
The Decentered, Ecocentric Humanism of Pierre Rabhi in *La Part du Colibri*

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The purpose of this essay is to explore the decentered, ecocentric humanism of Pierre Rabhi (1938). As one of the Franco-Algerian author's latest works titled *La Part du Colibri* (*The Hummingbird's Share*) illustrates, the humanism of this unconventional and provocative philosopher-farmer transcends the limitations of traditional humanistic thought given that it extends to the entire biotic community of life. This highly original thinker, environmental activist, and presidential candidate in 2002 also espouses strong ethical convictions related to the environmental crisis which are predicated upon the principles of modern science. In *La Part du Colibri* and throughout his entire philosophical repertoire, Rabhi underscores the gravity of the present ecological calamity of epic proportions which threatens to destroy the delicate balance which sustains all life including *homo sapiens*. Due to the alarming warning signs all around us, Rabhi affirms that embracing and implementing a new way of being in the world has become an absolute necessity if we are to save the imperiled planet and ourselves in the process. In addition to outlining the basic tenets of his interdisciplinary philosophy, this investigation attempts to compel other scholars to engage with the ecocentric thought of this neglected thinker.

Despite the evident utility of Rabhi's thought and the undeniable urgency of the dialogue that his works endeavor to foster, his theories have been nearly entirely ignored by the academic community.¹ Perhaps, this failure to engage with his philosophy is due to the fact that his work seems to fall between the humanities and the sciences. Within the rigid contours of modern academic disciplines, it is often difficult to carve out a space for cross-disciplinary dialogue because of the interrelated problems of insularity and overspecialization which are emblematic of the current university paradigm. Regardless of the reasons why Rabhi is overdue for recognition, this exploration aims to begin to fill this significant research gap. It should be noted that he is virtually unknown in the Anglophone world.² However, this essay is merely a point of departure as opposed to being an exhaustive analysis of the nuances of Rabhi's complex philosophy. Additional studies from numerous disciplines incorporating various theoretical approaches are desperately needed.

Despite the lack of attention that he has received within academic circles, his prolific and diverse body of work has garnered a considerable amount of interest in the general public at large in France. He is an important public figure who has appeared in numerous documentaries and televised exchanges with famous people. For instance, Rabhi recently participated in a public conversation with the 2008 Nobel Laureate in Literature J.M.G. Le Clézio. The renowned journalist François Busnel moderated this exchange on April 10, 2014.³ Moreover, Rabhi has published several books with prestigious publishers that have been commercially successful in France and in the larger Francophone world. His theories have been relegated to the periphery within academia, but the ideas of this tireless advocate for environmental justice have been very influential in French and Francophone society as a whole.

In *La Part du Colibri* and Rabhi's other texts, it is nearly impossible to separate the writer's work from his social engagement outside of the literary space. As the journalist Fabrice Nicolino explains, "car s'il (Rabhi) avait tout d'un intellectuel, il était aussi un vrai paysan, un

homme qui menait une vie pauvre et rude”⁷⁴ (71). Rabhi’s farm in Ardèche and the agricultural training programs that he has created around the world related to his concept of “agroécologie”⁷⁵ demonstrate that the Franco-Algerian philosopher is not afraid to get his own hands dirty. His concrete action is inspired by his deep respect for life itself in all of its divergent forms. All of Rabhi’s projects, which have been extremely successful worldwide, embody the core principles of his thought.

