

Treeing: What Remains of a Pilgrim

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Fine Arts in Digital + Media in the Department of Digital + Media of the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island

by

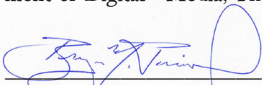
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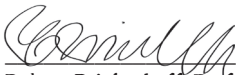
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Abstract:

Myths and legends have existed since the start of human civilization, but now we can only imagine a world full of wonders from our ancestor's scripts. What if we could go back to the age of myths and magic? Would we see things differently?

In *Treeing: What Remains of a Pilgrim*, I propose a fictional book with 15 short myths of humans transformed into trees. The stories combine my own imagination with inspiration from real mythologies. In the annotations of each story, an unnamed person is following the myths as guidance and manuals, one by one, trying to bring them into reality with their own body.

We begin with a preface and introduction by an imagined editor who has found the book of myths and is planning to publish it. The second part is the book itself with the hand-written annotations. Lastly, there is a glossary and bibliography.

Multilayered in its storytelling approach, this book is an invitation to look into your own understanding of myths and folklore, and root yourself back in the most sublime imaginations of nature.



TREEING:
WHAT REMAINS
OF A PILGRIM



*All mirages have their
original objects.*

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Become a Tree: Myths
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PREFACE

I have a passion for collecting old books, and I stumbled across a unique one. My friend bought this book from a country bookseller, who knew neither its author, title, or date.

According to the seller,

he dug the book out of the soil, therefore some of the pages were torn. But even though some contents were missing, I was deeply attracted by the words and the bewildering stories.

The book is called *Becoming a Tree: Myths in*

Four Regions. It is a compilation of myths about people becoming trees in four ambiguous regions. No specific times or locations are recorded in the text, only the stories.

If that were all that it's about, I would lock it in my Wunderkammer of old books like all the

other ones. But there are many annotations written inside - in them, I see a person following the myths as guidance and manuals, word by word, trying to bring them into reality.

The annotator was wandering in the ethe-

real waves of the pages, like a pilgrim, devoutly pursuing the gods that may not be true.

Myths to them (there is no clue in the book to find out the annotator's gender) were not merely stories from a distance. They were, instead, re-

garded as actual experiences found throughout the land. If the stories were more real than the reality, then can the reality be more deceptive than the story? When did they start? Why would they want to become a tree in the first place?

Maybe they no longer remember anymore. In the annotation for *The Bird Lover*, they mentioned: "This scene (birds come and go) puzzles me, I cannot tell if I'm awake or in a dream, standing in vain or have become part of the forest."

If everything will eventually settle into a dream-like memory, then maybe truth or falsehood never really matters, and what remains are only the stories.

They practiced these stories meticulously. In the annotations for the

story *Willow God in the Heart of the Lake*, they went to the middle of the lake at different times of the day. At midnight, they felt "the ambience in the air is different" and they seemed to "smell the growth of branches and leaves."

These feelings could be illusions or hallucinations. But they are real to them at the moment. I cannot help but imagine: What would I see if I lived in the age of myths and magic? The age where most people believe in strange forces, ghosts and gods? The age

where all inexplicable things are told as stories?

These stories reverberate in the world like the oldest songs. Truths are mythological beasts in ancient classics, attracting all the ambitious hunters.

The annotator is a romantic person. They be-

lieve that there are fishes swimming in rocks and will stand overnight in the forest without sleeping to follow a story. Their imagination is like birds flying in the mountains, but their practice is like an ox cultivating in the ground.

I would like to meet this person if I have the chance. These pages are unique windows opening onto vistas that represent an elusively beautiful world. So I compiled and published it, to show more people this devoted annotator who was faithfully making a pil-

grimage to a mirage.

After all, every mirages
have their original objects.

INTRODUCTION

Some part of the book is not in very good condition. While reading, I have made many assumptions about what the missing words might be from the existing text and the annotations. But I don't want my guess to

mislead people and block their imaginations. Thus, all the torn pages and blurred words remain the same.

