

*ROUTINES, RITES, AND REJOICING*  
*THE CULTURAL USE OF PLANTS IN MEXICO*

The landscape is the background against which the life of a country unfolds; it preserves the memory of its past and sustains the present. In the vastness of Mexican territory, with its capricious mountain ranges, in the communion between the arid north and the tropical south, the climates, soils and plant communities that inhabit it are in a constant state of flux. Their splendor and attributes have accompanied the imagination and everyday rites of the inhabitants of this diversity. Different cultures have found various uses and meanings for plants to meet both their physical and philosophical needs. Plants form part of everyday life because they provide shelter and household goods, food and equipment, yet they are also an essential component of rites because they constitute offerings and aromas and extend their fleeting life span when they are incorporated into songs, poems, pictures and evocations.

The astonishingly diverse cultural use of plants in Mexico is linked to tradition and the landscape that produces them, whether they are organ cactuses or palm or maguey leaves. From generation to generation, plants from the Mexican countryside have sheltered families. A maguey leaf roof astonishes us with its rhythmic arrangement, its triangular shapes placed one on top of the other after it is no longer a living organism, straining to reach the

skies. The maguey yielded the sap from its core to be fermented as pulque or drunk neat; someone may have stripped its leaves and used the thinnest layer to make parchment or wrap up food in it to seal in the juices during baking. Others may have preferred to use the leaves to protect their rooftops from the rains and harsh sunlight while still others may have found that the dark green maguey provided enough shade to make a place inhabitable.

Stern, military bamboo plants were planted in rows to create light, airy fences, subject to the wind's whims. Branches were packed solid with mortar from the ground and clay to delimit the outlines of a house, turning it into a home. And over the years, men experimented with different ways of cutting beams from trees to produce a sturdy framework that would be able to bear the weight of lank palm leaves and straw and protect them from the rain. Muscular hands and arms created structures and arranged horizontal or vertical frameworks to build houses resembling rings of straw. Airy, thatched roof shelters known as *palapas* are the result of an ingenious combination of straw and wooden struts that technology has yet to equal. Because houses made from plants, such as these eccentric *palapas*, smelling of grass and harvests, enable us to enjoy the sun in comfort.

### *Plants can double as fences*

In the middle of the countryside, you sometimes come across houses surrounded by fences that turn green and sprout leaves, with the sap still rising in them. Living fences is the name given in Mexico to the cacti or bushes planted in rows that serve as palings. In addition to being decorative, they seem determined to be useful without wasting the opportunity to grow, receive nourishment and harness the sun's rays for their photosynthesis. Yet the cacti that abound in Mexico's largely semi-arid territory are also removed from their natural surroundings to flank doorways like rugged, arrogant plant sentinels. Perhaps it is because the landscape often blends, either unintentionally or as a result of its inhabitants' bursts of enthusiasm, with the constructions that mark their lifestyles. That is why the bowls, cans or flowerpots that hang from the walls like ear-rings are a means of appropriating the landscape, depriving the flowers of their seasonal nature and making the scenery an attribute of the walls, rather like a person who puts up paintings. Our liking for plants is a reflection of our indigenous past. Both botanical gardens and those on rooftops were regarded as natural. The heaps of harvest fruits are proof of abundance, each crop has its own characteristics and elegance, a particular way of being arranged to show what has been obtained from the earth. Corncobs, coffee, tobacco.

Products that need to be processed to change shape and be transformed, those extracted from plants, those related to man because they have been subjected to processes learnt over the years and passed on from one generation to the next.

Henequen with its tough fibers softened the landscape of the once-powerful haciendas; dried tobacco leaf, with its wonderful aroma, is a tribute to the plants and hands dedicated to crafting fine cigars.

### *Plants and hands*

Plants and hands have an age-old pact in this land of craftsmen where fiber, whether reed, straw, palm or willow, is woven into baskets, mats, sacks, bags, covers and hammocks. Observing the lively work of hands weaving a carpet pattern that has been handed down from generation to generation, it is easy to imagine the fiber as an extension of the hands, and the muscles and veins that animate the craftsman's nimble fingers. His powerful muscles will enable him to weave ropes, nets or sacks that will be used to transport or store the harvested grains. These ropes are used for fastening oxen to the plow, binding the tree trunks used to build a house, mooring boats to the river's edge and securing objects that are so essential to man that they have to be tied to him. Rope is the umbilical cord between peoples and nature because its production

required a patient relationship between the sun and plants, before man could extract the vital fiber from the green pulp to bind himself to the countryside and thereby control it. The oxen tilled the land, using ropes to pull the plow, water was drawn from the well in a bucket attached to a rope and fishermen brought up shoals of wriggling fish in their nets.

