

Woodland Imagery in Northern Art, c.1500–1800

Poetry and Ecology

Leopoldine van Hogendorp Prosperetti

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Preface

With disenchantment the tenor of the times, this book looks to the woodlands as a source of re-enchantment. Once part of the everyday environment, small woods have long been in retreat, but have been enjoying a comeback in recent times. Even the marble pile of New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art is now offset by the David H. Koch Plaza, whose 'allées and bosques' of small-leaf linden create a space of welcome for visitors and neighbors. The plaza, outside the museum's Fifth Avenue entrance, opened in 2014 to wide acclaim.

For a long time, fascination with the wilderness eclipsed our appreciation of the humble woodlots closer to home. This began to change with the success of the writings of Oliver Rackham (1939–2015). This historical ecologist, tireless author and fellow of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge described Hayley Wood in Cambridgeshire as a great example of an ancient woodland which, he stated emphatically, we must imagine as a tree-filled island in the pastures. His books *History of the Countryside* (1986) and *Woodlands* (2006), both widely available as illustrated paperbacks, renewed interest in the bosquets of the past. Though these green islands among the pastures have mostly vanished with modernization, their presence resounds in reams of poetry, and they are often the favorite subjects of our painters. Hence a focus on woodland imagery as a subject for poetic, artistic and ecological considerations.

As an art historian, I have focused on the art of Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568–1625), who introduced brightly green verdure as a feature of small pictures in

an art lover's cabinet. This study led me to conclude that the deciduous trees of Northern Europe, and verdancy in general, were often shorthand for the places where poetry originates. Oaks murmured prophecies, the ilex whispered, the beech comforted the poet, the linden sheltered lovers. Trees, it seems, were the matter of poetry. Not only the elegiac poets, but also those of a religious cast of mind, discovered that divine knowledge was more readily revealed in the forests than in the garret or coffeehouse, or perhaps even the cathedral. Spiritual poetry is rich in evocations of the nearness of a divine spirit through sylvan imagery. To read the poets, from Virgil to Seamus Heaney, I found, is to restore a knowledge of trees that is not botanical, but is humanistic, often verging on the spiritual.

The mystic and composer known as the 12th century's 'Sibyl of the Rhine', Saint Hildegard of Bingen, often invoked the mysteries of *viriditas*, the myth of an ever-returning green world, no matter the darkness that prevails. The Renaissance, the age of renewal, was also the age of a particular understanding of sylvan matters known as *dendrologia*. This is a branch of moral wisdom that draws on the characteristics of trees to describe human life. Eventually, painters like Claude Lorrain, Jan Brueghel and Jacob van Ruisdael, casting their keen eyes on the material at hand in the countryside, developed drawing techniques to capture the fleeting aspects of trees, choosing different seasons, different times of day, an array of features, but always in the end making the trees in their landscapes as eloquent as a poem.



1 A roomful of Claudes, photograph. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

An Introduction

Poetry and painting, if not brother and sister (as once was said of music and of song),
are at least nearly so.

– Francis Turner Palgrave, *Landscape in Poetry* (1897)

A ROOMFUL OF CLAUDES

Always teeming with visitors, the Metropolitan Museum in New York City is one of the great hubs of art. Many of us have ascended the grand stairway and made our way through the maze of galleries filled with paintings by the Old Masters. Old Masters! It is a dusty term, too gender specific for our times, but used in the art world to designate the great artists who painted their masterpieces before the period generally considered as modern: roughly between 1400 and 1800. Hundreds of visitors gather before paintings by Titian and Raphael before moving on to grandees of comparable stature such as Rembrandt and Velázquez.

On their way, our visitors pass Gallery 618, but there, silence reigns. No one stops to view a wall hung with landscape paintings, three of which are filled with trees and shrubs. The smallest, *View of La Crescenza*, depicts an ancient villa in the Roman countryside glimpsed through a stand of trees. In a second painting, *Pastoral Landscape: The Roman Campagna*, a shepherd tends to his herd, a distant castle evokes a Roman past, and a river winds its way through the countryside. The third

picture, *Sunrise*, shows a cowherd fording a river on a donkey; behind him rides a young woman, her hand on his shoulder (fig.1).

These works are by Claude Lorrain (c.1604–82), painter of landscapes of elegiac beauty that have enchanted collectors and other art lovers for four centuries.