Although most of the myths and folklore are not tales that I have heard before, most of them have some traces to

follow. Interestingly, many of them seems to related to the Chinese text, *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*. Which is an ancient record of a compilation of mythic geography and beasts. All my speculations are listed in the page notes, with evidence and references.

And just a few words
before you start:

*What you are holding
now is a storybook, also a
manual, and a tunnel to-
wards a hidden world.*

*Your imagination is the
soil, the air, the habitat of all
deadwood and new shoots.*

BECOME A TREE:

*Myths in Four
Regions*

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NORTHERN LAKES ¹

Willow God in the Heart of the Lake

Once a person was fishing in the middle of the lake day by day, sitting still like a statue. Gradually, his reflection turned into a weeping willow.

With his breath, the willow branches absorbed the nutrients in the lake and the roots became one with his veins.

People worshiped him, and the willow trees became lusher and lusher, bringing vitality to the lake.

Found a small Lake nearby.

Sat on the raft in the lake for 3 days with a rod

Midnight on the third day, my reflection seemed to be swaying, even though I didn't move

The ambiance in the air is different, I seem to smell the growth of branches and leaves.

Day 4, no change

Day 5, Dawn to dusk, my reflection was still human.

Day 6, Noon to midnight, the surroundings were quiet, and the center of the lake to the entire area became different, cold, from atmosphere to color.

Day 7, no change

Spring Tree

In Spring, during the sunset when clouds pass through the branches, that tree will become the friend you are thinking of from afar.

Those who

Conjuration? Di

The Twin Trees

Among the Northern Lakes grow many trees in pairs. Their branches entwined like hugging people.

The twin trees were not two trees in the first place. Travelers who are tired of trekking will

find a tree with the blessing of the divine bird to settle down. They hug the tree. After one day, if the tree agrees, they will start to root and grow out twigs, and eventually turn into a tree.

a Three-Legged Raven

Need a tree with 10 branches

SOUTHERN MOUNTAINS

The Mayfly Tribe

In ancient records, there is a type of people who live only seven days like mayflies. They live together under a big tree, and the deeds of

7
their ancestors are densely engraved on it.

After death, these people will turn into leaves on the tree. Thus the leaves are extremely lush and will never fall.

The tree is preserving the souls of the whole tribe...

The Bird Lover

There is a record: A girl loved birds, and she used her body to lure birds to perch. In the end, she turned into a tree and hid in the forest.

Dawn or Dusk

Birds won't stay.
Even I put grains on my
body.

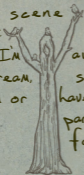
Suspend all thoughts and
believe:

I AM A TREE



Day 6: Birds come and go,
come and go, come and go.

This scene puzzles
me, I cannot
tell if I'm awake or
in a dream, standing
in vain or have become
part of the
forest.



The Three-Legged Raven

A leaning Mulberry tree is growing in the valley on the Southern Mountains, and a three-legged raven rests on it.

The Raven flies out every day and will bless those trees that have ten

branches.



*Might be relevant to
The Twin Trees*

The Tree Tribe

In the mountains there is a tribe where people who are born as human will grow up to become tree-beings: with the trunk of a tree and a human face.

As they approach death they will turn in-

to trees completely.

P16. People that are holding ceremony for tree transformation.

P17. Illustration for people in the Tree Tribe.



a cow head, a moon
and a sun



a star



Special Rods: Star, Sun, Moon

The Peach Forest

All Peachtrees on the Southern Mountains were once a giant. He raced with the sun and died.

His body turned into a peach forest.

This is beautiful. I'm not a giant but still, I ran to the west during sunset until I was exhausted.

I didn't think I could race the sun, but I felt nearer to the hero.

REGIONS BEYOND
THE SEA

Tree Monk

The elders once recorded that there was a monk who practiced Zen in front of an ancient tree. He looked at the tree every day, and eventually, his flesh became

nourishment for the tree.

A traveler who had passed by this place came back and cried bitterly when he learned that the monk had passed away, but the monk's voice came out from the tree.

Only then did he learn that the monk's soul and

the tree have merged into one, and will live on in the tree for thousands of years.