It is not always necessary to alter the essence of a leaf, flower or trunk for plants to be absorbed into everyday family life. A violently knotted tree trunk can double as an easy chair, a stump can be used as a stool for reaching the top shelf of the larder or garden shed, while a tree trunk with dents in it makes a handy set of kitchen steps. People in Mexico still often take plants just as they are, without altering them with a saw or a hammer, using oddly shaped pieces of wood for domestic purposes. Hollow gourds are used to keep water cool and clean, while *zacatón*, which are nothing more than dried out grass roots, cover the mountains and are used to scrub pots and pans.

Harvesting is country work, reflected in the peasant landscape, either as land waiting to be plowed or ripe maize fields, and then as broken off leaves and heaps of fruit waiting to be slowly shared out and digested. Whether in the form of flowers, fruits or leaves, the harvest adorns patios, eaves and long corridors. Crops have to be dried, aired, and controlled in their new existence away

from the mother plants: squash, tomato and corn cobs are both round and appetizing.

The plants are now ready to become part of the daily feast. Nothing is wasted, since roots, stalks, leaves, flowers, fruits and seeds are all eaten in Mexico. The versatile pumpkin seed, native to this part of the world, lends itself as readily to savory dishes such as the baroque *pipianes* as it does to sugar and milk paste confections molded into the shape of Mexican fruits such as mamey, pineapple and mango. Amaranth and chia are also staples of the Mexican culinary tradition. Mexico is the home of vanilla, the black pod that dazzled French pastry cooking and was immediately incorporated into its cakes and biscuits. A popular drink is made from Jamaica flowers which are dropped into boiling water to release their flavor and deep red color. Coral bean tree flowers are fried with beans or egg while the striking squash flowers are used to turn soups yellow or as a filling for quesadillas. Mexico boasts some of the most flavorsome leaves, such as eared pepper, quelite goosefoot and *huauzontle*, served with its stalk, which, when cooked in batter, is a delicacy.

Since pre-Hispanic times, leaves have been used as wrapping, such as when goat meat is covered in green maguay leaves and baked in an underground oven, or for cooking and transporting that marvelous invention known as tamales. These may either be wrapped in smooth, shiny banana leaves or

rough, hollow corn husks. Tamales, or *tamalli* as they are called in Nahuatl, are small packages containing a complete meal based on maize with a stuffing that varies according to local ingredients, which may include shrimp, beef or chicken, vegetables, sauces, nuts and spices. Cylindrical, flat or elongated, the tamal is Mexico's answer to the packed lunch. Not for nothing is the Spanish name derived from an Aztec word: *itácatl*, for a foodpack (*itacate*). Tamales took pride of place at ceremonies because slaughtering a pig warranted organizing a memorable tamale feast in which women shared out the work of grinding the maize, preparing the filling, washing the corn husks, smearing the inside with a thin coating of dough, adding the ingredients, wrapping and tying up the tamales and then placing them in a steamer to cook. The maguey leaf, tough yet transparent, is the perfect wrapping for *mixiotes* made from rabbit or pork cooked in a deep red sauce. The wrapping allows the juices and smells to blend and achieve the perfect temperature and flavor. The epidermis of the leaf was used both as writing material and to whet the appetite in Aztec times.

The maguey and agaves, with their long, sharp leaves, jealously guard their juice in their cores, which the pre-Hispanic peoples used to ferment as pulque and to worship the goddess Mayahuel (and subsequently learnt to distil to obtain mescals and tequila during the Colonial era). The nopal is the stalk most commonly used in Mexican cooking:

round and thorny, it becomes soft and slimy when diced and boiled for eating in tacos.