There is even a direct correlation between the chosen title of Rabhi’s essay *La Part du Colibri* and these initiatives. In 2007, his association “le Mouvement pour la Terre et l’Humanisme”⁷⁶ was renamed “Le Mouvement Colibris”⁷⁷ (Binctin n.p.; Pons 75). This rebranding of an existing organization is extremely revealing. The symbolism of the Amerindian legend of the hummingbird and the armadillo is a crucial metaphor in Rabhi’s philosophy. In the aptly named *La Part du Colibri*, Rabhi takes advantage of this Amerindian myth, replete with both philosophical and spiritual significance, to highlight the importance of responsible stewardship and individual accountability. As a later section of this essay will explore, Rabhi attempts to empower each and every one of us to “do our part” to preserve abundant life on this planet. The title of this forty-two page essay should be understood in this context. Although this specific work is rather short in comparison to some of his other texts such as *Manifeste pour la Terre et l’Humanisme, Du Sahara aux Cévennes: Itinéraire d’un homme au service de la Terre-Mère, Le Gardien du Fen*,⁸ and *Parole de Terre: une initiation africaine*, *La Part du Colibri* is one of Rabhi’s best works to date. In a very accessible and concise form, he presents all of the nuances of his cohesive worldview in *La Part du Colibri*. This seminal text thus serves as an excellent introduction to his philosophy.

It quickly becomes apparent that Rabhi is not a classical humanist. The philosopher incessantly problematizes conventional humanistic logic inherited from the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Specifically, he criticizes the dominant form of humanism which tends to create sharp ontological distinctions between *homo sapiens* and other species in spite of nearly irrefutable scientific evidence that has thoroughly debunked any notions of human exceptionalism. In the first sentence of the essay, the philosopher reminds us that the human race constitutes merely one thread in the larger fabric of life into which our saga has been woven by indifferent cosmic forces which predate humankind by billions of years. Rabhi describes the earth as an “être silencieux dont nous sommes l’une des expressions vivantes”⁹ (7). Near the end of the work, the writer reiterates, “Ainsi sommes-nous inclus dans un ordre où la terre, le végétal, l’animal, et l’humain sont reliés et liés aux autres éléments que sont l’eau, l’air, la chaleur, la lumière. C’est dans cet ordre vital que nous sommes inclus”¹⁰ (42). He maintains that the same ecological laws which govern the existence of every sentient and non-sentient being that has ever roamed this planet are also applicable to human beings. In an interconnected and interdependent universe that arbitrarily recycles material particles to regenerate new life, our species has the same intrinsic right to exist as anything else. Musing in a recent interview with Yvan Saint-Jours he cites Lavoisier, “Rien ne se perd, rien ne se crée, tout se transforme”¹¹ (12). Due to these cosmic sensibilities, supported by contemporary scientists, many scholars might label Rabhi’s engaged philosophy as a form of post-humanism.

Rabhi’s main problem with traditional humanism is that these anthropocentric thought systems often reinforce the scientifically erroneous notion that humans are the center of the universe or the great miracle of existence. Given that our continued existence depends upon the health of the biosphere that literally provides sustenance to all organisms, Rabhi posits that these enticing ontological delusions of grandeur must be exposed as an ideological prod-

uct of the fragmented human imagination. Even though *homo sapiens* are merely one of the estimated 5,416 mammals that exist on earth united by common evolutionary ties (Wilson and Reeder 2005), Rabhi notes in a short text published by *Kaizen* magazine that “dans le genre des mammifères. Nous nous sommes autoproclamés les meilleurs”¹² (119-20). For him, classical humanism represents a potentially deadly way of thinking because it fails to take into account rudimentary material realities from which there is no escape. By focusing exclusively on the needs and desires of one given species, the homocentric logic of many humanistic writers frames our relationship to the ecosphere in purely utilitarian terms. According to Rabhi, anthropocentric thought paradigms, which reduce the inherent worth of other organisms to their instrumental value, explain why the illusion of ontological human sovereignty still reigns supreme in Western civilization.