I will try this when
I'm reaching the end
of my life.

The Dreamer

Someone beyond the sea dreamed that he was a tree, and woke up finding that he had really become a tree.

I never had this kind of dream.

How did he know that he is no longer in dreams?

The Under-Water Forest

The deity beyond the sea is named Nemus and his body is a tree. He grows at the junction of land and sea. A wish will be granted to those who see him.

It is also recorded that if

the wishes were beyond his ability, he would turn the person into a tree at the bottom of the sea.

What if you wish to become a tree?

Found a Place that connects the land, sea and forest, but no special tree here

NEMUS is NOT near a forest.

The Laurel

Laurel trees grow on a silvery-white land. They are very lonely, so all creatures that come here will be turned into a Laurel tree by its magic.

That's why there is a laurel forest.

sea, desert at night
Moon?

THE GREAT WILDERNESS

Tree Ritual

All trees in the golden forest were once human.

Tribes who live in the Great Wilderness will pick a gifted youth each year to complete the tree

ritual.

Which is:

Use special liquor for the offering; find the fish swimming in the stone for the Major Sacrifice; for the pendant of the animal of white color, use a single round jade; perform the tree dance.



the stone is on the hill?



I found a pond with many stones, but none of them have a fish in it.



The special liquor might be related to wind or put at a place with wind.



Hexagram 10 (Lü)

Wine in glass on the hill;
stone with engraved fish;
Rabbit; Dance like a tree
grows, Failed

Wine in glass on the
hill; fish in a stone cup;
Sheep; Dance like a tree
grows, Failed

From the tree?

29

Man of Straw

This is very old witchcraft: Facing a tree, stick three leaves on the head, stand like a scarecrow in the first ray of sunshine - there is a certain probability to become attached to the tree.

Distance: ~~1 cubit~~ ~~2 cubit~~

~~3 cubit~~

Tree of Clay

A girl sat by a river and made a small tree with yellow clay everyday. One day, her clay tree was so real that her body suddenly turned into a puff of smoke and disappeared into the tree. Then the clay tree began

to take root and sprouted life.

Clay + Soul of human = Tree

The yellow clay might be made of soil mixed with water in the river.

||||| ||| ||| ||| ||| ||| ||| ||| |||
 ||| ||| ||| ||| ||| ||| ||| ||

Give up at 82 trees

NOTES TO PAGES

Northern Lakes

o. The name of each region are similiar from the Chinese text, *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*. Which includes: Southern Mountains; Western Mountains; Northern Mountains; East-

ern Mountains; Central Mountains; Region Beyond the Seas: The South, The West, The North, East; Region Within the Seas: The South, The West, The North, East; The Great Wilderness: The South, The West, The North, East.

4. The Twin Trees and the following one (*Three-legged Raven*) are related and should be viewed together. The origin of the Twin Trees is very likely to be the tree Fusang. In *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*, Fusang are two Mulberry trees

leaning together, and is
*"where the ten suns are
 bathed."* The suns are all
 Three-Legged Ravens,
 according to the text,
*"Nine suns occupy its
 lower branches, and
 one sun occupies its
 topmost branch."*

Southern Mountains

12. Following the record
 of Fusang, there were
 ten Three-Legged Ravens
 as ten suns. But nine
 of them were killed
 because they went out
 together and brought
 disaster to the earth. The
 Raven's action of *"bless*

those trees that have ten branches" might be because that it's hoping the other nine siblings become alive again.

18. Story of The Peach Forest is also very similar to a text from *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*: "Boast Father raced with the sun and ran

with the setting sun....Before he reached it, he fell parched on the way and he died. He abandoned his stick there and it changed into Climpton Forest."









Regions beyond the sea

25. In Greek mytholo-

gy, Daphne turned into a laurel tree to avoid the love from Apollo. In Chinese mythology, the laurel trees grow on the moon.

26. Some of the characters from the **Tree Ritual** is the Oracle bone script, the meanings of

them are:

	Sacrifice		Stone
	Drink		Fish
	Wind		Water
	Hill		White



Beast



Dance



Shelter



Tree



Woods

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