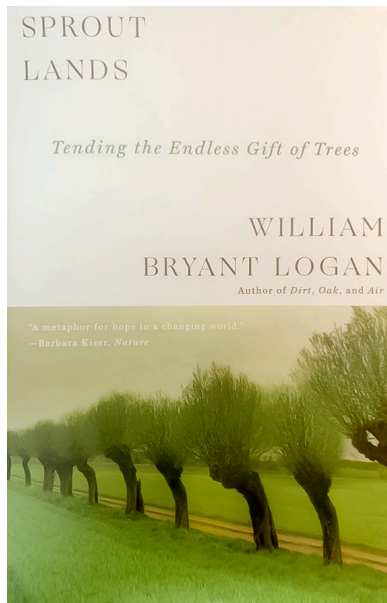


Sprout Lands – Tending the Endless Gifts of Trees.

William Bryant Logan.
 W.W. Norton & Company. 2020
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William Bryant Logan is a prolific author having already published three acclaimed books on the natural world, *Dirt: The Ecstatic Skin of the earth*, *Air: The restless Shaper of the World* and *Oak: The Frame of Civilisation*. Any subject he tackles is well researched and presented in a very accessible fashion. William is a practising arborist and works at the faculty of the New York Botanical Gardens. He is President of Urban Arborists, Inc., a Brooklyn-based tree company and he lives in Brooklyn. He has won numerous Quill and Trowel Awards from the Garden Writers of America and won a 2012 Senior Scholar Award from the New York State chapter of the International Society of Arborists. He also won an NEH grant to translate *Calderon de la Barca*. His book *Dirt*, was made into an award-winning documentary. The same filmmakers are currently planning a documentary made from *Air*.

In this book he argues that in the past farmers and rural people knew how to prune hazel to foster abundance: both of edible nuts and straight, strong, flexible rods for bridges, walls and baskets. Townspeople thinned their beeches to make charcoal to fuel ironworks. Shipwrights shaped oaks to make hulls. No place could prosper

without its inhabitants knowing how to coppice and pollard their trees so they would sprout again.

Pruning the trees didn't destroy them. Rather, it created the healthiest, most sustainable and diverse woodlands that we have ever known. "Eighty percent of the trees in a leafy forest are not virgins from seed, but experienced sprouts" the author recounts. He offers us practical knowledge about how to live with trees to mutual benefit and hopes that humans may again learn what the persistence and generosity of trees can teach. He seeks to recover the lost tradition that sustained human life and culture for ten millennia. He offers us practical knowledge about how to live with trees to mutual benefit and hopes that human beings may again learn what persistence and generosity trees can teach.

His first lesson in tree's persistence was at the Metropolitan Museum of Art on Fifth Avenue in New York when he planted 92 London planes which were 40-foot-tall and trained and trimmed like architectural pieces. He went to look at them covered in snow and began to panic. But he need not have worried for the trees had what he described "persistence" and recovered over time. He was a student of Alex Shigo, a scientist at the USDA and the guru who changed the way we prune. He did for trees what 15th & 16th century anatomists did for the human body, he discovered the branch collar which was there to defend the tree from damage, if we made our pruning cuts to the collar all would be well. But he argues deep in Shigo's teaching lay a prejudice, he worked for the Forest Service and his job was to produce clean timber.

He argues strongly for coppicing and gives the example of Iberia where it gave good wood, charcoal, vines, cork, ink, sweeteners and fat pork. Similarly, in West Africa it created a times system of agriculture that gave lumber, grain and vegetables and renewed the forest. He gives examples from Japan, Norway, Sweden and the Basque region on how useful pollarding and coppice was to the community.

Books like this, which have mass appeal, are vital at assisting the general public to understand trees and woodlands. The book is written in a manner that's easily understood even though it's a very erudite production, but there are a few sections where the narrative is less focussed and rambles somewhat (e.g. some of the examples from Japanese culture). Ultimately however, the author begs us to reclaim reciprocity with the living world and in particular with trees; and what could be wrong with that?

John Mc Loughlin