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Esther Sánchez-Pardo and
Maria Porrás Sánchez, eds.

MYTH AND
ENVIRONMENTALISM

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The volume *Myth and Environmentalism: Arts of Resilience for a Damaged Planet* (2024), edited by Esther Sánchez-Pardo and Maria Porrás Sánchez, is part of the Routledge Explorations in Environmental Studies series, which includes collections such as *Satire, Humor, and Environmental Crises* (2023) and *UN Human Rights Institutions and the Environment* (2023), among others.

This particular volume examines how culture and science intertwine with the fields of environmental studies and myth. By navigating how myth, environmentalism, and the arts intersect, the editors propose points of view with which readers can reflect on the need to repair humanity's relationship with the world. The introduction written by Sánchez-Pardo illustrates just how connected the fields of environment and myth can be—constantly expanding as social notions of nature shift throughout space and time, as evidenced by the changing and differing definitions of terms such as “environment,” “natural,” “narrative,” “myth,” and “fiction.” For instance, she quotes folklore scholar Elliot Oring's view that “narrative” is but another term for “story,” while Sánchez-Pardo also explains that the terms “myth” and “fiction” are today often interchanged.² At the core of her introduction is a call for environmental education and literacy that recognizes the diversity of environmental perspectives and knowledges across the globe, including those in

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² Sánchez-Pardo and Sánchez, 2.

Arctic, Mi'kmaq, Caribbean, Brazilian, Moroccan, Ukrainian, and Japanese contexts. The emphasis on the importance of the environment in myth and culture worldwide marks the tone of the essays within the volume: one of urgency and possibility amidst the very real ecological crises that the human and nonhuman world face.

Myth and Environmentalism is divided into three parts. The first, “Myth, disaster, and present-day views on ecological damage,” deals with apocalyptic and postapocalyptic narratives. In chapter one, Haley Laurila examines the apocalyptic nature of the 1986 Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant explosion and the 39-km Zone of Exclusion that serves as its postapocalyptic terrain, as well as the possible futures this environment holds. Laurila also explores the Soviet cultural mythologies and environmental exploitation that surrounded the idea of nuclear power and eventually led to the fall of the Soviet Union, including that of the “peaceful atom.” The notion of peaceful nuclear culture was touted as necessary for the betterment of societies such as the Polissian communities, which were primarily made up of farmers who held deep cultural roots to the land and developed spiritual beliefs surrounding nuclear power. The author suggests that “ecological literacy, one that prepares us for postapocalyptic living,”³ through an intimate knowledge of landscape rather than a dependence on dominant narratives, is crucial if we are to survive possible future apocalyptic events. The volume’s second chapter, on the other hand, includes readings of maternal and postapocalyptic narratives of the Anthropocene by authors Claire Vaye Watkins and Diane Cook. By fleshing out the concepts of “wilderness” and the “good” mother, Hope Jennings and Christine Junker argue that both authors “come up against the limits and impossibilities of fulfilling traditional roles of motherhood in a world determined by ecological collapse and mass species extinction.”⁴

The second part of *Myth and Environmentalism*, “Indigenous and Afro-diasporic myths and ecological knowledge,” features three chapters that encourage readers to consider environmental issues from a global context. Chapter three looks at the Inuit perspective and cultural memory with regards to global warming; Sonja Ross writes that the extensive knowledge the Inuit have of their environment has been scientifically challenged and proven, leading to greater respect for what have been termed “traditional knowledge” (TK) and “traditional ecological knowledge” (TEK), and allowing for their integration into the typically acceptable “Western” natural sciences. Chapter four illustrates the ecological knowledge and worldview of the Indigenous L’sitkuk through the writings of Mi’kmaw poet shalan joudry, and Chapter five examines the link between Afrodiasporic spirituality, myth, and the oceanic environment as portrayed in various comics such as those by Marvel and DC.

The third and last part of *Myth and Environmentalism*, “Artistic practices, myth, and environmental resilience,” is composed of four chapters that approach the topic of ecological mythmaking through various media. In chapter six, Esther Lezra and Sánchez-Pardo analyze the works of Baptiste Debret and Antônio Parreiras, artists

³ Sánchez-Pardo and Sánchez, 58.

⁴ Sánchez-Pardo and Sánchez, 64.

who depicted the land and people of Brazil, in relation to two questions: “why the mythologization of life in the tropics produces alternative modernities” and “why institutions and practices erected by the colonial machinery promote ways of seeing which distort land and nature.”⁵ Chapter seven is a deep dive into the waste-related work of Moroccan visual artist Mohamed Larbi Rahhali, in which, as María Porrás Sánchez and Lhoussain Simour argue, “the imbrications of myth are conveyed through the notion of *baraka* (“divine blessing”), not understood as a singular myth but as the mythic fabric of Moroccan spirituality and social life.”⁶ In Chapter eight, Keijiro Suga dissects the mythmaking work of artist Maki Ohkojima and her guiding principle that “death gives life” with respect to Japanese mythology. Chapter nine, the last in the volume, is an intimate account by Jeanette Hart-Mann of her personal process and perspective as an environmentally conscious artist. She writes, “Being an artist is akin to being a farmer; for both, critical and creative inquiry are woven into embodied interdisciplinary labor with the intention to cultivate a kind of nourishment in the world.”⁷

Myth and Environmentalism calls attention to the myriad ways readers can address environmental issues and ecological crises through myth, narrative, and art. Each chapter offers fresh, interdisciplinary perspectives, in terms of the medium of art used or the culture in which it is rooted. The terms Sánchez-Pardo mentions in her introduction, such as “myth” and “fiction,” are repeatedly dismantled and rebuilt with each chapter, offering strategies through which humans might be able to restore or preserve their relationship with nature and the planet either by recognizing indigenous TK and TEK, supporting ecologically-informed art of their own and others’ cultures, and creating participatory art as allies of planetary change.

Incorporating methodologies from fields such as ecocriticism, Anthropocene studies, new materialism, and postcolonialism, *Myth and Environmentalism* is a volume that would be of definite value to scholars and students already interested in the environmental humanities. However, activists and casual readers could also find meaning in the collection; at its simplest, *Myth and Environmentalism* demonstrates that cultural stories and the art that branches out from them have much to contribute to personal and global efforts to encourage environmentally engaged and committed communities. □

⁵ Sánchez-Pardo and Sánchez, 153.

⁶ Sánchez-Pardo and Sánchez, 181.

⁷ Sánchez-Pardo and Sánchez, 231.