



PAOLA LORETO

ECOPOETICAL TREES

Posthuman & Vegetable Intra-actions

ABSTRACT: The article offers fifteen Italian translations of US poems to or about trees. The selecting principle has been the ecocentric positioning of the lyric “I.” Thus, the little anthology covers poems that signal the emergence of a “new nature poetry” – such as Emily Dickinson’s and later on Robert Frost’s – and of “ecopoetry” proper, such as Gary Snyder’s and W. S. Merwin’s. The spectrum of tree poems represented includes various inflections, ranging from William Carlos Williams’s voice to Denise Levertov’s and Mary Oliver’s, to culminate with the contemporary statements of Cynthia Zarin and Christian Wiman. The translations are introduced by the author’s attempt to provide an understanding of the term and concept of “ecopoetry” within the theoretical frame of a posthumanist perspective, and to retrace the development of US poets’ consciousness of the posthuman.

KEYWORDS: American Ecopoetry; Posthuman; Poetry translation; Trees.

This little anthology of US tree-poems translations originated from an invitation to read my poetry at a conference on trees, *Trees In/And/Around: Literature in the Anthropocene*, which was held at the University of Turin on May 22, 2018. This occasion, as well as a previous invitation to read at the *Giornata nazionale dell'albero*, in the Sala Viscontea of the Orto botanico in the Upper Town of Bergamo, on November 21 of the same year, gave me the opportunity not only to realize how often my attention, as a poet, had focused on trees, but also how my beloved poets had done the same. Along with my own texts, I brought to the reading some American tree poems, which I selected upon the principle of their being expressions of what I best understand as ecopoetry, and which I here present.

I have always thought of ecopoetry – beyond all the attempts that have been made in the last couple of decades to define it, and the debates that have accompanied them – as a nature poetry that conveys a very distinctive sense of our relation to nature, or the environment – or, I should say, of reality *tout court*. This is the relation that is nowadays being effectively rethought, among others, by (onto-)epistemologists, philosophers of mind, existential (and eco-) phenomenologists, neuroscientists, literary theorists, anthropologists, and biologists. Their description is being gradually honed through

various definitions, such as *new materialisms*, *ecology of mind*, *ecological aesthetics of nature*, *agential realism*, *material textuality*, and through as many fascinating formulas, each of which brilliantly manages to grasp some aspect of a new way of thinking our position in the world. Serenella Iovino effectively outlines this intellectual horizon as the ground for the time's "material turn," which, having liberated us from the skepticism of the previous, post-structuralist, and postmodern, "linguistic turn," has returned us to the possibility of inhabiting a "real" world, i.e., one that we may know in the first place, immediately, through our senses (Iovino 2012).¹

My own perspective being literary, my sense of a literature that advances our project of turning our historical (and ideal) humanism into a progressing (and material) ideal of humanity is well represented by the powerful synthesis of many contributions to this project expressed by Iovino's elaboration on the perspective of "material ecocriticism" (Iovino 2012, Iovino and Oppermann 2014). My sense of the way ecopoets perceive trees and represent them in their poems perfectly matches the discursive descriptions of the nonhuman as "storied matter," or material textuality. Our relation to them is precisely mirrored by the idea of "intra-action," which makes our co-production of meaning explicit. The acknowledgment of the semiotic nature of our relations to the world, which supposes the agentive nature of matter and the unavoidable interconnection of reality and language – of matter and discourse, or life and text – encourages my belief in Gernot Böhme's aesthetic potential of nature's language, which is our own body impulse to signify: to read and write.

