts of a fungus, as opposed to the fruiting spores that we know as mushrooms, which not all types of fungi even produce, and then the symbiotic relationship between a fungus and a plant). My understanding is that all fungi consist of and rely on their mycelium, and that most plants in the world likewise rely on their mycorrhizal relationships to survive and thrive, and these labyrinthine connections can be enormous. The model of agency and autonomy inseparable from collectivity, and the way this piece unified spiritual and material work was exciting to me, and I even bought this book by a biologist called Entangled Lives to learn more about fungi and their relationships.

I still understand very, very little about biology or mycology.

But I know how on the best days you’ll feel sublimely and intimately connected with everything alive. And on the worst, lying days, so punishingly, incalculably and fictitiously alone.

I know that I’ve been caught softly by some nets. Ensnared in others. That the net that has scooped me up brought me this far still needs a lot of repair. That you can unravel it to see how I was made.

I know that fungi have demonstrated the structure required; the mutual benefit possible, and the persistence of parasites in even the holiest soil.

I know that my mother and her friends took me camping at The Blue Tier as a young child, and that one of them was an artist who was there to trace the clouds and the lichen — which I also *just* learnt are a symbiosis between fungi and algae, a kind of hybrid organism.

I don’t know if he’ll ever hear this, but I remember the way his canvases seemed so enormous as they unfurled flat on the earth for painting. I can smell the fresh and living ground. I thought it was the blue tear as in crying, and I’m still crying over that, because it’s not. And I’m different shades of resentful when white men expose me to Black things of interest. More googles to try and find images of this painter’s lichen studies to look back on, and I stumble across these stunning poems by First Nations elder in lutriwita/Tassie, Pura-lia Meenamatta Jim Everett, published through a collaboration called Meenamatta Water Country Discussion. And in Entangled Lives, the author Merlin Sheldrake references another white man’s recordings of women in a mushroom gathering ceremony in the Central African Republic — which is my father’s country but not his people — and I was astonished because it’s so beyond rare that I would hear anglos refer to the Central African Republic. Even a lot of East, West and South Africans here will look at you sideways as if you literally just made up another name for either of the Congos. But anyway, I’m trynna find the track, which I do and along the way see it recommended a second time online by a British musician Cosmo Sheldrake, which I immediately assume has to be a stage name for mycologist Merlin’s music career, but it’s actually just his bonafide sibling, and I’m thinking Cosmo and Merlin, that’s such a whimsical move as parents. It’s giving me Fairly OddParents/Camelot. I digress. I find the recording and it is unspeakably ethereal and transcendent. Like Pura-lia Meenamatta’s poetry, it holds the divinity of ancestral connection to land.

I know that forests are the first and only true cathedrals, that their floors are embedded with the blackest histories. That the fungi have eaten our dead and their dead and their dead and made them available to life again.

I know that I’m writing this in the dark, as it should be.

NET WORK

Woven, weaving,

Broken, breathing,

Weft and warping,

Sacred.

I am underneath you,

In stillness and silt.

Before you,

After you,

And in you.

I am between you,

Connecting

Your rootscape in folds and frills.

the prayer of this poem is that we could connect,

fuse even,

slice confusion to recognise it only reflects how deeply

and disorderly tangled we became

together

with the temporal

the physical

the unseen.

Net

work:

What is the state of your net?

Does it need some tending to? Its knots and fusion, collective delusions.

Is it large enough to envelop your most expansive joy? And wide enough to embrace your furthest living relative?

Imagine us, ‘fishers of men’,

minus the oppressive indoctrination,

With surplus redemption for all.

What is the state of your net?

Does it require a code to enter?

Is that one written or lived?

the purpose of this poem is to honour the mycellium,

to let them edify me

some people cultivate different plants like mushrooms or monstera siltepicana.

the proposal of this poem is that the mushrooms might cultivate me.

net work:

spore into me as i spore into you.

we’re all propagating something.

send a signal from anywhere and be heard

no such thing as the singular

But what if the underground was singing us together?

We can be a swarming mass or a militant grid.

Plenty of room for polyphony

Can not our steps sound stampedes?

Do not our cries copy a sobbing wind?

Net

work:

No body is expendable,

No body is extricable.

Pass it on:

Scale down to scale up,

Each one reach one.

Work the net it’s worth the work, speaking of

Net work, not net worth.

The purpose of the prayer of this poem is to upraise the underground

from where we came to return

the great loop ourobouros makes

the wide net we will never evade

Where our predecessors lay

Where the criminalised trade

Where freedom armies congregate

Where what’s dead is remade

Who knows the shape of God’s hands?

They are not like any father’s

— huge, calloused, absent or present, violent or tender —

Who’s to say they are not cells.

Net

Work:

Woven, weaving,

Broken, breathing,

Weft and warping,

Sacred.

Spore into me as I spore into you.

We are all propagating something.

**Ruby-Rose Pivet-Marsh:**

That was Aïsha Trambas. Before her, Nardi Simpson.

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 breezy, autumnal 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.

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.