In *La Part du Colibri*, Rabhi uses commonly accepted scientific theories to discredit pervasive notions associated with conventional humanism to create a more ecologically correct and sustainable form of humanism for the modern world in dire need of a radical paradigm shift. Urging the reader to celebrate life in all of its infinite variations and to respect the invaluable contributions of each organism that is part of the great Chain of Being, he fervently declares, “Il n’est pas vrai que nous dominions la nature et tant que ce mythe persistera, il nous maintiendra dans une illusion mortelle. La preuve que la nature reste maîtresse du jeu, c’est qu’elle nous applique ses règles draconiennes réservées à tout organisme vivant, à savoir la naissance, l’épanouissement, le déclin et la mort”¹³ (33). Thus, Rabhi reminds the reader that every creature including humans is bound to the same physical laws. Like every other organism that has ever existed on this planet, our life in this given ontological shape is fleeting. Furthermore, after we perish in our human form, our energy will reemerge elsewhere. According to Rabhi, mainstream humanism is built upon a shaky ideological foundation comprised of numerous anthropocentric notions that lie at the heart of the environmental crisis. In *La Part du Colibri* and all throughout his œuvre, he takes particular aim at Cartesian philosophy which suggests that we should try to “master” the material world to which we are ourselves connected. Given that the idea of transcendence from elemental matter and the ecological forces which render life possible is predicated upon chimerical illusions which fail to consider the fragility of organic cycles, Rabhi asserts that these homocentric fantasies are far from innocent. The wishful thinking that we are somehow *something more* than the universe that spawned us is an unfortunate by-product of dominant strains of humanism. Whereas outmoded forms of humanism argue that our species is “categorically different from all other animals,” Rabhi beckons the modern subject to accept fundamental material realities and to explore the interlinkages that connect us to the larger web of life (Anderson 3).

The philosopher tries to understand why anthropocentric thought systems appear to be more firmly entrenched in society than ever, despite a considerable body of scientific erudition that does not support notions of human centeredness. Moreover, he wonders why the nefarious effects of climate change have not given the final *coup de grâce* to any kind of misleading logic that places *homo sapiens* on an ontological pedestal as members of a privileged species. He reaches the conclusion that the modern lifestyle is at least partly to blame for the lack of critical reflection regarding the cosmos and our minute place in it. In *La Part du Colibri* and throughout his work, Rabhi laments the tragic situation of the modern subject that he describes as being nearly entirely severed from the remainder of the biosphere. Since the vast majority of the earth’s population now spends nearly every waking hour inside of various

edifices of brick, stone, wood, concrete, and steel, he asserts that it has become increasingly difficult to have a meaningful rapport with other material life forms. Highlighting how this cosmic alienation has further hindered our ability to create what the Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss terms a stable, ecological self, Rabhi affirms,

la modernité est fait d'enfernements successifs: de la maternelle à l'université, il est enfermé, les jeunes appellent ça le 'bahut'; les femmes et les hommes en activité disent travailler dans des 'boîtes', petites ou grandes; les jeunes s'amuse en 'boîte' et y vont dans leurs 'caisses.' Ensuite, vous avez la boîte où l'on stocke les vieux avant la dernière boîte que je vous laisse deviner [...] Comment ne pas voir, avec ce programme d'existence, une forme d'aliénation de la personne (21).¹⁴

Rabhi maintains that we have forgotten who and what we are, since many of the world's human inhabitants live in almost complete isolation from the rest of the community of life. He also criticizes dominant educational paradigms that focus entirely on human concerns. In a sterile environment where everything is carefully manufactured for human consumption including light and the air we breathe, the rest of the universe is constantly out of sight and out of mind. According to him, it is this ecological disconnection which has placed the existence of every organism in serious peril.

Elucidating that conceiving a new decentered strand of humanism is no longer optional if we wish to survive, Rabhi advocates in favor of an ecological humanism. After directly associating ecology with humanism, he contends that this philosophical project “concerne chaque être humain, chaque créature, il en va du salut ou du péril de tous. Cette aventure atypique postulait pour un nouveau paradigme: placer l'humain et la nature au cœur de nos préoccupations, et reprenait les alternatives [...]”¹⁵(15). The author invites others to contribute to the ongoing environmental conversation which endeavors to re-anchor our obsolete thought systems into the inner workings of the biosphere. The radical paradigm shift he promulgates is not a reflection of nostalgia, but rather an urgent matter of self-preservation. A more sustainable relationship with the planet will never fully come to fruition unless bad ideas bequeathed to the twenty-first century by Renaissance Humanism are uprooted and replaced with a different way of thinking.

