

Leonardo Nolé
The Graduate Center – CUNY, USA
lnole@gradcenter.cuny.edu

Carmen Concilio and Daniela Fargione, eds., *Trees in Literatures and the Arts. HumanArboreal Perspectives in the Anthropocene* (London: Lexington Books, 2021), 298 pp.

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The experience of the pandemic is making me redefine many of the terms of my daily life, like that of “domestic space.” I used to think of my house as a place where, thanks to its privacy, I would feel safe, at ease. When the first lockdowns paused my social life and forced me to spend more time indoors, my relationship with this space changed. I started to go more and more often for long walks in the park and soon I became familiar with its trees and plants. The intimacy of this growing relationship, the awareness that we were living through the same crises, helped me find the peace and focus I could not find in my apartment anymore. When I think of domestic space now, it is not the concept of privacy that comes to mind but that of relationality, as *Trees in Literatures and the Arts. HumanArboreal Perspectives in the Anthropocene* (2021) has made me realize. Edited by Carmen Concilio and Daniela Fargione, the volume originates from a conference held at the University of Turin, Italy, in May 2019, and can be read as the development of the editors’ work on the cultures of the Anthropocene and their previous *Antroposcenari. Storie, paesaggi, ecologie* (2018). The eighteen essays included in the new collection focus on the millenary experience of mutuality and co-evolution that binds together human beings and the vegetal world, and the ways in which it has been represented in world literatures and the arts. In their introduction, Concilio and Fargione suggest rethinking the common ground between human beings and trees through Édouard Glissant’s definition of identity as constructed in relation with the Other, and Rob Nixon’s “slow violence” (3), that points to the long-term effects of anthropogenic change. Working in and on the Anthropocene, this collection attempts an exercise in a “wider conception of world literature,” a “new biodiversity of both ecosystems and cultures” (3) to resist the “plant blindness” (2) that inhibits humans to perceive the vegetal world while transforming trees into inanimate objects, into resources to fuel world capitalism and its systemic exploitation.

The first part of the book, titled “Human-Tree Kinship,” focuses on various instances of this relationship, from ancient myths to contemporary literary experiences. In her essay, Carmen Concilio works on the metamorphosis of human beings into trees to renew the connection between literature and psychoanalysis. On a similar note, Shannon Lambert shows how recent literary narratives, like Deborah Levy’s *Swimming Home* or

Kang Han's *The Vegetarian*, "turn to vegetal forms to engage with experiences of grief that are depicted as multi-generational and dispersed" (52), developing the idea that "grief both creates and coordinates collectives" (55). The effort to conceptualize alternative, non-anthropocentric collectivities is also at the heart of Emanuela Borgnino's and Gaia Cottino's anthropological contribution, which invites rethinking natureculturescapes in more-than-human terms through the examples of Pacific societies, and Igor Piumetti's study of the influence trees have on national and individual identities in Soviet culture. Later in the collection, Bahar Gürsel returns to a similar idea through Flora J. Cook and her tree-inspired practice of education. By identifying themselves with trees, the author argues, children can "experience the benefits and advantages of communal life" (158).

The second part of the volume, "Spiritual Trees," allows for an exploration of some of the religious and philosophical roots of the relationship between humans and trees. From Bernard Łukasz Sawicki's analysis of *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, a fifth century collection of anecdotes that uses trees to symbolize "the elevation from a worldly reality to a spiritual dimension in life" (93), the discussion reaches Alberto Baracco's Buber-inspired ecophilosophy and his focus on contemporary Italian cinema. Stefano Maria Casella addresses the question of Christian mysticism through the image of the ash tree in Ezra Pound, while Irene De Angelis argues that in Seamus Heaney's poetry woods become "an interstitial space where paganism and Christianity coexist" (114). Turning to the history of New Zealand, and to Māori culture in particular, Paola Della Valle brings together various narratives that map out a violent cultural transition, from the sacredness of trees to their transformation into a profitable commodity.

A comparable interest in the uneven effects of modernization emerges from Patricia Vieira's work on the Amazonian "novels of the jungle" in the third part of the volume, titled "Trees in/and Literatures." These "extractive fictions," the author writes, "have broken new ground in their portrayal of an active, sentient forest that . . . is often the main character in the texts" (164). In his article on Romanian poet George Bacovia, Roberto Merlo directs this critique of modernity to its "most distinctive anthropic construct" (175): the city. In the last contribution of this section, Giulia Baselica studies the exoticizing perspective that Russian author Nikolaj Gumilëv adopts in his poems, through the recurring presence of the palm tree.

The volume's theoretical reflections all converge into its fourth part, "Trees in the Arts," where three artists share their personal experience in the field. Italian poet Tiziano Fratus talks about his encounter with American redwoods and his progressive transformation into *Homo Radix* through poetry, that is "a man constantly seeking roots . . . who moves around to get connected with nature" (205). Finnish performative artist Annette Arlander explains her concern with the individuality of each tree, seen as a "first step toward decolonizing our relationship with 'nature'" (212). Marlene Creates, an environmental artist and poet based in Canada, describes her practice of writing site-specific poetry that is performed in the same places that inspired it, together with the challenges to transform it into a digital archive accessible from anywhere in the world.

The last section, "Trees and Time," explores the differences between human and arboreal timescales. On the one hand, Eva-Sabine Zehelein reflects on the history of family

trees and their significance in the construction of American identities. On the other, Daniela Fargione offers an in-depth analysis of Richard Powers's *The Overstory*, which becomes an analysis of anthropocentric technological development and the recording of collective memory. In her words, this novel is "a colossal photo-book . . . aiming at storing images of a world that will be visualized in the post-Anthropocene, an epoch that will not contemplate human presence, a world without us" (248).

Trees in Literatures and the Arts is an engaged testimony to the physical, intellectual, and spiritual relationship that has connected human beings to trees for thousands of years. The articles effectively juxtapose diverse traces of this long discourse, from ancient myths to more contemporary artistic productions, from indigenous traditions to ignored voices of Western literatures. Thanks to the variety of contributions and their interdisciplinary vocation, the collection moves between different perspectives and scales, by focusing at the same time on local and global experiences; on artistic praxis and the broader development of theoretical frameworks; on the analysis of trees as influential metaphorical elements and their reality as historical beings endangered by anthropogenic change. At times, the broad scope of the volume risks complicating the full integration of some of its chapters and the full development of certain theoretical and thematic threads. However, *Trees in Literatures and the Arts* certainly succeeds in asserting the urgency of comparative approaches that transcend national boundaries together with critical perspectives that rethink the relationship between human beings and the rest of the natural world.