Ecopoets distinguish themselves from the writers who have been writing nature poetry all over the world since the beginning of literature in that not only are they attentive to nature and write about it, but express their feeling of being part of it in the terms I have just briefly recalled, and in a language that persuasively renders the physical sensation of that participation. John Elder, a pioneer of ecopoetry theory, has pointed out that "poetry derives from the living earth," as our bodies and minds do; and that it is structured and behaves like an ecosystem (Bryson 2002, ix).² Laura-Gray Street, in a further stage of the attempt to define ecopoetry, has also spoken of a "paradigm shift," and written that in its contemporary understanding, ecopoetry is "the apprehension of real biological selves (as opposed to fantasy selves) inhabiting this planet along with us, a mix of negative capability and empathy expressed with the cadence, imagery, and wit to make it visceral, so that it lodges in our neural systems and cultivates the environmental imagination that is analogue to the crucial biodiversity of the rainforests and our intestines" (Fisher-Wirth 2013, 38). Ecopoetry responds to the awareness of the limits of language by empowering language to convey the processes of our perception, and how they weld our "subjective human psyche to phenomena in the natural world," so that our

¹ See especially the bibliographical references to Barad, Böhme, Bateson, Abram, Latour, Bennett.

² More accurately, Elder writes that poetry "can manifest the intricate, adaptive, and evolving balance of an ecosystem" (Bryson 2002, ix).

perceptions may be steered from the anthropocentric to the biocentric (Scigaj 1999, xiv). For biologist (eco)poet A. R. Ammons, poems “come on in a sound stream that cannot be talked away... to the extent that they are dispositions, not expositions, [they] are nonverbal... They are actions” (Ammons 1996, 32).

My own choice of American ecopoems (rather than ecopoets) starts with some of its symptoms in the poetry of Emily Dickinson. The other giant of the American Renaissance, Walt Whitman, was very close to nature’s physical semiosis, but also shared Ralph Waldo Emerson’s neoplatonic cosmology, featuring a hierarchical order of levels of beings, where man is an expression of the Spirit in nature, which is therefore made to serve him. On the one hand, Whitman can look in the eye of a bay mare and affirm that “it shames silliness” out of him (“Song of Myself,” Sect. 13, Whitman 1982, 199). On the other, his redwood trees declare that they abdicate their kingdom on earth for a “superber,” that is the human, “race, *they too to grandly fill their time*,” whose genius he sees “Clearing the ground for broad humanity, the true America, heir/ of the past so grand,/ To build a grander future (Whitman 1982, 352, 355).” We know Whitman for being a man of exultant contradictions, but this doesn’t let him pass as a champion of ecopoetry. The Modernists were the real moment when an ecopoetic conscience broke into US poetry, and I consider Wallace Stevens’ “The Snow Man” as its milestone. The physiology of this proto-hybrid creature – at the same time man and snow – allows “it” to see what is really there in a winter landscape, i.e., in his own words, the *nothing* that is there.

But I was looking for trees, in my attempt to retrace the development of US poets’ consciousness of the posthuman, and found Robert Frost’s tree soundscape, H.D.’s pear and William Carlos Williams’ winter trees – and it’s curious to note how winter seems to contribute repeatedly to the poets’ refraining from an unconscious, anthropocentric use of the pathetic fallacy. Lorine Niedecker’s friend tree must compete for survival with at least another natural agent, in the adumbrated sense of an ecosystem, whereas Denise Levertov’s later burgeoning awareness is fully within the realm of a co-inhabited environment, where sentience and language are represented as fully shared with the vegetable world. Merwin participates in the turn in nature poetry that some theorists identify as the manifest beginning of ecopoetry, that is, the awakening of an environmental consciousness in the Sixties as a product of its civil rights culture. His stance becomes polemic and political, his causes intersectional: endangered woods and victimized trees allude to the analogous predicament of Native American people, and talking trees give us back an image of the human as the cause of environmental disaster. The same culture sustains a former Beat and Buddhist poet, Gary Snyder, whose pine treetops are imbued with a “Zen understanding of existence through the pluralistic concepts of being, unity, time and knowledge” (Hernandez 2014, 2). The minimal language of his poem embodies the ecopoetic belief in the possibility of poetry to walk “that edge between what can be said and that which cannot be said” (Snyder 1980, 21). Snyder wants to “see *with* language,” so that it can lead us “back to unmediated direct

experience” (Snyder 1995, 174). Finally, Mary Oliver, with the ecocentric mysticism of her Cape Cod hymn book, is the most outstanding representative of contemporary US ecopoetry.³ In her works, she led a sustained reflection on language as a supposed marker of species divide, questioning its status as such, and envisioning a community of material beings and objects whose intra-active production of meaning makes the world a place in which it is worth living. Her trees, as her animals, are the guides to an ethical and happy way of living by listening, and caring, and feeling grateful. Jane Hirshfield learns in the same way from trees, both how to relate cognitively to the world: through our body, which partakes of the earth (blind) intelligence; and how to respond ethically to it: through resilience. Interestingly, in the small canon I was able to put together for the present purpose, the presence of women writers appears dominant, as if suggesting that a posthuman “horizontal thinking” may be gender-related.

