

Trespass

My first reaction was to the tents themselves, as if through their own exertions they had perched here on their spindly poles; their monotone, angled shapes marked them apart from the forest. To see them on my land felt like a tectonic shift in my reality – which, in fact, it turned out to be.

Despite my best efforts with the trespassing ignoramus, who turned out to be my new neighbour, the yelling got truly out of hand over a tree.

I asked what he was planning on doing for the tree he'd taken a hatchet to, carving off chunks of bark almost all the way round like some demented beaver.

Nothing, he said, it's just a pine. (It's a sugar maple, but that's an aside...) – What do you want me to do, buy you a seedling?

Some rural-dwellers are, in effect, pagans (and some are proper Pagans); but many, such as my new neighbour, are displaced consumers, consuming – directly, indiscriminately and carelessly – forest. He has no inkling of partnership between humans and the rest of the nature we protect from other humans (and that protects us, in turn). What's the point of moving to the forest if you're not going to treat it as the sentient ecosystem it is, but as a backdrop for your life without regard for the lives already there? After all, it's inconvenient here. You will be disappointed at what passes for road maintenance, at the power grid and its vulnerability to branches, and at the absence of public transportation. If you want to live an uncomplicated, human-

centred life, best to stay in the human-centred city. That's what they're there for.

Environmentalists talk about helping humans bond with nature by getting them 'out there' to connect, therefore encouraging that love that leads to protection of nature. The problem with this plan is that it leaves intact the frame learned and enforced by living in the city: the privileging of humans and our endeavours over the natural world. This plan has turned out to be dangerous. Nature is no safer from my new neighbour than from the frackers and loggers who come out here to take what they consider to be 'our natural resources'. My new neighbour is trying to take over space – space that, like the explorers, venturists and colonists before him, he wrongly considers empty of life and will of its own.

Non-human nature knows best how to self-perpetuate, and is safer without any of us out here. But if the cost of protecting acres of forest is to lose a portion of each parcel to human habitation, then surely it matters how the humans handle the balance of the land they cohabit – that they realize that life is a co-creation with their land. Nature is safer if this particular type of urban consumer stays in the cities they have chosen to make their homes.

The sugar maple and I are in discussion about the best course of action forward. So far we agree it includes training in respectful opening to the voices of the natural world before being set loose with sharp objects. ■

Lisa A McLoughlin

About the author

Lisa is a Pagan and land activist living off-grid in Northfield, MA, USA. She has a PhD in Science and Technology Studies.

Citation

McLoughlin LA (2020) Trespass. *The Ecological Citizen* 4: 9.

Keywords

Ecological empathy; nature

Show your support for ecocentrism by signing the Statement of Commitment to Ecocentrism at <http://is.gd/ecocentrism>