#### *Embroidering the countryside*

First came the loom, then the needle so that women could incorporate shapes and colors into their clothes and weave sashes, skirts and shawls that they could discreetly cover with borders, leaves and flowers. Regional costumes, of indigenous origin, establish their identity using elements from the colorful world that surrounds them. Flowers abound in Mexican clothes and lightweight and heavy blankets alike. Both light and dark colored clothes set off the colorful petals adorning a neckline, decorating a belt or enlivening the hem of a skirt. Mexican women's clothing is striking for both its color and the time required to achieve the desired effect. Many hours of embroidering and weaving are spent on the swirl of a skirt, puffed sleeves or the shoulder cape gracing a neck. Little girls wear them with the coquetry that a flower requires: it is a female pact. Traditional dances reflect the combinations of regional costumes and in several municipalities, women wear them every day whereas in others, they are only donned for ceremonies. Women from the Isthmus captivate onlookers with their abundance of embroidered golden flowers, which they emphasize with golden

necklaces. Veracruz women have turned white lace and organza into a subtle floral whisper: could it be because in that part of the world, flowers are always peeking out at you? Flowers are not only ceremonial offerings, colorful extensions of the landscape. They are also turns of phrase. *Una flor* is a compliment. *Echar flores*, literally "to cast flowers", means to flatter someone. A woman wears clothes with flowers to attract compliments. Set a flower to catch a flower.

Although flowers live close to women's bodies, embroidered on cloth or printed on their clothes, they can also be seen on the cloths used for keeping tortillas warm, on tablecloths, on paper designed to imitate flowers and on the vases used to hold delicate calla lilies.

#### *Floral rites*

Flowers and plants are an essential part of both everyday and religious rites. Their short-lived luxuriance, their fleeting beauty and their inevitable withering reflect the festivities that begin and end. Flowers forsake their color, freshness and turgidity to decorate a church entrance, a virgin's altar or adorn a little girl's hair. Garlands are a marvel of craftsmanship in which plants have been transformed into a woven cascade that joins forces with the walls to drench them with color. Plants are

used in festive rites to distinguish them from everyday life, to flaunt their beauty, so that the endless cycle of night and day will be different that day. Flowers are an echo of rejoicing and praise, and the celebrations begin with their care and harvesting. Flowers are cut, sold and then woven into pedestals, arches and roofs. Branches and palm trees become the platform for the floral architecture that will serve as a walkway, bridge and ceremonial passage for the offering to the patron saint or for the Virgin's feast day.

Processions are accompanied by floral arrangements, stars and rosettes, because one must honor the day to honor oneself. It is essential to celebrate to give life a meaning, to commune with the gods, to give thanks for the harvest and to ask for well-being. It is necessary to be at one with the hereafter and with the divine forces that our ancestors once appeased with human sacrifices.

Palm Sunday decorations are a feat of manual dexterity. The day before the celebrations, church courtyards and plazas are filled with craftsmen selling their woven palm figures that are offered to the crucified Christ to begin Lent. The palm leaf reveals its tender green stalk, which allows it to be woven and gradually turn yellow while it awaits its turn to reach the altar.

I once went to a wedding in San Pablito, a village on the border between Oaxaca and Veracruz, where the women gave us baskets of lilac, pink and purple

petals with which we followed the bride and groom to the house where the banquet was to be held. The women in the wedding party threw petals over the bride and the pathway, leaving a carpet of fresh scattered colors. Detached from the flowers, which had been broken off their stalks, the petals lasted but an instant; trampled into the dust, they would become vestiges: therein lay their beauty.

Flowers serve as adornments at weddings from the moment they appear on the snowy white bridal gown, in the hands of the bride nervously clutching her bouquet, and on her veil with its band of orange blossom or local flowers. And flowers flank the corridors and are woven into waves on church roofs and serve as the means of beginning family life. And virgins are deflowered because sex is also a flower that yields its beauty. And then there are competitions to find the most beautiful “flower” in the community and flower games, and there were once even flowery wars that were both bloody and voracious because of the need to silence the gods with sacrificed prisoners.

And flowers are also used to bid farewell at the time of death. Mexico has a special flower for this purpose, the *cempasúchil* marigold, an orange blossom whose petals can be removed, which chooses November to adorn the altars to the dead that would not be complete without it. The streets and markets are carpeted with bright orange to dress death, asserting that we must visit it to console our-

selves in life, and reminding us that we must not forget the dead, however alive we may be, because we share their destiny and sooner or later we will meet up again. So why not bring them closer to life with songs and tequila and their favorite dishes and fill the houses and churches and tombs with marigolds so that they feel good or at least we feel good when we embellish death or when we say to it, “See how lively the fiesta can be! See how conscientious we are, we can’t rest unless every year we do the same, drawing more dead souls and faithful into the celebration!”.