I chose to translate or re-translate all these poems because I wanted to use an ecopoetic language, which might emphasize their bio- and ecocentric impact on the mind-body of the reader, and respond to the way we are finally assuming the cultural perspective of our being in the world in an unavoidably enmeshed relation of intra-actions with other creative material agents, contributing to the emergence of the meaning and fate of our existence. Moreover, I chose to re-write these texts for the sheer pleasure of writing poetry – particularly a poetry that expresses my same sense of physical belonging to an enchanted world that is alive with breaths and pulses, cries and voices, sensations, feelings, ideas and intentions.

³ Laird Christensen has called Mary Oliver’s a “pragmatic mysticism,” implying not only its material grounding, but also its engaging, and active, effect on the reader.

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

41

I robbed the Woods –
 The trusting Woods.
 The unsuspecting Trees
 Brought out their Burs and mosses
 My fantasy to please.
 I scanned their trinkets curious – I grasped – I bore away –
 What will the solemn Hemlock –
 What will the Oak tree say?

from *The Complete Poems* (Boston, Little Brown, 1960)

Ho derubato il Bosco –
 il Bosco fiducioso.
 Gli Alberi ignari
 hanno esibito Ricci e muschi
 per soddisfare la mia fantasia.
 Ho esaminato i ninnoli curiosa – preso – portato via –
 Cosa dirà l'Abete solenne?
 Cosa dirà la Quercia?

Robert Frost (1874-1963)

The Sound of Trees

I wonder about the trees.
 Why do we wish to bear
 Forever the noise of these
 More than another noise
 So close to our dwelling place?
 We suffer them by the day
 Till we lose all measure of pace,
 And fixity in our joys,
 And acquire a listening air.
 They are that that talks of going

But never gets away;
 And that talks no less for knowing,
 As it grows wiser and older,
 That now it means to stay.
 My feet tug at the floor
 And my head sways to my shoulder
 Sometimes when I watch trees sway,
 From the window or the door.
 I shall set forth for somewhere,
 I shall make the reckless choice
 Some day when they are in voice
 And tossing so as to scare
 The white clouds over them on.
 I shall have less to say,
 But I shall be gone.

from *Mountain Interval* (Henry Holt 1916; previously published in *The Atlantic Monthly*, August 1915)

Il suono degli alberi

Pensavo agli alberi.
 Perché desideriamo tollerare
 in eterno il loro rumore
 più di qualsiasi altro
 così vicino a dove abitiamo?
 Li sopportiamo di giorno
 finché non perdiamo ogni senso del ritmo,
 e della fissità delle nostre gioie,
 e assumiamo un'aria di ascolto.
 Sono quello che parla di andare
 e non va mai via;
 e non ne parla di meno sapendo,
 nel diventare saggio e vecchio,
 che adesso ha intenzione di stare.
 I piedi sollevano il suolo
 e la testa oscilla verso la spalla
 a volte se guardo oscillare gli alberi
 dalla finestra o dalla porta.
 Partirò per qualche parte
 farò la scelta incauta

un giorno che gridano forte
e si agitano per spaventare
le nubi bianche sopra di loro.
Avrò meno da dire
ma me ne sarò andato.

William Carlos Williams (1883-1963)

Winter Trees

All the complicated details
of the attiring and
the disattiring are completed!
A liquid moon
moves gently among
the long branches.
Thus having prepared their buds
against a sure winter
the wise trees
stand sleeping in the cold.

"Winter Trees" by William Carlos Williams, from *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams*, copyright ©1938 by New Directions Publishing Corp. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp.

