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CULTURAL WORKS

Yellow Wattle (*Acacia*) – Three Versions

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Abstract

Ian Campbell's trilingual poem series explores the *Acacia* genus. The *Acacia pycnantha* is Australia's national floral emblem. Across English, Spanish, and Indonesian and inspired by Campbell's family history and A.J. Campbell's 1921 *Golden Wattle – Our National Floral Emblem*, the series examines some aspects of the cultural and ecological significance of *Acacia* in Australia, Latin America, and Indonesia. Each version reflects linguistic and regional nuances, showcasing how the essence of a shared theme transforms across languages.

Keywords

Acacia; Wattle; Yellow; Gold; Poetry

This series of poems in three languages— English, Spanish and Indonesian— takes as its starting point Campbell's own family history of involvement in the process that led to the naming of a species of the *Acacia* genus of flowers as the national floral emblem of Australia. *Acacia*, commonly known in Australia as 'wattle,' is the second largest genus in the pea family (*Mimosaceae*), with about 1350 species currently recognised. The largest concentration is in Australia, about 1000 species, and about 185 are in the Americas. The name '*Acacia*' derives in botanical taxonomy from the Greek 'akis'—'point' referring to the prickly leaves of some species.

The Australian national floral emblem is the *Acacia pycnantha* (known as 'Golden wattle'). In 1921 A.J. Campbell (1853–1929) published his photo-essay, *Golden Wattle – Our National Floral Emblem*, which dealt with not just that species but many of the other varieties found in

Australia. The poem version in English by Campbell is based on an extract from a 1921 review of that book. The poem tries to preserve to some degree the language of that review from 1921.

In the Latin American context, in addition to the endogenous species of some acacia-like trees, in the 19th and early 20th centuries various Australian *acacia* species were also introduced such as the *Acacia longifolia* and *Acacia dealbata*, now found in Uruguayan south-eastern coastal areas, for example. Whereas the common name in Australia for the genus is ‘wattle,’ in Chile and Uruguay the name ‘aromo’ is often used. The poem version in Spanish is a co-translation by Campbell and López-Calvo.

In Indonesia, especially in Papua and Maluku, as well as in North Queensland, Australia and the Western Province of Papua New Guinea, the *Acacia mangium*, also known in Indonesian under the common name, ‘akasia,’ grows naturally, as well as in plantation form. In some South-East Asian countries various Australia-origin species have been introduced to try to assist in land stabilisation measures and in plantation cultivation. The poem version in Indonesian is by Campbell, acknowledging comments and suggestions by others concerning earlier drafts. In the Indonesian version the term ‘akasia’ is also used to refer to the various Australia-origin species.

In European countries, such as France and Italy, the Australian-named introduced wattle or *Acacia* species are often commonly known as ‘mimosa.’ The English writer, D. H. Lawrence, often used this term to describe the *Acacia* species in Australia he wrote of, and when he lived in France. In the South of France, in some localities, local people celebrate Mimosa festivals where the introduced species of *Acacia* have become part of the landscape.

Yellow wattle (*Acacia*)

It is the shining glory of our hills and streams:
 when other flowers lie hidden, it radiates its richest treasures of gold,
 it shines through the wilderness and
 illuminates the stony breaks between the scrub.

Floods will not drown it, nor fire destroy it,
 and after forest fires, seeds germinate more freely.
 When neglected it flourishes, yet it takes kindly
 to cultivation in parks and along the roadside verge.

Poets and prophets have searched for epithets,
 as it expresses all moods; there is the silver wattle for happiness,
 the golden wattle for pride, and the wattle that weeps

for grief. May its abundant foliage, the yellows of its florescence
 belie all human emotions. The fortunate may rejoice within
 in its billowing splendour, the bereaved find gentle
 solace as if gathered in as one, unto its tender grace.

Ian Campbell, Melbourne/Sydney, September 2006

(An earlier variant of the poem is on the web by courtesy of the Pinkerton Forest Landcare group).

Acacia amarilla

Es la brillante gloria de arroyos y colinas australianas:
 cuando otras flores yacen escondidas, irradia
 sus más ricos tesoros de oro, brilla a través del yermo e
 ilumina los descansos pedregosos entre el matorral.

No la ahogarán las inundaciones, ni la destruirá el fuego, y tras los incendios forestales, las semillas germinan más libremente. Cuando se la descuida, florece, pero agradeced su cultivo en los parques y al borde de los caminos.

Poetas y profetas han buscado epítetos, ya que expresa todos los estados de ánimo: allí *acacia* plateada para la alegría, *acacia* dorada para el orgullo, *acacia* que llora por el dolor de las *acacias*. Su abundante follaje y floración amarilla

expriman todos los humores; hay plateada que connota alegría; dorada como el orgullo, *acacia* que llora por el dolor.

Los afortunados pueden regocijarse alegrarse en su interior en su ondulante esplendor, los afligidos encuentran tierno consuelo como si se reunieran como uno solo, en su tierna gracia.

Ian Campbell, Sydney and Ignacio López-Calvo, Merced, California, June 2024

Akasia kuning

Cahaya kemuliaan dan keagungan dataran ini bunga pohon akasia yang menyinari bukit dan sungai benua selatan. Bunga lain suka tersembunyi, akasia cemerlang di antara semak dan batu.

Banjir tak menenggelamkannya kebakaran hutan juga takkan menghancurkannya. Benihnya lebih kuat jika terlalaikan, dirawat di taman bunga atau di pinggiran jalan, nyatanya tumbuh juga.

Konon penyair dan ahli kata telah mencari-cari istilah menggambarkan intisarinnya. Akasia - segala emosi di relung hati manusia. Berwarna perak kegembiraan, emas sebagai kebanggaan, dan akasia menangis tanda kesedihan.

Jika seseorang tersentuh rasa kesenangan, bersukacita di kemegahan akasia. Jika berduka cita dan putus asa, marilah bersama-sama di bawah naungan kuning yang menenangkan hati penuh kesukaran dunia ini.

Ian Campbell, Sydney, 26 June 2024