Glossary

Plant Medicine and Ceremony Terms

These terms relate to Amazonian healing traditions, plant medicines, and ceremonial practices as they appear in the novel.

Agua de Florida: A fragrant, alcohol-based cologne used throughout Latin America and in many Amazonian healing traditions as a ritual cleanser. Practitioners may spray or blow it over a participant to clear the ceremonial space, dispel harmful influences, and restore a sense of grounding.

Ayahuasca: A ceremonial brew commonly prepared from the *Banisteriopsis caapi* vine and leaves of *Psychotria viridis* (chacruna). It is used in many Amazonian healing and spiritual traditions. The name is often traced to Quechua *aya* (spirit or ancestor) and *waska* (vine or rope), yielding translations such as “vine of the soul.”

Bobinsana: An Amazonian plant (*Calliandra angustifolia*) used in some plant dietas and healing traditions. Practitioners often associate it with emotional openness, tenderness, and the healing of grief.

Boquichico: A common Amazonian fish (*Prochilodus nigricans*) found around Iquitos and throughout the Peruvian Amazon. Mild and nonpredatory, it is traditionally used in some plant dietas, commonly prepared plainly without salt, oil, or strong seasoning.

Bruja / Brujo: Spanish for a female or male witch or sorcerer. In the novel, the term refers specifically to a practitioner believed to use spiritual power to cause harm, in contrast with a healer.

Camino: Spanish for “the way” or “the path.” In the ceremonial language of the novel, it is the spiritual pathway opened by the healer’s songs and chakapa, guiding the participant through visionary space.

Chakapa / Shakapa: A bundle of dried leaves used as a rattle by Amazonian healers during ceremony. Its sound is used to accompany healing songs, direct attention, clear the ceremonial space, and guide participants.

Curandero: A traditional healer in Latin American cultures who may use herbal medicine, ritual, prayer, and spiritual practice. In Amazonian settings, a curandero's training often involves apprenticeship and direct work with plants.

Dieta: In Amazonian plant-medicine traditions, a disciplined period of dietary, behavioral, and social restriction undertaken while working with a particular plant. A dieta may involve isolation and restrictions on salt, sugar, alcohol, pork, sexual activity, and social contact. Practices vary by lineage, healer, plant, and purpose.

Don / Doña: Spanish honorifics placed before a first name as marks of respect. In the novel, they are used for experienced elder healers, as in Don Enrique.

Embrujado: Spanish for bewitched or placed under harmful magical influence. In the novel, it describes a person believed to be affected by a curse or *mal hechizo*.

Hechizo: A spell or enchantment. A *mal hechizo* is a harmful spell or hex.

Icaros: Healing songs sung or chanted by Amazonian curanderos during ceremony. They may be used to guide visions, call protective or helping forces, and direct the work of healing.

Maman kuna: A term used in the novel for a collective of feminine plant spirits, including Madre Ayahuasca, Madre Toé, and Madre Bobinsana. The phrase is inspired by Quechua *mama* (mother) and the plural suffix *-kuna*.

Maloca: A large communal structure, often round or oval, used by some Amazonian Indigenous peoples for gatherings, ritual, and ceremony. Its form and meaning vary among cultures.

Mapacho: A potent form of tobacco, usually *Nicotiana rustica*, regarded as a sacred plant in many Amazonian healing traditions. It may be used ceremonially for cleansing, protection, prayer, and offerings.

Pachamama: An Andean earth being or deity whose name is often translated as “World Mother” or “Mother Earth.” She represents the living earth, fertility, reciprocity, and the cycles of life.

Sachamama: A powerful being in Amazonian folklore, often imagined as an immense serpent associated with the forest and the earth. The name combines Quechua *sacha* (forest or wild) and *mama* (mother).

Siete raíces: Spanish for “seven roots.” A traditional Amazonian tonic prepared from a mixture of roots, barks, and other botanicals and commonly sold in jungle markets.

Toé: A name used in the Peruvian Amazon for highly potent *Brugmansia* plants, known in English as angel’s trumpet. In the novel, Madre Toé is one of the maman kuna, a feared and respected teacher associated with ordeal, danger, and revelation.

Vegetalista: An Amazonian healer whose training centers on extended dietas with particular plants. A vegetalista’s knowledge is understood within the tradition as arising through apprenticeship, dreams, visions, songs, and sustained relationship with the plants.

Historical and Cultural Terms

These terms provide context for the historical cultures and settings represented in the novel.

Alguacil: In fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Spain, a constable or bailiff charged with maintaining order, making arrests, and carrying out judicial commands.

Amice: Latin for “friend” or “dear friend,” used as a direct form of address. Valens’s use of it toward Marcus carries warmth and pointed familiarity.

Anubis: The ancient Egyptian god associated with embalming, burial, and the protection and guidance of the dead, commonly depicted with a canine head.

Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim: Arabic for “In the name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful.” Known as the basmala, it opens all but one chapter of the Qur’an and is spoken before many ordinary and sacred acts.

Daji: The favored consort of King Zhou of Shang. In later Chinese tradition, she became a legendary figure blamed for encouraging the king’s cruelty and excess.

Diviner: In Shang China, a ritual specialist who prepared and interpreted oracle bones to seek guidance from royal ancestors and divine powers.

