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Book Review: Paroles d'Arbres

Hélène Ducros

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Paroles d'Arbres

By Ernst Zürcher

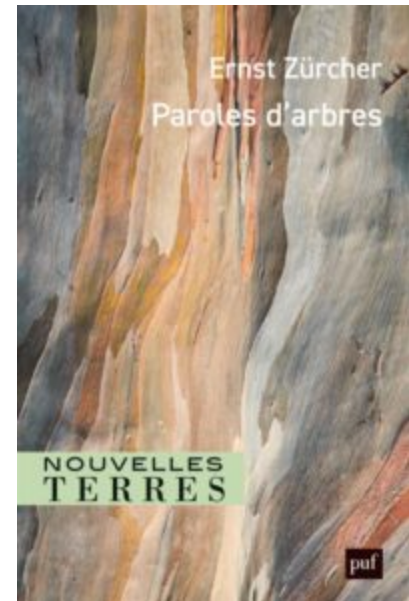
Publisher: Presses Universitaires de France

Recommended by **Hélène B. Ducros**

Ernst Zürcher is a renowned botanist and forest science expert. However, in *Paroles d'Arbres*, rather than to our scientific rationality, it is to our senses and emotions that he appeals, as he invites us to open up to our relationship with trees. In this original collection of short texts by an array of authors, Zürcher uses a humanistic approach to expose the many ways in which trees matter to people, as he delves into how the different bonds individuals form with the arboreal world are triggered and developed from the time of their childhood through all stages and conditions of their lives. Part reflective journal, poetic fantasy, and environmental critique,

Zürcher's book amplifies the voices of trees, which only some people hear as distinctly as do the contributors featured in the volume. In unveiling some specific relationships people have fostered with trees—whether individual trees or “communities of trees” (i.e., forests)—the essays gathered here help us understand that to fully grasp the treeworld, humans must first become aware of their own emotions and of what that world reveals about humanity, societies, and individuals.

The testimonies in the volume sort out the myriad ways trees are significant to humans; and ultimately the collection seeks to help humans rebuild their link with nature and with their own genealogy in order to forge their (better) future. The book makes clear that the scientific approach gains when complemented by a focus on lived experiences in arboreal contexts, real or imagined, which may help in repairing the modern disconnect between humans and the Cosmos. Listening to and hearing trees thus allows us to unveil the invisible, the unseizable, and the unquantifiable, and enables us to fully recruit our subconscious to rebuild our bond with nature. Trees in turn are the “pillars of our lives,” symbols of time passing, frameworks for the banal quotidian, mirrors for human dances, symbols of special occasions, and sources of dreams and remembrances of familiar places and elsewhere. As we attempt to close the gap between the vegetal and human worlds, trees provide us with inspiration, self-healing, self-realization, strength, joy, and love, but also sadness in the face of decline, decay, suffering, and damage (some of which we suffer and some of which we inflict). At once intimate and introspective and spectacular and charismatic, treeworlds impose a slower rhythm upon our lives, serving as a remedy against restlessness and



solitude. Zürcher's inspiring pages convey that communicating with trees is a two-way process. When seeing trees as spiritual beings with a conscience and envisaging our relationship with trees as a collaboration, we then can connect to invisible worlds below and above, to both the infinitesimally small and the infinite, as well as to worlds that came before us and will come after us.

Published on November 21, 2023.