Isn’t this in fact a sort of graveyard art that goes beyond the tombstones and the statues that accompany them? An art form that involves flowers that vary from region to region, often found in the misty, mountain areas and that is spare in the arid north.

In Mexico, colorful flowers are available year round, which is why the inhabitants of Huamantla, Tlaxcala can afford to carpet the streets with flowers, creating paintings with petals as though they were brushstrokes and in Xochimilco they use flowers to write the barges’ names such as Lupita, Carmen and Maria (even though the pragmatism of plastic has conquered). It is hardly surprising that people take flowers to these barges since Xochimilco means “field of flowers”. And where flowers are scarce, people use the haughty, monumental maguey plume to pay homage in the temple.

It is temples that encourage people to make

offerings, it is churches, of whatever ilk, that challenge worshippers to do so. Catholicism imposed its dogma and destroyed the multiple gods although not the spirit of worship or the need for the variety of faces provided by the saints who served as substitutes for a world peopled by specialized gods. The Virgin of Guadalupe, who appeared to the recently canonized Juan Diego found an adoration echo in the same Tepeyac where Tonantzin was worshipped. Flowers became imprinted on Juan Diego’s tunic; roses, mute witnesses of a legendary apparition.

Rites always involve worship and death. They are prepared, carried out, enjoyed and then ended. They summarize life in a miniaturized version, which is why the plant world, with its finite essence, is a loyal companion. It sacrifices its fruits for the benefit of the fiesta and forsakes the charm of its flowers and the languid green of its leaves. These ornate, overblown offerings have a distinctly baroque charm.

#### *The flower that never fades*

The need to reverse the transitory nature of flowers and the plant world is reflected in the artist’s obsession with binding it to permanence and sublimating it. He feels impelled to make them an eternal attribute of the glances of all times, an incentive to

sensibility. That is why the craftsman imitates their shape by painting them on clay, embossing them on tin, reproducing them in wax, cutting them out of paper, and creating them out of blown glass. The art nouveau architect depicted the capricious, asymmetric shapes of plants between tunics and women’s tresses on lamps, handrails and stained glass windows.

Diego Rivera made calla lilies the symbol of Mexicanness, monuments of beauty that recall the dark-skinned body embracing an enormous bunch of flowers. The calla lily in the painting was captured showing the gracefulness of its stalk, the protective, modest whiteness of the petal that insinuates, discovers and provokes, its intimacy speckled with yellow pollen. By making choices, the artist imbues the objects he depicts on the canvas with meaning. He invites us to see through his eyes and intelligence. He shows us the common flowers in the gardens and points out their names so that we will pay attention when we see them in the huge garland that the woman’s arms are barely able to hold. The woman embraces, protects, supports, she desires those flowers that she has encompassed in her bosom.

Among the most outstanding efforts to emulate and enhance nature and plant forms through art is the fascinating work of a British, Edward James, who chose a corner of La Huasteca to create a world of sculpture and architecture that blended in

with the jungle. In Xilitla, in La Huasteca Potosina, one can enjoy the capricious surrealism of the aristocratic Scot who spent long periods in this exuberant, tropical corner of the Mexican countryside.

James was the son of aristocrats (and it was even rumored that he was the illegitimate son or grandson of Edward VI) who lost his father at the age of five and his mother at twenty-two. He inherited a vast fortune with which he sponsored ballets (when he was in love with Tilly Losch in New York) and Surrealist painters such as René Magritte and Salvador Dalí. He had a passion for poetry and plants and eventually acquired a botanic garden in West Dean in Sussex, England. He was fascinated by orchids and participated in competitions with his exotic creations. It was orchids that led him to discover and purchase forty hectares in Las Pozas, very near Xilitla. With his friend Plutarco Gastélum, a native of Sonora whom he had met on his first trip to Mexico, he took the road from Laredo to Xilitla in 1945 and discovered the ravine with the orchids that so intrigued him. He was immediately entranced by the place with its waterfalls, pools and exuberant vegetation and he and Gastélum settled there. James traveled frequently between Europe and his corner of the jungle where he grew orchids and raised boas and macaws until one day he took it into his head to create an organic form of architecture that would blend in with the scenery with its large trees and hanging vines. So James turned that

expanse of terraces and ditches into a fantasy world. His flights of fancy eventually took shape when the sketches in his notebook were turned into wooden molds by a skilled craftsman and then filled with concrete to create those thought-provoking, seemingly unimaginable shapes. The area was soon filled with fountains with bromeliads, colonnades finished off with buds, stairways with no obvious purpose—other than perhaps to touch the sky—a pool in the shape of an eye, a three-story bamboo palace that would be inhabited by James, the legendary foreigner in Xilitla with a macaw on his shoulder, who financed Gastélum's children's trips to Europe and their education.

