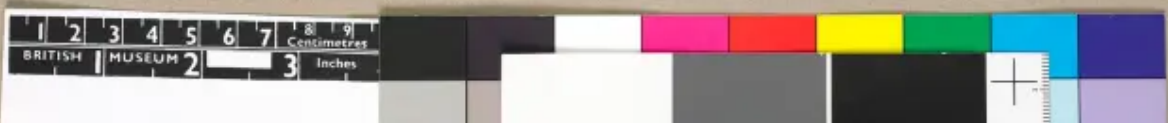


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A wild forest fruit becomes part of a luxury skincare regimen. What is lost along the way? Hog plum (aka yellow mombin) hails from the tropical forests of Mesoamerica and the West Indies, where people have foraged its sweet fruit and medicinal leaves and bark for hundreds if not thousands of years. They have developed subtle knowledge of its properties, which are variable and even contradictory. Historically, the fruit has been difficult to commodify because of its delicate pulp and short shelf life. Yet today, as hog plum is being incorporated into Gwyneth Paltrow's boutique *goop* skincare products, its complexity is reduced into a shelf-stable form.

Hog plum appears in the first European book written on American soil, Fray Ramón Pané's 1494 "Relación acerca de las antigüedades de los Indios." Pané recounts the Taíno myth of cosmogenesis, in which the Sun punishes a group of ancient fishermen by turning their bodies into *jobos*, or hog plum trees (Pané 22).

The aroma of the fruit sometimes infuses Caribbean literature with a Proustian nostalgia for the childhood treat, a longing that also grieves a lost form of intimacy with tropical forests as their distinctive species are increasingly commodified by twenty-first century botanical prospecting. Saint Lucian poet Derek Walcott muses about "the scent of hog plums that I have never smelled since" in his poem "Parang" (27). Similarly, Martinican writer and philosopher Édouard Glissant eulogizes their elusive fragrance:

*There barely remains along the roads, as far as smells go, the sudden sugary blanket of hog plums in whose wake you can get lost, or, in some places along the Route de la Trace, the delicate smell of wild lilies beckon. The land has lost its smells. (Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays 11–12)*

At the outset of Glissant's 1959 novel *The Ripening*, a young man, Thaël, is tempted by the hog plum tree:

*He came to a stop in the plum tree's dangerously alluring shade, stepping on a carpet of fruit left to rot on the ground. A traveler perspiring from a prolonged effort would not have risked catching a cold by lingering in this place. But Thaël was cool and fresh and had nothing to fear; the blood and sweat of his task were still to come. And so he picked up a plum and ate it, defiantly. (11–12)*

To recognize the shade of the hog plum as a threat, one must be well-versed in local folk medicine. Martinican tradition conceives of the body in terms of cooling and warming elements which must be balanced to maintain good health (Peeters 131–32). While cooling shade is valued for its ability to refresh the body, excessive cooling when the body is hot and sweaty is linked to a variety of inflammations (Longuefosse and Nossin 120). This idea of hot and cold appears in various forms across the Caribbean islands and parts of Central America. Although its origins are debated, some scholars assert that it predated settler colonization (Benoît 865–66).

In the context of the novel, the cool tree's alluring shade poses a threat to passersby who are already warm from their climb up the mountain from the opposite side. In local terms, its shade could turn their blood into water, inciting fever, chills, and possibly even pleurisy (Longuefosse and Nossin 121). (Pleurisy, here, does not refer to the inflammation of the pleura, but rather to a potentially fatal condition known as *pirézi* in Creole (Benoît 869).) It is only because Thaël is cool and dry as he begins his trek downhill that he has the gall to taste the hog plum's fruit and relax in its shade. His assessment of the risk and conclusion that he has nothing to fear reflects his understanding of its dynamism.

The subtext is that the hog plum is a *pharmakon*, a substance with the ability to heal and harm in equal measure. In Martinique, it is sometimes used to treat the very condition that it causes. Its leaves and buds are infused into a tea to treat flu and inflammation, conditions associated with excessive cooling (Longuefosse and Nossin 123). This technique may well have originated with Amerindian healing practices. Hog plum was used medicinally by Carib people before the arrival of European settlers on the island of Dominica, which neighbors Martinique. Victoria Berry has argued that their knowledge of hog plum leaves passed directly into the folk medicine of Montserrat (247). Given that Carib people also lived in Martinique, the plant's use there may also have its origins in Indigenous practices. In Glissant's text, we are meant to understand that Thaël, as a mountain-dwelling descendant of maroons, has access to this local body of syncretic plant knowledge. When he falls in love with a woman from the plains, her inability to understand the rhythms of the hog plum tree foreshadows her eventual death.

If Glissant's novel highlights the hyper-local character of Martinican medical knowledges about the hog plum, its recent adoption into Gwyneth Paltrow's *goop* line of cosmetics suggests a radical departure. Yellow mombin essence features in the GOOPGLOW 15% Glycolic Acid Overnight Glow Peel, which retails for \$125 for a pack of twelve peels, and the Goop Beauty G. Tox Malachite and Aha Purifying Tonic, which costs \$75 for a 95-milliliter bottle. What was once a foraged food and medicine for mountain dwellers has been transfigured into a luxury good in service of a chic, less-is-more consumer ethos. Whittled down to its essence, the hog plum is no longer even a plant as such, but rather an ethereal substance to be absorbed through the (vanishing) pores of one's skin.

What is at stake in the globalization of a hyper-local product like the hog plum? Not only does its adoption into an international supply chain elide the species' complex significance within Amerindian and Afro-Caribbean medicinal and culinary practices; it attaches value to a plant whose matter was formerly free for the taking. In doing so, it suggests that plants once located far beyond the reach of plantation agriculture are new grounds for foreign capital accumulation. This new extractive regime supplants a tradition that has long respected the tree as a dynamic, even fearsome agent, trafficking instead in its inert and decontextualized extract. Made fungible, the hog plum is defanged.

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