

Tall Trees Short Stories

by Dr Gabriel Hemery

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gabrielhemery.com/portfolio/tall-trees-short-stories-vol-20/

Review by Robin Walter (June 2020)

(Free ebook download in return for a review)

Gabriel Hemery combines his wide silvological knowledge and his roving imagination in this fascinating collection of writings about trees. Well not exactly *about* trees, but featuring trees, seeds, roots, forest creatures, memories of trees.

This collection contains 30 pieces, some just a page of poetry, others extended narratives with chapters, linking to other pieces. They form a haphazard arc across myth, sci-fi, parable, auto-biography, even songs, covering a kaleidoscopic review of attitudes to trees – both worshipful and destructive, poetic and utilitarian.

Many of the pieces adopt a non-human narrative voice, and this is one to their strengths – they are glimpses into and around the world of trees and combine to offer a multi-faceted vision. In the Author's Note, he remarks on the task of assembling disparate fragments of trees into 'a coherent body . . . moving readers to see your entirety with tears of joy and wonder'.

For example, one of my favourite pieces was *Eye to Eye*, where the narrative progresses down the food chain from human through predators to insects and plants, viewing the unfolding scene from each perspective in turn, imagining their nested lives and revealing their interactions.

There are quirky stories set in a war cabinet as the elms try to resist the invading beetles; memoirs of a bonsai tree looking back over 500 years of Japanese history; the human body re-imagined as landscape and forest; and not least a delightful surprise for Steely Dan fans.

In an autobiographical passage, the author remarks: 'Fiction has the power to transcend beliefs, change behaviours, disrupt norms', and this he does by presenting our relationships with trees in such a variety of guises, some familiar, some shocking, some ecstatic.

Included here is 'The Man Who Harvested Trees (And Gifted Life)', a beautifully written story which picks up Jean Giorno's classic and completes it from a forester's perspective, ranging across generations, the 'slowest of relays', to show 'the collective, multitudinous, and diverse nature of the forest as a whole'.

I recommend this book: those who love trees will see them in several new lights; those who like stories will find a rich array of narratives.