A great deal of money and will power, as well as a boundless imagination are required to carry out James' architectural feat; to attempt to imitate nature, disguise oneself as it and exploit the possibilities of the rigid framework of bamboo and build arches that appear to bend in the wind like fragile branches. It takes a very special talent to be able to reproduce the softness of vegetation in hard concrete. And it is all there just so that visitors can discover it among the reddish, brown, green or gray trunks of the long, thin trees that rise up amid the forest gloom to catch a ray of sunlight. James gave concrete the possibility of struggle for survival as though inanimate forms had the same spirit as living creatures. If ever there was a land of fantasy and whim, it was the one that Edward James, with the

help of Gastélum, built in the middle of the gully, among the summer downpours and the ever-present mosquitoes. There James shed his academic pretensions, the scientific names and the competitive fairs where his orchids strove to outdo others in strangeness and beauty and felt free to create a sculptural poem, an impractical form of architecture and a construction that was the accomplice, mirror, and lover of that corner of nature. Going to Xilitla is to cultivate astonishment when one realizes that a person's life settled forever in that corner, coexisting with the forest and its shapes, the fleurs de lis and the philodendron leaves, the bromeliads and their floral offerings, the leaves and hanging vines, the bamboo and the flowers frolicking between the pencils, wood and concrete to give shape to a whim that continues to lie under the sun, speaking of dreams and eccentricities and a madness that is well worth inhabiting.

#### *Planting walls*

Planting is anchoring to the earth, it is placing a seed in the ground so that a plant will grow out of it or digging up a plant and putting it somewhere else so that its roots grow. In the human realm, however, planting is an unpleasant matter. *Dejar plantado*, or to stand someone up, means to leave someone waiting somewhere and never turn up, it

means immobilizing and disappointing someone, in other words, tying them down. That is why you can also plant walls and mosaics, windows and canvases by filling them with plants and flowers. Planting is undoubtedly an art when it comes to filling up an empty space, and in this respect, trompe l'oeils represent the triumph of illusionism. They give the sensation of an actual landscape and of a reality that extends as far as infinity. They are provocative in that they enable one to perceive an orchard where none exists, where a wall would prevent one from seeing it. A trompe l'oeil tricks us and provides us with a landscape that has been removed from the imprisonment of its walls. It twists the imagination into a playful proposal. There, plants have sap and seek the complicity of wind, insects and birds in order to go on populating this artistic sleight of hand.

#### *A pact with words*

Plants have always been synonymous with permanence, the desire for testimony, the first signs and the first words. The bark of the wild fig tree yielded its rough, warm surface to the inscriptions of the *tlacuilo*, an expert on dyes and drawing. Whether in the form of papyrus on the banks of the Nile, rice paste, cellulose or membrane of maguey, plants are still the substrate of words. Without tree trunks,

libraries would be nothing more than a fantasy. But man managed to extract from the landscape the ideal means of leaving a record of his presence, of expressing himself and constructing other worlds because he found the world that contained him insufficient. It was both a prison and an incentive. The first things to be recorded on paper were drawings. Then symbols became an extension of human groups, as proof of their ability to produce ideas, formulas, inventions and epic and love poems. The pact between paper and expression was sacred, intimate and powerful, perhaps the most powerful alliance that exists with the plant world or perhaps a new alliance. It was not intended to satisfy hunger or to meet the need for shelter, to cure illnesses or to fashion utensils but rather to satisfy the need to speak, to communicate, to think through representation and express an understanding of the surrounding world.

The Aztecs, the warring empire of Mesoamerica, used flowers to represent song. The flowers that emerged from men's mouths were songs of praise. Words and flowers led to the field of poetry. A nation of poets and warriors, they regarded the heart of the sacrificial victim as a flower for the gods. How else could one explain the fact that they called their battles *xochiyaoyotl* or flowery wars? Julio Cortázar, astounded in awe, used them as the background for a nightmare in his unforgettable short story *La noche boca arriba*.