Claude Lorrain's paintings were a great commercial success, not just in Italy, where many are still on display in the salons and reception rooms for which they were originally purchased, but also elsewhere, especially in England, where a nobleman's palace or a country estate would not be complete without a few 'Claudes' on the wall. Indeed, it would not be uncommon for a visitor to an English manor – imagine one of Jane Austen's characters – to ask his hosts, 'And where are your Claudes?' (Keen-eyed viewers can glimpse paintings by Claude in *The Crown* and other television series set at Buckingham Palace and other residences of the English aristocracy). Similarly, when in English letters a writer refers to the pleasure of walking beneath a 'Claude sky', many readers will know exactly what is being specified. As in the landscapes in Gallery 618, the light will be

limpid and the sky cloudless. Gardeners who read this book will be interested to know that the British taste for Lorrain's paintings was so much a part of the genteel culture of the 18th and 19th centuries that it led to an odd inversion: art as a model for nature. Landowners, wishing to ennoble their country residences, expected their garden architects to shape the parks surrounding these handsome houses in such a way that they would look like a painting by Claude, including seemingly untrimmed trees and airy little copses. Indeed, it can be argued that Frederick Law Olmsted's vision of New York City's Central Park is at least partly rooted in the example of the English parks, and therefore in landscapes of a Claudean lineage.

For all their prestige and fame, Claude's paintings do not particularly compel contemporary viewers. What are today's art lovers to make of these works? In times past, critics of Claude Lorrain, perhaps the greatest painter of trees before the age of Romanticism, took little notice of his trees, but stressed the theme of a timeless Arcadia which, for viewers at the time, would be reminiscent of descriptions of the classical landscape, not only in Greece or Rome but also in the vernacular poetry of the Renaissance and the Baroque. No poetry had greater resonance than that of Virgil (70–19 BCE), a native of the Roman countryside whose pastoral songs, generally known as the *Eclogues*, established the themes and motifs of a harmonious vision of a pleasant and accommodating earth.¹ In fact, it was not uncommon for critics to use the adjective 'Virgilian' in their assessment of harmonious landscape paintings well into the 19th century. This was very much the case in the critical reception of landscapes by Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot (1796–1875), who idolized Claude and kept a book of pastoral poetry by his bedside. Immensely popular in his time, not only in Europe but also in the United States, Corot was acclaimed as the last to create landscape paintings in the Virgilian mode.² Gilbert Highet, in his much-admired *Poets in a Landscape*, whimsically notes that 'in the first of his

poems called *Bucolics*, or *Shepherd Poems*, Vergil paints a little landscape in the manner of Corot'.³

Claude was a native of the region of Lorraine, in northeastern France. His beginnings were modest. Legend has it that he was a pastry cook before he achieved success as a painter in Rome, where he established himself as a specialist in landscapes of the Italian countryside – more specifically, the Roman countryside ('Campagna Romana'). The literature refers to these paintings as pastoral landscapes, or Arcadian visions, that project the lives of shepherds and cowherds upon a vista of ancient ruins and ageless trees. Visiting the Claudes at the Metropolitan Museum of Art with friends, I often ask their opinion of the paintings. The response generally is dismissive. They are too dark, I am told. Looking at them is a strain. Things cannot be taken in at a glance. Even professional art critics quipped that 'Claude loved his trees, which we love to hate'.⁴ Remarks like these relegate a roomful of long-revered paintings to the margins of art history. Yet the charges are understandable. It is difficult for the modern viewer, accustomed to bright colors, bold lines and startling visions, to adjust to the smoothly executed images of traditional landscape paintings. But is it impossible? Can we find in the art of Claude Lorrain a lyrical beauty that speaks to modern concerns about nature, the environment and the very survival of the woodlands he so imaginatively depicts? It is worth a try. Experts consider *Sunrise* one of the finest of Claude's landscapes available for viewing in the United States. Let us give it greater attention (fig.2).

