

Searchlights in People's Hands:

Book Review

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Abstract

This brief article reviews *Searchlights in People's Hands*, a book written by Vivian Darroch-Lozowski and published by Penumbra Press.

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Searchlights in People's Hands by Vivian Darroch-Lozowski, Canada. Penumbra Press, 2023, pp.13-235. 24.95 (paperback). ISBN 978-1-89323-49-6
<https://penumbrapress.net/products/searchlights>

I wrote this work because I believe that it is only a paradigmatic shift in human consciousness at large that may allow us to evolve so that we can avoid doing more catastrophic damage to our planet and to ourselves.

Darroch-Lozowski

One realization through which Vivian Darroch-Lozowski wrote, *Searchlights in People's Hands*, "I did not plan to die in the world as it is today." In our current reality, with one country

almost razed, and on the day that another country sent missiles against its opponent, I share Darroch-Lozowski's sentiment. The writing in her book is "fearless", poetic, and graceful as it faces the environmental and political decline of a human-plundered Earth. This is an allegory that imagines the earth, its beings and life itself, far into the future, after several near extinctions.

The characters are diverse; Annie is a plant human symbiont. Two humans, Ahm and Cedar, keep the records for the territory. Sophia is an adopted child of two fathers who is also a girl-child butterfly human symbiont. There is Paddy the dog and Pareska, a deceased grandmother. Honoré is an elder. Ahm's outdoor diary is written with arresting detail. A mythical phylon, part human, part bird, represents the community. The phylon appears in Annie's dreams. Repeatedly, I read Ahm's words as they animate the glory of life in

the meadow, “shedding fruit tree boughs, showers, the day has been filled with rainbow light” (p. 90).

Darroch-Lozowski’s art provides images for the book cover. Doves watch from a house rooftop on the back cover. On the front, a dove descends towards a human being (or possibly a soul). This is being watched through a darkened haze. At the beginning of the story, Annie struggles through a storm to reach the Earthwatchers’ territory. There are fewer territories left on earth, but do not be discouraged. This community comes together and reaches out to other territories to investigate the mysterious signs and symbols that may offer insight into their plight.

Each of the twenty-six chapters tells a portion of the story. A few are titled thus: Annie leaves the territory; A day in the earth song meadow; Lessons with a plant; The death of Ahm; Seeing feelingly is not impossible (Darroch-Lozowski, 1999); Planning for the phantasmagoria. With respect to the field of holistic education, *Searchlights* is a “merciful ecology” that guides the reader back to the pulse of life. Although it draws from an abiding love and engages with the numinous imagination, its message is not abstract. The story rings through the natural world at every turn of the page. Darroch-Lozowski reveals a dynamic of communal relationship, inspired by such scholars as Donna J. Harajay, Carlo Rovelli, Henry Corbin, and Sufi Hazrat Iniyat Khan. Darroch-Lozowski’s scholarship is introduced with a thoughtfulness that allows the story to breathe. There are fifteen references that give voice to an array of fields, from physics, to language, philosophy, and spirituality.

The field of consciousness is drawn beyond a mere human phenomenon, to a consciousness that is

open, vast, unfathomable; interconnectedness is skillfully demonstrated. Darroch-Lozowski expands the worldview of the separate individual who lives to think, to the *cosmos as consciousness*.

Consciousness is not a product of mere human knowledge, nor of the human brain and emotions, it emanates throughout spacetime and it grows through all beings’ capacity to sense with feeling.

The character Cedar believes in this depiction of consciousness and explains that each being plays their own distinct part. Rudolph Steiner would undoubtedly agree with Cedar’s perspective. Additionally, the book is pedagogically aligned with Waldorf’s approach to introducing ideas and concepts; the main lesson typically begins with a story (Miller, 2000).

Allegories thrive through imagery, symbols, archetypes, and myths. How the regenerative imagination tends to take a backseat to our cognition during times of trouble. Allegories tend to show, as opposed to tell. They draw from the writer’s imagination and awaken the imagination of the reader. A phylon appears at the end of this story to speak its wisdom. Reality in the Earthwatchers’ territory does not play out rationally. Regenerative events arise outside of human reason; a small animal, for example, runs from a womb in Annie’s part human, part rhizome hands. I await with hope for the discussions that *Searchlights in People’s Hands* will spark in the classroom. The discourse that arises from the community as they seek resolution, for an environment that has suffered five extinctions, remains deeply complex, curious, and kind.

Four concepts are necessary for understanding the story. The author’s notes explain that Carlos Rovelli inspired “light cones of time”, “natureword” is inspired by R.A. Schwaller de

Lubicz's "elucidation of an innate and functional consciousness that seeks to discern the mysteries of the physical world..." I leave the reader to unravel the mystery of the grammars and the wisdom of the great mystical half human, half animal, phylon. It is possible that these words and their meanings, which unfold throughout the writing, will transport the reader beyond the constraints of tightly held concepts. It is true that concepts may be necessary for our work as scholars, and that animals conceptualize as well (McGilchrist, 2010). But how tightly are our concepts held in academe?

This allegory is not a vehicle for conceptualization: its attunement with subtle energy, time, gesture, thought, and being also seek the continual rhythm of harmonious joining, pausing, and releasing. Darroch-Lozowski's writing teaches us to circle back to the life that is immanent, which is here and now, present sacred. At Ahm's funeral, the community gathered and mourned together:

Hundreds of voices joined in, and the voices began to harmonize, seemingly of their own accord. The harmony rose from the wild grief in our collective unconscious. Then it seemed that our singing was flowing through us from the metaphysical background of the world. We repeated and repeated and repeated the singing of the song. We live in beautiful timeless sound... (p. 84)

We learn from Annie that whales carry their dead children while they grieve for their passing. The whales carry their grief too and then surrender the bodies of their young.

Further in the story questions about the meaning of the strange symbols and patterns are to be

resolved by the community. There are images and symbols that are evidenced in lived experience, they show us that we are marked by life and challenged by life's mysterious coding. What healing will come through the assemblage and presentation of the territories' imagery? Along with the Earthwatcher's territory, I suggest that we, the reader, might be released from our continuous aggression towards self, other and Earth, to join the song of those who seek a merciful ecology. *Searchlights* reminds us that "matter is light-like" (p.17) and that it is possible to feel life in our hands, even our whole bodies, it is possible to be guided by this and offer it back as grace to all that lives.

"We become living again, when we love again, I write. Love-not sentiment, love as in being healed. Safe. Entire. Whole. Love as in "to maintain humanity's honour and promise" (Darroch, Lozowski, Epilogue, 2023)

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Author Bio

Kelli Nigh is a Sessional Lecturer in the Curriculum and Pedagogy, Wellbeing Emphasis, at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. After exploring consciousness with students in her drama class, she attended OISE as an MA and PhD student. She now teaches two courses at OISE, Spirituality in Education and Nature and Learning. Mysterious anomalies arose in her classes, and she found the field of holistic education a theoretical and practical ground on which to seriously investigate the relationship between spiritual experience, the body and the imagination. As a social activist Kelli co-chaired Voices for the Luminous Veil, a group that worked with Toronto City Council to improve public awareness of the Toronto suicide barrier. She is author of *Learning in Nature*, a book that chronicles her mind-body experimentation with students. Kelli is editor of *Current Perspectives in Holistic Education* at Information Age Publishing.