



## INTERTWINED HISTORIES: Plants in their Social Contexts

Edited by Jim Ellis

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# historia plantarum

**hecate prepares instructions  
for demeter and kore in hell**

**THE STORY OF THE LETTER **H**,**  
*or*

**HOW TO DRAW THE LETTER **I****

*a metaphysics,*

**part one**

*notes on*

*anatomy, conception, reproduction and the daughter*

erina harris



**notes:**

This poem is an excerpt from the poetry manuscript

*Persephone's Abecedarium: An Alphabet Play*

*An Eco-poetical Adaptation of the Homeric "Hymn to Demeter"*

**This work builds on** the interpretation of the ancient poem (6<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.E.), already an adaptation of an oral tale, as a proto-feminist mother-daughter narrative. Its anonymous and possibly female author deployed poetic language in a fashion that models an ethos of compassionate interconnectivity among humans and ecological others such as flora and fauna: an early meditation on ecological ethics, I propose.

In the tale, the deity Hecate is the first to inform Demeter (Goddess of Harvest) of her daughter Kore's (Goddess of Grain) abduction to the Underworld, of their immanent separation, and possible individuation.

Hecate was a liminal goddess of crossroads, and a keeper of plant lore - especially plants' healing, poisonous, and metaphysical properties. The *Historia Plantarum* or *Enquiry Into Plants* by Theophrastus (somewhere between 350 and 287 BCE) is among the earliest written accounts of how plants reproduce. It included detailed studies of plant anatomy, individuation, and classifications. Patricia Vieira and Michael Marder report that "Aristotle's student Theophrastus was excluded from the Western canon for the painstaking botanical researches he undertook" ("Writing Phytophilia: Philosophers and Poets as Lovers of Plants").

This is Hecate's later, unpublished version.

This work engages the research of Monica Gagliano and Marva Grimonprez who observe that plants breathe transmissions by sending out a chemical language made up of scented words within their specific, social settings. They establish that plant utterances are both more meaningful as well as more effectively received among kin. Inspiringly, they consider plant communities in terms of overlooked possibilities such as intelligence, agency, and inter-subjectivity.



## 22 intertwined histories plants in their social contexts

### 1

How to draw the letter H:

Three strokes

of a crayon

cross oblivion —

*The Tree. The Drawbridge. The Flower.*

### 2

To draw *The Tree*:

In any place in space and from there, down. A line straight, spining—

from stratosphere or forehead, then descend

to somewhere low her hip, her paper skyline.

To stop at troposphere

where the soil's soiled knee.



3

This is *The Tree*.

In it lives the little Laboratory of the Little

within it, The Littlest

cell too tiny to.

4

Her tiniest cell,

smaller than a doll's doll's doll.

"Here, I shall host a ball!"

5

Until a guest dressed best enters

A room is just a cell

until and when and he – and makes it a party!

And enters her,

and then a room and she and he

Are we.

And doubling, in his image her reflection in his eyes. Makes her two! makes him a dollhouse.



6

The butler blasts the trumpet blastodermic

in a cell

in a cell

and in a room is one and two; are we

Are a making are a party, "Hear mere blastomeres!" he trumpets.

Until, arriving, more – more guests is best.

7

A room within herself – and doubling in the company of the guest.

Amorous, amoral, Morula: she conceives

of guests and rooms –

"More rooms!" "More we!"

And carrying a tray of canapés she strops and trophoblasts about.

That guests might fuse themselves in chatter

of some matter,

or: "A game!"

To play in ones and twos, she sings,

of meetings, gametes singing, gameful. Syngamy –

the singing rooms do buckle, swell, self-echo, and self-

double in their cupboards, replicate to placate: "Make more rooms!"

The singing.



8

The singing, surging, and divergent, differing, invited:

"To the syncytium!"

9

Holding hands, the guests

move along longitudinal ridges.

The guests are building something.

Unfolding,

down a hall along a bannister: to unwrap all the presents,  
ribboned, rudiment, a system, tubes and vesicles, a swirling guest in  
pinafore and fore-brain, to present presents crescentic en masse masses.

In pairs! Pericardial, uncloak a cloacal membrane in the cloak room;  
enter. And there, pass her a tissue where tissue resists,

blocks differentiate to skeletal muscle, not a tussle but a two-step:  
vertebrae and dermis, somites might or ribs, top hats

and masses cubical, alas. At the podium:

the head, there blossom spindle-shaped cells, spinning.

