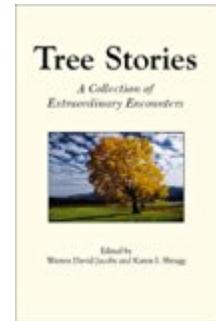


Warren David Jacobs, Karen I. Shragg, eds. *Tree Stories: A Collection of Extraordinary Encounters*. Hygiene, Colo.: SunShine Press, 2002. x + 181 pp. \$16.00 (paper), ISBN 978-1-888604-22-1.

Reviewed by Mary Oak O’Kane (Storyteller and former Director of Children of the Green Earth)

Published on H-Net (November, 2002)



Close Encounters of the Root, Branch, and Leaf Kind

Close Encounters of the Root, Branch, and Leaf Kind

Books on trees used to be found almost exclusively under the rubric of Landscaping or Botany, but over the last decade there has been a tremendous flowering of books on arboreal myths, magic, folklore, and healing qualities as well. Prime examples of this genre are *The Spirit of Trees: Science, Symbiosis, and Inspiration* by Fred Hagender (New York: Continuum, 2000); *Tree Wisdom: The Definitive Guidebook to the Myth, Folklore and Healing Power of Trees* by Jacqueline Memory Paterson (San Francisco and London: Thorsons, 1996); and *Tree-Talk: Memories, Myths and Timeless Customs* by Marie-France Boyer (New York and London: Thames and Hudson, 1996). This new interest in stories, myths, and folklore about trees can be seen as a (much-needed!) response to the rampant destruction of the biosphere that has accelerated in our lifetimes. It’s as if we could only go so far in “buying” the all-pervasive materialistic worldview that sees trees solely as “natural resources” before a countermovement occurred, reclaiming a sense of wonder and freeing us from relating to trees in a solely objectifying manner.

Along these lines, *Tree Stories: A Collection of Extraordinary Encounters* fills an important niche in offering personal stories, from ordinary people, about loving and, in many cases, losing trees. Indeed, what is offered in these pages is a celebration of the subjective, and these simple and soulful tributes to trees keep it far from an academic work. (For instance, citations are not provided for any of the quotes that open the chapters.) The writing

styles vary quite a bit, and keeping in mind that it never claims to be literary helps us appreciate *Tree Stories* for what it *does* profess to be: a venue for sharing experiences to awaken the reader’s sense of kinship with our fellow trees. In this it succeeds. There is a sprinkling of poetry throughout a range of narratives that comprise chapters on “Trees As Teachers,” “Trees As Nurturers,” “Trees As Companions,” and “Trees in Memoriam,” as well as honoring the child’s perspective through “Trees of Childhood” and “Children’s Tree Stories,” which are filled with tree-climbing episodes, awe, and variations of “I once loved a tree but it got ruined” (p. 88).

There is a strong resonance here with the “Grief Work” of Joanna Macy, in which, out of being sensitized to our embeddedness within the living earth, we can acknowledge the despair of its decimation, and move from hopelessness to a sense of empowerment by taking action. This dynamic runs throughout *Tree Stories*, with the act of expression, in sharing these stories or poems with a wider audience, being the proactive stance. In many ways, this work actualizes what is articulated by the quote from Krishnamurti that opens the first chapter: “If you establish a relationship with it [a tree] then you have relationship with mankind. You are responsible then for that tree and for the trees of the world. But if you have no relationship with the living things on this earth, you may lose whatever relationship you have with humanity, with human beings” (p. 18).

Tree Stories will appeal to those who have had their

own “extraordinary encounters” with trees, and out of the sheer force of testimony, it will promote those experiences to become more ordinary. In speaking of the process of seeking out these stories, Karen Shragg states that universally the authors were full of gratitude for having the opportunity to share their stories and that it became clear to her that “the reason that there is no social context for sharing them (the stories) is that our modern-day culture does little to encourage these connections. On the contrary, it is considered a bit bizarre to have

a meaningful relationship with an inanimate object” (p. 13). *Tree Stories* supports normalizing this intimacy and contributes to fostering a sensitivity to, and an honoring of, “a communion of subjects rather than a collection of objects,”[1] and therein lies the book’s bold strength.

Note

1. Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), p. 243.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-nilas>

Citation: Mary Oak O’Kane. Review of Jacobs, Warren David; Shragg, Karen I., eds., *Tree Stories: A Collection of Extraordinary Encounters*. H-Net, H-Net Reviews. November, 2002.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=6914>

Copyright © 2002 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.