A PLEASING WOODLAND

It is early in the morning. A scene of bucolic life unfolds. A cowherd and his love, riding a donkey, drive their cattle to a river bend that separates the foreground from the panorama unfolding into the distance. Trees and shrubs are arranged along the river's banks, with

scraggly scrubs clinging to a rockface on the left and a pleasing grove providing shade on the right. Two arboreal groups at the center dominate the scene. Note how the painter arranges a conversation between the slanted silhouette of slender trees on the viewer's side of the river and the dark tapering forms of a clump of high-topped trees on the opposite bank. Woodsmen have a lovely word for this phenomenon in the realm of trees, 'inosculation'.⁵ It refers to the habit of trees to incline towards each other as if to exchange a delicate kiss or a solemn vow. Nuptial poetry in the classical tradition is replete with images of trees propelled by love to bend to each other, none more famous, perhaps, than some lines in a poem by Claudian (370–404 CE), which in its celebration of an imperial wedding in ancient Italy codifies the commonplaces of vegetative imagery. Describing the court of Venus on the island of Cyprus, Claudian brings before us the images of trees in love and of trees in despair: 'a poplar bending to meet a poplar' and 'an alder responding with a sigh to a sighing alder-tree'.⁶ A painter like Claude Lorrain, whose approach to woodland imagery is more poetical than literal, found ways to weave these lyrical conventions into his woodland scenes. Sentience in trees was intuitively understood by the poets, who drew inspiration from the echoing woods, but was not acknowledged by botanists until recently. Now it is a hot topic of discussion in both academia and public discourse.⁷

In this bucolic reverie Claude avoids the monotony of greenery by pairing opposites: the opaque tops of a clump of trees confront the airy crown of a fast-growing river tree. 'Airy' is an epithet that pertains to things that are aloft (reaching for the sky) or insubstantial. River trees like willows and poplars are rarely dense; they are always suffused with air and light. This is due to the fact that their leaves are attached to little leafstalks (flattened petioles) that cause the leaves to stir the light as they toss hither and thither in the air. 'Airy cages' is what the English poet Gerard Manley

Hopkins called the treetops in 'Binsey Poplars' (1879), his famous poem on a beloved grove in the English village of Binsey that was slated to be felled. The poem's opening line reads, 'My aspens dear, whose airy cages quelled'. 'Opaque' is a counterpoint to this image of light-filled trees. It is an adjective that poets attach to what is cast in shadow, is dense and obscure. It is a visual effect associated with certain shade trees that pack their leaves into a mass so dense that no beam of light can penetrate. Linden, elm and ash trees, whose leaves are small, often take on that quality of an obscure verdancy in high summer, whereas trees that belong to the water-worshipping tribe, like poplars, willows and aspens, tend to be spindly and airy. Whether the two opposing trees in *Sunrise* are an elm and an aspen, or a linden and a poplar, is not the issue. It is the poetry of opposites – a frail tree juxtaposed with a sturdy one – that counts. This nonchalance about botanical exactitude in the depiction of woodlands is a recurrent theme in the advocacy of woodland imagery. For example, the French Symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–98) wrote:

To *name* an object is to remove three-quarters of the enjoyment of a poem, which derives from the pleasure of gradually perceiving it; to *suggest* it, that is the dream. It is the perfect use of that mystery which is the symbol: to evoke an object little by little to illustrate a mood or, inversely, to choose an object and draw out from this a mood, by a gradual deciphering.

Another French poet, Paul Valéry (1871–1945) said it even more succinctly: 'botany is precision, poetry is purity'. This assertion is echoed by Rex Vicat Cole (1870–1940), the English landscape painter, who stated in his very useful *The Artistic Anatomy of Trees* that 'when we admire a tree painted by a great artist, we are not disturbed by wondering whether it is an Oak or an Ash'.⁸ More recently Oliver Rackham, a leading naturalist and author of the highly popular scientific





2 Claude Lorrain, *Sunrise*,
c.1646–7, oil on canvas, 102.9 × 134 cm
(40 ½ × 52 ¾ in). The Metropolitan
Museum of Art, New York. Fletcher
Fund, 1947, Acc. no. 47.12.

book *Woodlands* (2006), repeated the sentiment, writing that 'one hardly expects El Greco, or Turner, or Picasso to get the trees right; that was not their job'.⁹