A verse in *Cantares mexicanos* goes as follows:

The flower of the liquor of war  
has made my prince drunk,  
yellow lord of the *cuextecas*,  
Matlacuiatzin bathes in the flowery liquor of war,  
together they go where they exist in some way.

The word also appears in Mexican songs, as when they make plants objects of worship, metaphors for feelings and analogies of knowledge:

I must eat that prickly pear, even if it stings my  
hand.  
(*Me he de comer esa tuna*)

What good is it to the acacia to have been  
brought up in the countryside?  
What good is it to my love to have loved each  
other so much?  
(*El huizache*)

You have a bindweed in your window  
and every time I go by,  
it binds up my heart.  
(*La enredadera*)

Two little trees have sprung up on my farm,  
two little trees that look like twins.  
(*Dos arbolitos*)

On the edge of a palm grove  
I saw a beautiful young girl...  
(*A la orilla de un palmar*)

How lovely is the amaranth!  
All praise to the one who designed it.  
For along its edges it has  
I person I shall always remember.  
(*El quelite*)

Little lemon, little lemon,  
hanging from a branch,  
give me a warm hug  
and a kiss from your delicate mouth.  
(*Limoncito*)

I crossed the mountains  
to come and see the flowers;  
there's a shy rose here,  
that is the most precious of all my loves.  
(*La feria de las flores*)

The willow and the palm tree sway gently,  
their leaves are covered in blue mother-of-pearl,  
the willow and the palm cast a welcome shadow,  
love of my life, how beautiful you are!  
(*El sauce y la palma*)

The fig tree has dried up,  
you can even see its roots,

my dark-skinned beauty doesn't love me any  
more,  
because I spend my life on drunken sprees.  
(*La higuera*)

Palm tree keeper, climb the palm tree,  
climb the palm tree, palm tree keeper,  
and bring down a load of the biggest coconuts  
for the muleteer to take away.  
(*El palmero*)

People use plants for practical purposes such as building a shelter from the sun's glare, weaving them into hammocks so that they can rest in the cool breeze, hollowing out tree trunks to make a canoe, turning them into fishing nets, carving wooden spoons and building a table where they can have meals and talk. Plants also serve as a pretext for remembrance, however, since they are referents from the landscape and constitute shape, touch and smell. The nightshade is undoubtedly a trunk of melancholic memories; the light of the jacaranda flowers carpeting a field is a hypnotic trance of well-being while the bougainvilleas cascade down walls, bringing back memories of our childhood.

Salvador Novo dedicated *Florido laude* to describing his astonishment over Mexican flora. One of his poems recalls smells and evocative shapes.

And I inhale you, gardenia,  
jasmine, nightshade, morning glory,  
heliotrope, lily, tuberose,  
because you are shape, color and perfume;  
because you are a flower, the essence of life,  
the youth of the world, the beauty of air,  
the encoded music of the world;  
because you are fragile, short-lived, delicate,  
and run to death that immolates, consecrates  
and perpetuates you.

And Carlos Pellicer, with his tropical odes and  
voices of June, twisted the landscape with the inci-  
sion of words to reveal it in its full power and glo-  
ry in *Retórica del paisaje*:

Plants are untouchable; with their green skins,  
the defensive tattoo needle  
pierces touch from a distance.  
Fleshy flowers shriek  
above the nopal that bends its stages  
rhymed into an ellipse. If I press the pedals down,  
the organ cactus emerges in a slender prism,

whose pincushion bevel seizes  
small clouds of hay.  
The cactus, whose false erection,  
male limit, marks the land,  
the maguey arrayed in military ranks:  
Prepares the weapons and in its wait,  
sweetens the water of its thirst for war  
and makes the thief of its honeycombs drunk.  
And when time surrenders, it hoists a spear  
with a heroic flower.

Whether flowers are heroic, warlike, a commun-  
ion with death, a celebration of life, the scaffolding  
on which to base lives, bowls for drinking water,  
thread creations embroidered on cloth, garlands  
placed on a head, petals trodden underfoot by a  
bride, fragrances for churches, song, poems or mem-  
ories, our link with the plant world is both imagina-  
tive and absolute. It binds us to the earth and keeps  
us in a perpetual state of astonishment at the living  
and the fleeting, the beautiful and the diverse.

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