Rabhi also hypothesizes that excessive urbanization has exacerbated the cosmic disconnection. Due to the so-called rural exodus, he affirms that most people no longer have a primordial connection to the earth. Similar to Michel Serres, he asserts that this drastic historical shift away from a predominantly agrarian society has changed everything and posits that this social phenomenon has led to a fractured sense of ecological awareness, “Dans tous les cas, la rupture entre le citadin et la nature vivante induit un comportement et même une pensée conformés par la structure urbaine et donc souvent fort étroits”¹⁶ (34). He further clarifies, “Il n'est donc pas étonnant que l'absence de la terre nourricière et de la nature génère une rupture psychique que chiens, chats, hamsters, poissons rouges et pots de géranium ne peuvent réduire”¹⁷ (34). According to Rabhi, it is easy to forget that our species is part and parcel of the economy of nature when most of our experiences are limited to spaces that have been radically transformed by a heavy human footprint.

The author's apprehension about excessive urbanization and ecological disconnection causes him to question what ecocritics such as Michael Cohen, William Howarth, Nick Hefernan, and David Wragg identify as the idealistic version of Renaissance humanism that defines progress in linear terms. Although many humanists from the Renaissance period did not promote this naïve view, the notion of linear progress was quite pervasive during this

time. Additionally, this utopian conception of progress was linked to other core ideas which would eventually become the foundation of the modern world. Specifically, this myopic vision of progress implies that unfettered growth and development are always desirable outcomes which improve the quality of human life. In *La Part du Colibri*, Rabhi notes that this simplistic logic is the cornerstone of the monolithic economic model which has been exported to all corners of the globe. Furthermore, this conviction or belief that constant growth and expansion should be the ultimate goal of every economy is extremely problematic from an environmental perspective. In a biosphere that provides limited natural resources to all of its human and non-human residents, Rabhi asserts that any model built upon these kinds of assumptions might one day obliterate everything.

Asserting that the current socioeconomic paradigm is emblematic of a dangerous form of regression, Rabhi explains, “Nous passons notre temps à oublier que nous vivons sur une planète limitée à laquelle nous appliquons un principe illimité, ce qui accélère le processus d’épuisement des ressources”¹⁸ (16). A few pages later, he presents compelling statistics to strengthen his position, offering a concrete example based upon empirical data which proves that the present situation is untenable,

prétendre que l’on peut continuer dans cette voie et satisfaire aux besoins de chaque être humain sur cette base est aberrant et mensonger. Comme l’a démontré le WWF avec ‘l’empreinte écologique’, si chacun des six milliards d’habitants actuels vivait comme un Français moyen, il faudrait deux planètes supplémentaires pour assouvir les besoins de tous; comme un Américain, six à sept planètes! [...] S’acharner à le perpétuer à tout prix comme nous le faisons avec le dogme absolu de la croissance condamne l’ensemble de l’humanité¹⁹ (22).

The author takes advantage of these grim statistics to extend an ethical summons to the reader. Implying the modern subject to act on behalf of the entire biosphere before it is too late, Rabhi concludes, “Nous sommes donc impérativement invités à changer pour ne pas disparaître”²⁰ (22). The apocalyptic tone of this passage deeply resonates with the reader given that these concerns have been validated by the world’s eminent scientists.²¹

In this short essay, Rabhi invites us to imagine a new economic model which centers on basic principles of ecological humanism. Even if the conveniences of the modern lifestyle are appealing, which author himself does not deny, the earth simply cannot sustain this calculated assault in the long term. When the cosmos has been stripped of all of its resources, no one or nothing will be left to reap the benefits of this alleged progress. The biosphere will become sterile or unable to support life of any kind. Rabhi cogently outlines how the dominant economic ideology of “toujours plus”²² could only lead to utter oblivion in an interconnected and interdependent universe where there are only so many vital resources to be collectively shared by all species (24). Unless global society deviates from its current trajectory, Rabhi highlights the very real possibility of a human-induced ecocide.