Alberi d'inverno

Tutti i complicati riti
del vestirsi
e dello svestirsi sono compiuti!
Una luna liquida
si muove gentilmente tra
i lunghi rami.
Così, assicurati i germogli
contro un inverno certo
gli alberi saggi
dormono ritti nel freddo.

H. D. (1886-1961)

Pear Tree

Silver dust
 lifted from the earth,
 higher than my arms reach,
 you have mounted.
 O silver,
 higher than my arms reach
 you front us with great mass;

no flower ever opened
 so staunch a white leaf,
 no flower ever parted silver
 from such rare silver;

O white pear,
 your flower-tufts,
 thick on the branch,
 bring summer and ripe fruits
 in their purple hearts.

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Pero

Polvere d'argento
 sollevata da terra,
 più su delle mie braccia
 sei salita.
 O argento,
 più su delle mie braccia
 ci fronteggi in massa;

nessun fiore aprì mai
 una foglia bianca così forte,
 nessun fiore separò l'argento

da un argento così raro;

O pero bianco,
i tuoi ciuffi di fiori,
folti sul ramo,
portano l'estate e frutta matura
nei loro cuori viola.

Lorine Niedecker (1903-1970)

My friend tree
I sawed you down
but I must attend
an older friend
the sun

from *The Granite Pail* (North Point Press 1985)

Mio amico albero
ti ho abbattuto
ma devo servire
un amico più antico
il sole

Denise Levertov (1923-1997)

Aware

When I found the door
I found the vine leaves
speaking among themselves in abundant
whispers.
My presence made them
hush their green breath,
embarrassed, the way
humans stand up, buttoning their jackets,

acting as if they were leaving anyway, as if
 the conversation had ended
 just before you arrived.
 I liked
 the glimpse I had, though,
 of their obscure
 gestures. I liked the sound
 of such private voices. Next time
 I'll move like cautious sunlight, open
 the door by fractions, eavesdrop
 peacefully.

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Accorta

Quando trovai la porta
 trovai le foglie della vite
 che parlavano in sussurri
 abbondanti.
 La mia presenza zitti
 il loro respiro verde,
 nel modo imbarazzato
 in cui gli umani si alzano, abbottonano le giacche,
 e fanno finta di andarsene comunque, che
 avevano finito di parlare
 proprio prima del tuo arrivo.
 Che bello, però,
 il barlume che ho colto
 dei loro gesti oscuri. Che bello il suono
 di quelle voci private. La prossima volta
 mi muoverò come la luce cauta del sole,
 aprirò la porta a poco a poco, spierò
 pacificamente.

W. S. Merwin (1927-2019)

Native Trees

Neither my father nor my mother knew
the names of the trees
where I was born
what is that
I asked and my
father and mother did not
hear they did not look where I pointed
surfaces of furniture held
the attention of their fingers
and across the room they could watch
walls they had forgotten
where there were no questions
no voices and no shade

Were there trees
where they were children
where I had not been
I asked
were there trees in those places
where my father and my mother were born
and in that time did
my father and my mother see them
and when they said yes it meant
they did not remember
What were they I asked what were they
but both my father and my mother
said they never knew

from *The Rain in the Trees* (Alfred A. Knopf 1988)

Alberi indigeni

Né mio padre né mia madre sapevano
i nomi degli alberi
dove ero nato
cosa è quello

chiesi e mio
 padre e mia madre non
 sentirono non guardarono dove indicavo
 superfici di mobili attiravano
 l'attenzione delle loro dita
 e attraverso la stanza riuscivano a guardare
 muri che avevano dimenticato
 su cui non c'erano domande
 voci o ombre

C'erano alberi
 dove erano bambini
 dove non ero stato
 chiesi
 c'erano alberi in quei posti
 in cui mio padre e mia madre erano nati
 e a quel tempo mio padre e mia madre
 li vedevano
 e quando dissero sì voleva dire
 che non si ricordavano
 Che cosa erano chiesi che cosa erano
 ma sia mio padre sia mia madre
 dissero che non lo avevano mai saputo

The Last One

Well they'd made up their minds to be everywhere because why not.
 Everywhere was theirs because they thought so.
 They with two leaves they whom the birds despise.
 In the middle of stones they made up their minds.
 They started to cut.

