

Tree Spirits: Tales and Encounters

Heather Preston

Heather Preston, Illustrator

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"When trees, once intensely worshipped, become regarded as mere matter or just so many board feet of lumber, a profound change has taken place in human consciousness," writes author and artist Heather Preston. "Something held to be precious has been lost. The sacred trees are no longer valued as living, conscious beings with spirits of their own. The voice and vital hum of life inherent in all things ... is silenced, soulless."

Preston, a graduate of The Art Institute of Chicago and the recipient of numerous awards for her illustrations, is a long-time student of cross-cultural spirituality and has traveled widely, recording what she learned in words and sketches. Her book, *Tree Spirits*, fifteen years in the making, is a call to awaken to the spiritual essence of all that lives. Sensitive conceived and beautifully illustrated, it was awarded the Silver Finalist Medal in the 2010 Indie Books Awards.

Preston takes readers on a journey deep into the heart of history, myth, and religion to trace mankind's relationship to the natural world from its animistic past, when it was believed that all things in nature have souls or consciousness; through its adoption of polytheism, which ascribed the forces of nature to many different gods that required worship; through monotheism with its one male God; to the present day, when most of the natural world is thought to be devoid of spirit—composed simply of material objects to be used or abused according to the whims of humans.

Seeing in this so-called "progress" a profound loss, both for the soul of humanity and for the natural world, Preston reconnects us to what once was a deeply-felt reverence for, and feeling of connection with, all of life. Lacking this, she writes, humanity becomes "mistrustful and coldly estranged, cut off from the great scheme of things," and life becomes less complete, less satisfying, and less joyful.

In heartfelt, conversational prose and 173 exquisite illustrations, in both black and white and full color, Preston recalls the time when people "spoke" with trees, saw their spirits, and honored them as healers and sustainers of life. She tells the tales of wise men and women throughout the ages who knew how to listen for the messages of the plant kingdom, as some still do, and how they used that wisdom to restore health and vitality.

A celebration of the spirit of life inherent in nature and a reminder that humankind is a part of a complex, interdependent web of existence, *Tree Spirits* affirms that, even today, "wherever a single soul reaches out across the unseen to make a connection, it happens."

KRISTINE MORRIS (May 3, 2012)

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