Woodland imagery in the manner of Claude and his many followers was the product of what could be called a lyrical naturalism. The naturalism is convincing in its effects of light, time of year and patterns of growth, the details of which were carefully recorded *sur le motif* in the countryside. But in a final composition these 'studies' were arranged by the rules of poetry, or in accordance with a system that could be called a 'sylvan poetics'. In this term, the word 'sylvan' is problematic. It held sway as an almost indispensable adjective in English-language poetry until modern times. Poets referred to unpolished poems as 'silva', a descriptor denoting the unruly vegetation of an underwood. True poetry would arise from a heap of notes and unfinished verse, as stately trees rise above the unruly hazels and the limber osiers of the underwood. When the English squire and author John Evelyn (1620–1706) wrote a book on the management of trees, he titled it *Sylva; or, A Discourse of Forest-Trees, and the Propagation of Timber* (1664). The book was in its tenth edition by 1825, by which time the term *sylva*, also spelled *silva*, was thriving in English poetry. When it was the turn of the American Henry David Thoreau (1817–62) to write of the woodlands of New England, his publisher suggested the title *Silvania*. But the word had become a worn-out trope, and Thoreau settled for the straightforward title *The Maine Woods*.¹⁰ Today the word *sylvan* strikes most readers as old-fashioned, even recondite, but it served remarkably well as an adjective for all things related to woodlands. I confess a fondness for it as a useful epithet in a work that celebrates the woodlands as the great ornament of the earth in nature and art. As such, it follows a 'literary ecology' that looks to literature as an archive for features that are no longer part of our everyday environment.¹¹ What is novel in the approach taken in the present volume is the intermingling of the literary and pictorial

traditions of woodland imagery with an analysis of what these representations reveal about woodland elements that are no longer part of the world in which we live. Claude's *Sunrise* is a leading example of a lyrical approach to the arrangement of sylvan material. It can also be viewed as an archive of the toil of woodlanders, who felled mature oaks, pollarded their willows and harvested their copses in order to ensure a steady supply of sturdy timber, limber withes and pliant staves to support the needs of pre-industrial society.¹²

'INJURED,' BUT STILL 'WONDERFULLY
DELICATE'

It has been said that Claude's paintings may be 'injured', but they are still 'wonderfully delicate'.¹³ Paintings by the Old Masters have in many instances been turned murky by the buildup of glazes that results from being heavily varnished. Art critics of the past praised Claude as a master of light, but the modern viewer sees little more than masses of undifferentiated greenery blotting a pallid sky. Where the vegetation is dense, the original green colors have darkened; where the foliage is transparent, the tinted glazes have lost their delicate hues. This lack of nuance in greenery is due in part to the kind of pigments that were used by the Old Masters for the color green. Verdigris is among the villains. Derived from the corrosion (patination) that is induced upon copper plates, this pigment was valued for the depiction of verdure, or anything else intensely green. It served to render the brilliant foliage of a lime tree in early summer or dainty willow leaves in spring. Unfortunately, the chemical was a hostile agent; it viciously turned passages of tender green into unseasonal browns or even impenetrable blacks. In its present state, a painting that was once alive with the play of light upon blades of grass and the leaves of trees now exudes an air of lifelessness.

Fortunately, there are images, other than oils on canvas, by which we can judge the qualities and attractiveness of Claude's green worlds: his studies of woodland imagery on site, a full set of drawings by his own hand after his paintings, and a small number of etchings that appear to be fresh compositions in their own right.¹⁴ In the remainder of the present chapter I will introduce a work from each of these categories, in an effort to convince skeptics that Claude set a high standard for sylvan beauty in his landscapes and deserves the attention of all who study the representation of trees not only in art but also in managed environments like city parks, urban landscapes and the ever-diminishing acres of woodlands that remain on this, our earth.

The first image, drawn on site, depicts an untrimmed tree growing freely in the countryside (fig.3). Three stems rise from a single planting hole and bring a mass of foliage to a great height. Shade rules below, but where the sun penetrates, the leaves dissolve into a haze of pale light, presumably to be interpreted as a lighter green or even a kind of transparency when executed in oil. The cropped form of a miserable tree nearby creates a bit of drama, reminding the viewer that glorious growth is inevitably followed by decay. Note how a crooked snag in the dying tree touches some leafy outliers of the flourishing tree. If there is something autobiographical and pathetic about that branch – a substitute for the viewer coming upon the scene – it is not accidental. Multi-tiered untrimmed trees occur in many of Claude's paintings. They are rare in nature. Staged as lofty survivors in his painted landscapes, they remind us that the place the painter envisions is Arcadia, the pastoral paradise where, safe from billhooks and saws, trees forge ahead by themselves. All that is required of them, by the unwritten rules of Arcadia, is to offer shade, and to provide leafy fodder for the animals and nuts for an Arcadian repast.