Well they cut everything because why not.
 Everything was theirs because they thought so.
 It fell into its shadows and they took both away.
 Some to have some for burning.

Well cutting everything they came to water.
 They came to the end of the day there was one left standing.
 They would cut it tomorrow they went away.

The night gathered in the last branches.
The shadow of the night gathered in the shadow on the water.
The night and the shadow put on the same head.
And it said Now.

Well in the morning they cut the last one.
Like the others the last one fell into its shadow.
It fell into its shadow on the water.
They took it away its shadow stayed on the water.
Well they shrugged they started trying to get the shadow away.
They cut right to the ground the shadow stayed whole.
They laid boards on it the shadow came out on top.

They shone lights on it the shadow got blacker and clearer.
They exploded the water the shadow rocked.
They built a huge fire on the roots.
They sent up black smoke between the shadow and the sun.
The new shadow flowed without changing the old one.
They shrugged they went away to get stones.

They came back the shadow was growing.
They started setting up stones it was growing.
They looked the other way it went on growing.
They decided they would make a stone out of it.
They took stones to the water they poured them into the shadow.
They poured them in they poured them in the stones vanished.
The shadow was not filled it went on growing.
That was one day.

The next day was just the same it went on growing.
They did all the same things it was just the same.
They decided to take its water from under it.
They took away water they took it away the water went down.
The shadow stayed where it was before.
It went on growing it grew onto the land.

They started to scrape the shadow with machines.
When it touched the machines it stayed on them.
They started to beat the shadow with sticks.
Where it touched the sticks it stayed on them.
They started to beat the shadow with hands.

Where it touched the hands it stayed on them.
That was another day.

Well the next day started about the same it went on growing.
They pushed lights into the shadow.
Where the shadow got onto them they went out.
They began to stomp on the edge it got their feet.
And when it got their feet they fell down.
It got into eyes the eyes went blind.

The ones that fell down it grew over and they vanished.
The ones that went blind and walked into it vanished.
The ones that could see and stood still
It swallowed their shadows.
Then it swallowed them too and they vanished.
Well the others ran.

The ones that were left went away to live if it would let them.
They went as far as they could.
The lucky ones with their shadows.

from *The Lice* (Macmillan 1967)

L'ultimo

E così decisero di essere dappertutto e come no.
Dappertutto era di loro proprietà perché così credevano.
Quelli con due foglie quelli disprezzati dagli uccelli.
In mezzo alla pietre lo decisero.
Si misero a tagliare.

E così tagliarono tutto e come no.
Tutto era di loro proprietà perché così credevano.
Cadde dentro la sua ombra e li portarono via entrambi.
Un po' da tenere un po' da ardere.

E così a furia di tagliare tutto arrivarono all'acqua.
Arrivarono a fine giornata ne era rimasto in piedi solo uno.
L'avrebbero tagliato l'indomani se ne andarono.
La notte s'infittì fra gli ultimi rami.

L'ombra della notte s'infittì nell'ombra sull'acqua.
La notte e l'ombra infilarono la stessa chioma.
E disse Adesso.

E così al mattino tagliarono l'ultimo.
Come gli altri l'ultimo cadde dentro la sua ombra.
Cadde dentro la sua ombra sull'acqua.
Lo portarono via la sua ombra rimase sull'acqua.
E così scrollarono le spalle e provarono a rimuovere l'ombra.

Tagliarono rasoterra l'ombra rimase intatta.
Gli posarono sopra delle assi l'ombra rispuntò da sotto.
Gli passarono sopra delle luci l'ombra scurì e schiarì.
Fecero esplodere l'acqua l'ombra vibrò.
Accesero un enorme fuoco ai suoi piedi.
Fecero salire del fumo nero tra l'ombra e il sole.
La nuova ombra scaturiva senza toccare quella vecchia.
Scrollarono le spalle andarono a prendere delle pietre.