Duat: In ancient Egyptian religion, the otherworld through which the sun god traveled at night and through which the dead passed. It was a realm of danger, judgment, transformation, and renewal.

Field of Reeds (Aaru): The idealized afterlife of ancient Egyptian religion, imagined as a fertile landscape of fields and waterways where the justified dead could live.

Flagrum: A multi-thonged Roman whip used for severe corporal punishment. Scourging commonly preceded crucifixion and was intended to weaken the condemned.

Ge: A bronze dagger-axe mounted on a shaft, characteristic of warfare and ritual display during the Shang and Zhou dynasties.

Haudenosaunee: An Indigenous confederacy of six nations—the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, and Tuscarora—whose name is commonly translated as “People of the Longhouse.” Their Seventh Generation teaching emphasizes considering how present decisions may affect generations yet unborn.

Inca: The state and ruling culture that created the largest empire in pre-Columbian South America, flourishing chiefly during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Quechua became a major administrative language of the empire.

Jue: A three-legged bronze vessel used in Shang ritual, especially for offerings of fermented drink to ancestors.

Ka: In ancient Egyptian belief, a person’s vital essence or life force. The ka continued after death and was sustained through offerings.

King Zhou (Di Xin): The last king of the Shang dynasty, traditionally remembered as a tyrant whose conduct helped bring about the Zhou conquest.

La ilaha illa Allah, Muhammadur Rasul Allah: The shahada, the Islamic declaration of faith: “There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God.” It may be spoken at conversion, in prayer, and near death.

Lector-priest: An ancient Egyptian priest trained to recite sacred texts and ritual formulas during ceremonies.

Mihrab: A niche in the wall of a mosque indicating the qibla, the direction of Mecca faced during prayer.

Mototaxi: A three-wheeled motorcycle taxi common in Peru and elsewhere. In Iquitos, mototaxis are a principal form of urban transportation.

Nanga: In the novel, a West African healer and intermediary with the spirit world. Related healer titles vary widely across African languages and cultures.

Natron: A naturally occurring mixture of salts used in ancient Egyptian mummification to dry and preserve the body. It was also used in purification.

Obergruppenführer: A senior SS rank, commonly rendered as “Upper Group Leader,” roughly comparable to a general officer rank.

Oracle bones: Cattle shoulder blades and turtle plastrons used by Shang diviners. Questions were inscribed, heat produced cracks, and the resulting patterns were interpreted. Their inscriptions preserve the earliest substantial body of Chinese writing.

Peque-peque / Peke-peke: A small wooden motorboat used throughout the Peruvian Amazon, named for the repetitive sound of its exposed engine. It serves as a fishing boat, water taxi, and general transport.

Peruvian bark: A historical name for the bark of several *Cinchona* species native to the Andes. It is the natural source of quinine, once the principal treatment for malaria.

Priestesses of Lamentation: Women who performed ritual mourning in ancient Egyptian funerary ceremonies, sometimes embodying Isis and Nephthys as they lamented and protected the dead.

Quechua: A family of Indigenous languages spoken across the Andes and in parts of the Amazon, especially in Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia. Quechua varieties served as major languages of the Inca state and remain widely spoken.

Reichsführer-SS: The title of the head of the SS. Heinrich Himmler held it from 1929 until 1945 and exercised authority over the SS and its extensive police, camp, and military apparatus.

Shabti: A funerary figurine placed in an ancient Egyptian tomb to perform labor for the deceased in the afterlife. Shabtis first appear in the early Middle Kingdom; earlier funerary figurines may be understood as precursors.

Shang dynasty: An early historically documented Chinese dynasty, conventionally dated c. 1600–1046 BCE, known for bronze casting, oracle-bone inscriptions, royal ancestor rites, and the worship of Shangdi.

Shangdi: The "Lord on High," a supreme power in Shang religion associated with royal ancestors, victory, weather, harvests, and the fate of the ruling house.

Shema: The central Jewish declaration beginning *Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad*: "Hear, O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord is One." It is recited daily and is traditionally spoken near death.

Titulus: A placard displayed with a condemned person stating the charge or offense, including in Roman crucifixions.

Zhou dynasty: The dynasty that overthrew the Shang around 1046 BCE and ruled, in changing forms, for nearly eight centuries. Zhou political thought developed the Mandate of Heaven, under which a ruler's legitimacy depended on just rule.

Spanish Words and Phrases

Spanish appears throughout the novel, especially in scenes set in Peru. These are the most frequently used words and phrases.

¡Bienvenido!: Welcome!

Buenos días: Good morning.

Buenas noches: Good evening; good night.

Buen provecho: Enjoy your meal; a customary phrase said before or during eating.

Corazón: Heart; also a term of endearment.

De nada: You're welcome. Literally, "It's nothing."

¿Dónde vamos? / ¿Dónde estoy?: Where are we going? / Where am I?

Gracias: Thank you.

Hola: Hello.

Jefe: Boss; chief.

Lo siento: I'm sorry.

Más despacio, por favor: Slower, please.

Perdón: Excuse me; pardon me.

Por favor: Please.

Salud: Cheers; to your health. Also said after someone sneezes.

Señor / Señora: Mr. / Mrs.; sir / ma'am.

Ten cuidado: Be careful.

Vamos: Let's go.