The second work on paper is clearly related to Claude's *Sunrise* in New York, but we should not

consider it a preparatory study. It is a *ricordo* (a visual record) drawn by the artist late in his career, when he was worried about plagiarism (fig.4). A rash of painters in Rome were making easy money creating copies of his originals and ruining his reputation. He collected about two hundred of these *ricordi* in an album he called the *Liber Veritatis* ('Book of Truth').

A comparison of the *ricordo* with the painting at the Met makes it clear that what seemed a dense grove on the right is much more of a grassy mound with a single tree, sturdy in stem and rich in leaves, vaguely like a holm oak (*quercus ilex*) in its contours. A combination of lines, dashes and dots 'programs' the appearance of an almost magical treescape whose image is doubled in the reflective surface of a placid stream. I imagine that an Englishman viewing *Sunrise*, its fresh colors including a dazzling green, would agree that it was a perfect complement to 'the Loddon slow with verdant Alders crown'd' in Alexander Pope's majestic poem 'Windsor-Forest' (1713).

In addition to the pen drawings, Claude also created 44 etchings which further reveal his vision of sylvan beauty. *The Goatherd* (fig.5) captures a midday moment. His animals at rest, a herdsman plays the flute in the shade of a little grove, perhaps a neglected copse rising from a grassy knoll. The darker tree at the center of an arrangement of five trees (known in vegetal lore as a *quincunx*) is clad with ivy, the twining plant, whose wanderings 'over bole and branch' give a wintry tree a green coat. Ivy's habit of supporting a tree with its grasping tendrils was often read as the expression of an affectionate alliance, such as exists in the true love between a husband and wife. Like inosculation, it is fodder for nuptial poetry! The rest of the grove is rendered as a sisterhood of dancing trees veering in all directions to capture the light. In a painting, the dancing trees raising a freight of leaves would be rendered in a harmonious palette of colors, ranging from silver-gray to dark green, with many shades in between. Here it is the etcher's needle that does the work. In a 1988 catalogue, the print was interpreted as Claude's



3 Claude Lorrain, *Lofty Tree Study*, 1638, black chalk, pen and brown ink with brown wash on white paper, 31.9 × 21.7 cm (12 ³/₁₆ × 8 ⁷/₁₆ in). The British Museum, London, Oo, 7.183.



4 Claude Lorrain, *Sunrise*, 1635–82 (no. 109 in the artist's *Liber Veritatis*), pen and brown ink and brown wash, 19.6 × 25.7 cm (7 1/16 × 10 1/8 in). The British Museum, London, 1957, 1214.115.

definitive statement on the essence of a pastoral image, stocked as it is with the prerequisite material: livestock, a pipe-playing shepherd, rolling pasture and, above all, the trees, without which there would be no shade and therefore no pastoral.¹⁵

We are left with some uncomfortable questions: as prestigious and famous as these works are, why are viewers not drawn to Claude's landscapes? What are modern art lovers to make of these works? Are they potentially of interest to modern elegists of the vanishing woodlands? In this book, devoted to the representation of the woodlands in poetry and art,

Claude cannot be ignored. He is the consummate master of the tree-filled landscape in the Western tradition and an inspiration for the renewal of woodlands in the world to come.

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

The ten chapters in this book explore woodland imagery from many different angles. Chapter 1, 'Kindle's Promise,' explores the pleasurable theme of repose beneath a tree. This soothing sentiment remains as universal as ever, as



5 Claude Lorrain, *The Goatherd* (*Le Chévrier*), 1663, etching, 16.8 × 22.4 cm (6 5/8 × 8 13/16 in). The National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Rosenwald Collection, Acc. no. 1945.5.71.

shown by Amazon's ubiquitous Kindle logo.

Chapter 2, 'Albrecht Dürer and the Linden Tree,' discusses one of the great innovations of the hero of German Renaissance art: painting a linden as if it were the subject of a portrait. In June the linden is spectacular for its verdancy, and it was a challenge for painters to capture the ethereal qualities of its multitude of little heart-shaped leaves. Dürer showed the way.