Tornarono l'ombra cresceva.
Si misero a sistemare le pietre cresceva.
Distolsero lo sguardo continuò a crescere.
Decisero di farne una pietra.
Portarono le pietre all'acqua le rovesciarono dentro l'ombra.
Ve le rovesciarono ve le rovesciarono le pietre scomparvero.
L'ombra non si saziò continuò a crescere.
Questo successe un giorno.

Il giorno dopo continuò a crescere tale e quale.
Fecero le stesse cose tali e quali.
Decisero di toglierle l'acqua da sotto.
Le tolsero l'acqua gliela tolsero l'acqua calò.
L'ombra rimase dov'era prima.
Continuò a crescere crebbe sulla terra.
Si misero a scalfire l'ombra con delle macchine.
Quando toccò le macchine vi rimase attaccata.
Si misero a picchiare l'ombra con dei bastoni.
Dove toccava i bastoni vi rimaneva attaccata.

Si misero a picchiare l'ombra con le mani.
Dove toccava le mani vi rimaneva attaccata.

Questo successe un altro giorno.

E così il giorno dopo iniziò tale e quale continuò a crescere.

Spinsero delle luci nell'ombra.

Lì dove l'ombra li raggiunse loro si spensero.

Cominciarono a pestarne il bordo gli arrivò ai piedi.

Quando gli arrivò ai piedi caddero.

Gli entrò negli occhi gli occhi si accecarono.

I caduti sopra i quali crebbe scomparvero.

Gli accecati che la varcarono scomparvero.

Dei vedenti rimasti in piedi immobili

Ingoiò le ombre.

Poi ingoiò anche loro e scomparvero.

E alla fine gli altri fuggirono.

I superstiti andarono a vivere altrove, se glielo permetteva.

Andarono il più lontano possibile.

I fortunati accompagnati dalle loro ombre.

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Gary Snyder (1930—)

Pine Tree Tops

in the blue night

frost haze, the sky glows

with the moon

pine tree tops

bend snow-blue, fade

into sky, frost, starlight.

the creak of boots.

rabbit tracks, deer tracks,

what do we know.

“Pine Tree Tops” by Gary Snyder, from TURTLE ISLAND, copyright ©1974 by Gary Snyder. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp.

Cime dei pini

nella notte blu
 foschia di gelo, il cielo brilla
 con la luna
 cime di pini
 si piegano blu-neve, sbiadiscono
 nel cielo, gelo, luce di stelle.
 lo scricchiolio di scarponi.
 tracce di conigli, tracce di cervi,
 cosa sappiamo.

Mary Oliver (1935-2019)

When I Am Among the Trees

When I am among the trees,
 especially the willows and the honey locust,
 equally the beech, the oaks and the pines,
 they give off such hints of gladness.
 I would almost say that they save me, and daily.
 I am so distant from the hope of myself,
 in which I have goodness, and discernment,
 and never hurry through the world
 but walk slowly, and bow often.
 Around me the trees stir in their leaves
 and call out, "Stay awhile."
 The light flows from their branches.
 And they call again, "It's simple," they say,
 "and you too have come
 into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled
 with light, and to shine."

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Quando sto tra gli alberi

Quando sto tra gli alberi,
 specialmente il salice e la robinia
 ma anche il faggio, le querce e i pini,
 diramano tali segni di gioia.
 Direi che mi salvano, e quotidianamente.
 Sono così lontana dallo sperare di me,
 di avere bontà, e discernimento,
 e non attraversare il mondo di corsa
 ma camminare piano, e inchinarmi spesso.
 Attorno a me gli alberi muovono le foglie
 e mi richiamano: "Fermati per un momento."
 La luce scorre dai rami.
 E chiamano ancora, "È semplice", dicono,
 "anche tu sei venuta
 al mondo per questo: andar piano, esser riempita
 di luce, e brillare".

Jane Hirshfield (1953-)

Optimism

More and more I have come to admire resilience.
 Not the simple resistance of a pillow, whose foam
 returns over and over to the same shape, but the sinuous
 tenacity of a tree: finding the light newly blocked on one side,
 it turns in another. A blind intelligence, true.
 But out of such persistence arose turtles, rivers,
 mitochondria, figs – all this resinous, unretractable earth.