The organs pinking ring out for the choir. The choir is learning  
ectoderm of chorion, in the great room, song-room, a cavity  
amniotic. The conductor, is her uncle. Uncle peduncle

conducts a band of neurons, their emboused

flock resembles a stalk, singing, singing "Bouquet!"

for the hostess.



# 10

In the laboratory,

in the Tower,

*in the Tower,*

*in the Tree*

there sits the mother in the Milking Room.

Wearing her seed crown, she coddles the cotyledon,  
dresses her in a little seed coat,  
embroidered from her own body,  
grown, a gown from ovule or integument.

With intent. A caress is meant  
to tend the hilum-scar taped  
to the stalk to which was pinned  
the seed to the navel-like carbuncle,  
the caruncle. Tousle the plume,  
a pliez from her plumule.  
And singly, in monocot seeds,  
a monocle.

In the Milking Room the mother towers -  
her roots swell vertebrate in soil, ankling, tentacular.

She grows herself  
extra arms for her daughter  
octopus or spider.



Each hair an ear waves,  
cordial and plancking.

In burlap lap her sugar-waters. Bound in gauze, she coddles, embryonic -  
a swaddling.

Lub-dub, lub-dub, iambic thumper.

## 11

Ingredients:

"Is the mother-foot also:

the clubfoot, root in a water, water part air and part rabbit's foot past,  
and part past, downstream, and a tendril extending from bowels of flowers  
sharing pistil-time to place all the flammable names touching with your  
forehead alit in a sunlit gristle-parlour ?"

"Yes, in part."



# 12

To draw the *Drawbridge*:

From the window  
of the laboratory, from midriff

from within a rip in mind.

Draw a line horizoning-

A passageway  
in which hemorrhage buds cinch growing tiny hairs,  
filaments.

The guard hairs gorging at the opening.

From midriff. ingrows this trapeze, a cord:

and goes through her,

bridging brainstem, her radicle a portal where her baby root and will depart  
shoot outwards epic epicotyl from her tiny cot become transition zone between  
root and shoot, and rooting downwards invisible beneath the Tower to forever outwards.

A cord for the trapeze, for:

The little duchess against weather fists her seedling outwards in a violate-veined  
wide-mouth jar.

Cleaving animal pole, vegetal pole toward and diverging.



## 13

From the trapeze or rootling bridge or cording bridge, Bridge of the Child -  
from its last planck rhizomatic, precipice or strand  
now,

How to draw *The Flower*:

## 14

Tie the trapeze to her belly;  
trace it:  
down to downwards where she hides her roots under the bed with all her toys.

And again, from mid-stalk, upwards, trace towards -  
her spire spinning at the top a cup  
a turnstile, weathervane or chalice,  
is a headdress or receptacle to which  
her head will be attached;

Or if she is many-headed, inflorescence:

"Are so many of us!"

Her uncle, peduncle  
will he cup her tiny head and head and head.



## 15

Floreate, her mouth fills with organs singing, ringing with: a style and carpels, and her pistil  
will evolve to enclose ovules cherubic and beloved—

Vowelling, the flower yowls.

And queenly, her corolla pronounces petals within green calyx  
or sepals

(When an ovule grows up she will be a seed).

and tilting her slightly toward mother-scent.

## 16

Scentwards, or, slender in her filament, she unfolds, upholds the anther and its antlers, hers.

A stamen, radio and weathervane is lending pollen dusts the linens.



# 17

(When an ovule grows up she will be a seed)

dressed best in her little seed coat  
and tended).

In her little coat pocket  
sewn in: a baby root, impressed, or a photograph  
and smelling

(Remembering the Tree or the Flower who was she will be)

# 18

*How to draw the letter I.*

Sever it:  
the cord  
between  
*the Tree*  
and  
*the Flower.*

Hold her apart from her. By the rootlings, draw the  
daughter from the mother-waters. Apart: and makes  
of mother-body a weathervane can always tell.



# 19

"There will be a memory between us."

# 20

*Letter I:*

And swell, grotesque, resonant, a socket—

Conscious-flower, bloating,

gloats

Shivering and rare in her new edges motherless, and daughtered in their agape

Between, and anti-homewards time blooms there. And pretty globules slowly form upon  
the queen's pink gorge:

"I,



21

"There will be a memory between us, and ringing: backwards and forwards and around the other side."

22

"There I pass through her."

23

*Letter I:*

"Where my looking looks for her and my looking back reflects, upon her, surface,  
upon her I become image, with her and imagined  
within interruption.

I attend, an utterance."



**24**

**25**

Within interruption—

**26**

*Said the Flower to the Tree:*  
Who are we,

mother? Mother?"