Jan van Eyck's altarpiece of *The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* (1432) still glows with the innumerable leafy plants that embellish the vision of a New Earth. It became one of the greenest paintings in the Western canon. Chapter 3,

'The New Earth: Jan van Eyck's *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb*,' shows how this verdant marvel was achieved.

From Ovid to Walt Whitman, poets were fond of lists of trees, which included not only their names but also the chief characteristic of each one. There was the quaking aspen, and the lime tree, perpetually soft, and the alder, often described as 'lofty.' Some of these attributes were so strongly pictorial that they gave painters an opportunity to compete with both poets and nature when representing these common trees of Europe. Poets' catalogues assembled these diverse trees in 'mixed groves,' which are rare in nature but prevalent

in poetry and art. Chapter 4, ‘The “Transcendent Perfections of Trees”: The Poet’s Catalogue’, presents some of these poetical groupings in paintings by Claude Lorrain, Peter Paul Rubens and others.

Chapter 5, ‘The Copse’, reminds us that humankind got an early start on reshaping the natural environment. Once Neolithic man discovered how to turn the primordial wildwoods into woodlands, copses (or coppices) became a beloved feature of the countryside, ‘little islands in the pastures’, in Oliver Rackham’s description. Now they have all but vanished – except in paintings, where, more than ever, they evoke a long-lost landscape.

Chapter 6, ‘Survivor Sole’, takes its title from an old saying that reflects the universal perception of a tree as the analogue of the human figure. Many artists were tempted to look at trees through an anthropomorphic or zoomorphic lens. Some examples are truly startling, even suggesting that trees are sentient.

Not far from Rome, Tivoli is both a real destination for excursions and a fantasy setting for poets and artists. In European and American paintings, Tivoli came to assume an almost mythical quality as the quintessential place of reverie and repose. Chapter 7, ‘The Sights of Tivoli’, explores the Tivoli-inspired landscape as a genre that found its culmination in the masterful paintings and drawings of Claude Lorrain and Joseph Mallord William Turner.

A collaborative painting by Peter Paul Rubens and Jan Brueghel the Elder, *The Vision of Saint Hubert*, has been discussed stylistically as a breakthrough in landscape painting and culturally as a tribute to the revalidation of the Sonian Forest near Brussels, Belgium as a place of spiritual repose. Chapter 8, ‘Sonian Sylva: Love in a Ducal Forest’, is a reminder of the cultural significance of an old ducal forest, remnants of which are still part of the modern city of Brussels.

At the very end of the 16th century, two Flemish painters, Jan Brueghel the Elder and Gillis van Coninxloo, pioneered a new type of landscape, the depiction of a forest interior. Their work blazed the

trail for a new pictorial genre, for which there was a growing demand. Chapter 9, ‘Sea of Leaves: The Heart of the Forest’, looks into the relationship between the rise of the forest landscape as a desideratum on the art market and *solitudo* as a lifestyle option in times of religious persecution. These two artists’ first attempts also created precedents for the art of Jacob van Ruisdael, whose masterful work further advanced the genre of the tree-filled landscape.

Chapter 10, ‘Down by the Riverside’, explores the green-fringed river banks that, like the copse, became a hallmark of the works of the pastoral imagination. Painters found inspiration in the depiction of fluvial trees, especially the shape-shifting willow and the slanting alder. The willow and other river trees were an important component of the pre-industrial rural economy, supplying a cheap and inexhaustible source of raw material for making baskets and other much-used objects. This explains these trees’ ubiquity in the old woodlands in an age before plastics. Superbly biodegradable, the willow may also be one of the trees that will survive in the revived woodlands of the future.

In about 1636, Peter Paul Rubens created two great landscape paintings. They were meant as companion pieces, one to honor the beginning of the day (*A View of Het Steen*, now at the National Gallery, London), the other to reflect on the closing of the day (*The Rainbow Landscape*, now part of the Wallace Collection). They have been in London for over two hundred years, but were not shown together until the spring of 2021, when they resumed Rubens’s dialogue in a very special event. The paintings are major statements by Rubens as a *peintre-philosophe*. In the epilogue of this book, the two paintings serve as springboards for a closing essay on the importance of ecological philosophy – ecosophy – as a path to revitalizing the idea of making the woodlands part of one’s everyday environment and setting aside the notion that they are merely places for intermittent gestures of reflection and withdrawal.