"Optimism", by Jane Hirshfield, from *GIVEN SUGAR, GIVEN SALT* (NY: HarperCollins, 2001) ©Jane Hirshfield. Used by permission of the author, all rights reserved.

Ottimismo

Ho imparato ad ammirare la resilienza.
 Non la semplice resistenza di un cuscino, la cui schiuma
 torna sempre alla stessa forma, ma la sinuosa

tenacia di un albero: trova la luce bloccata da un nuovo lato
e si volta dall'altro. Un'intelligenza cieca, è vero.
Ma da questa persistenza sono venute le tartarughe, i fiumi,
i mitocondri, i fichi – tutta questa resinosa, irrimediabile terra.

Within this Tree

Within this tree
another tree
inhabits the same body;
within this stone
another stone rests,
its many shades of grey
the same,
its identical
surface and weight.
And within my body,
another body,
whose history, waiting,
sings: *there is no other body*,
it sings,
there is no other world.

“Within This Tree”, by Jane Hirshfield, from *THE OCTOBER PALACE* (NY: HarperCollins, 1994)
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Dentro questo albero

Dentro questo albero
un altro albero
abita lo stesso corpo;
dentro questo sasso
un altro sasso riposa,
le molte sfumature di grigio
le stesse,
identici
la superficie e il peso.
E dentro il mio corpo,

un altro corpo,
 la cui storia, in attesa,
 canta; *non c'è un altro corpo*,
 canta,
non c'è un altro mondo.

Cynthia Zarin (1959-)

Birch

Bone-spur, stirrup of veins—white colt
 a tree, sapling bone again, worn to a splinter,
 a steeple, the birch aground

in its ravine of leaves. Abide with me, arrive
 at its skinned branches, its arms pulled
 from the sapling, your wrist taut,

each ganglion a gash in the tree's rent
 trunk, a child's hackwork, love plus love,
 my palms in your fist, that

trio a trident splitting the birch, its bark
 papyrus, its scars calligraphy,
 a ghost story written on

winding sheets, the trunk bowing, *dead is*
my father, the birch reading the news
 of the day aloud as if we hadn't

heard it, the root moss lit gas,
 like the veins on your ink-stained hand—
 the birch all elbows, taking us in.

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Betulla

Sperone d'osso, staffa di vene – puledro bianco
 un albero, osso di nuovo adolescente, limato a una scheggia,
 una guglia, la betulla in secca

nella sua gola di foglie. Resta con me, arriva
 ai rami spelati, le braccia staccate
 dall'albero giovane, il tuo polso teso,

ogni ganglio un fiotto nel tronco
 strappato dell'albero, arte infantile, amore più amore,
 le mie palme nel tuo pugno, quel

trio un tridente che spacca la betulla, la corteccia
 papiro, le cicatrici calligrafia,
 una storia di fantasmi scritta su

fogli tortuosi, il tronco arcuato, *morto*
 è *mio padre*, la betulla legge le notizie
 del giorno a voce alta come se non le avessimo

sentite, il gas del muschio alla radice acceso
 come le vene sulla tua mano macchiata di inchiostro –
 la betulla tutta gomiti, che ci cattura.

Christian Wiman (1966-)

Hard Night

What words or harder gift
 does the light require of me
 carving from the dark
 this difficult tree?

What place or farther peace
 do I almost see
 emerging from the night
 and heart of me?

The sky whitens, goes on and on.
Fields wrinkle into rows
of cotton, go on and on.
Night like a fling of crows
disperses and is gone.

What song, what home,
what calm or one clarity
can I not quite come to,
never quite see:
this field, this sky, this tree.

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Notte dura

Quali parole, o dono più duro
mi richiede la notte
scolpendo nel buio
questo albero difficile?

Quale posto o pace ulteriore
vedo quasi
emergere dalla *mia* notte
e cuore?

Il cielo sbianca, e va avanti.
I campi si increspano in filari
di cotone, e vanno avanti.
La notte, come un volo di corvi,
si disperde e sparisce.

A quale canto, quale casa,
quale calma o singola chiarezza
non riesco ad arrivare davvero,
a vedere mai:
questo campo, questo cielo, questo albero.

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