He reveals, “Il est urgent de placer *l’humain* et la *nature* au cœur de nos préoccupations et l’économie à leur service. S’obstiner à maintenir le profit illimité et la croissance indéfinie comme fondement de l’ordre mondial est totalement suicidaire”²³ (25). First, it should be noted that the philosopher italicizes the words “humain” and “nature” to deconstruct the duality of “man and nature.” From a scientific standpoint, it would be more appropriate to discuss “man *in* nature.” He also applies this ecocentric logic to economic institutions and structures. The prevailing logic that unlimited economic growth and expansion are good defies common

sense. The dogmatic doctrine of incessant growth will eventually efface too many strands that preserve the delicate balance of life. Furthermore, even if the earth could survive the effects of continual economic expansion and the excessive consumption that such a model entails, one day there will be nothing left to pillage. Thus, any economic paradigm which depends upon endless growth and extension is inherently unsustainable. This ecological reality, ignored by most mainstream economists with the possible exception of Joseph Stiglitz,²⁴ is why Rabhi identifies “la croissance économique comme problème et non comme solution”²⁵ (Pons 74). In a recent text published in *Kaizen* magazine titled “Pierre Rabhi aujourd’hui,” he denounces “une idéologie sans intelligence (qui) prône inlassablement la croissance sans limites”²⁶ (118). In this same autobiographical piece, he asserts that due to “la force du non-sens,”²⁷ “la planète a été ravalée à un champ de bataille où l’homme, contre l’humain et contre toutes les autres formes de vie, a créé un hypermarché [...] où la terre nourricière, l’eau sont empoisonnées, l’air, chargé de tous les miasmes toxiques”²⁸ (118-19). According to Rabhi, it is evident that obstinately pursuing the path of constant growth on a global scale is to bite the proverbial hand that literally feeds all of the earth’s inhabitants. The author’s comments which equate the current economic paradigm to the act of waging a war against the planet itself are reminiscent of Michel Serres’s *La Guerre Mondiale*.²⁹

Both Serres and Rabhi assert that human civilization has blindly declared a “war” against the very cosmic forces that represent the origin of all life. Speaking directly to the reader, Rabhi poses the following questions: “Comment se fait-il que nous n’ayons pas pris conscience de la valeur inestimable de notre petite planète, seule oasis de vie [...] et que nous ne cessions de la piller, de la polluer, de la détruire aveuglement au lieu d’en prendre soin et d’y construire la paix et la concorde [...]”³⁰ (8-9). Given that we only have one planet which is deteriorating because of unbridled avarice and illogical ideology, Rabhi stresses the importance of conceptualizing a “nouveau rapport entre l’homme et la nature”³¹ (Bainier n.p.). Whereas traditional humanism either frames the relationship between humanity and the remainder of the universe from a purely utilitarian perspective or is indifferent to the lives of other organisms, Rabhi’s non-anthropocentric humanism includes “le principe de symbiose entre l’homme et la nature”³² (Kardos 56). Cognizant that nothing exists in a cosmic vacuum, Rabhi explains that it is always in our best interest to preserve life in all of its varying forms in an ecosphere where “everything is connected to everything else” (first law of ecology). The “world of things” to which our common fate is linked should always be one of humanity’s foremost concerns. Although we will never fully comprehend the veritable intricacy of the threads that constitute the larger web of life, the disappearance of an organism adversely impacts everything around it. Every sentient and non-sentient being exists for a reason. Consequently, he maintains that “sustainable humanism” must value the contributions of every creature. A form of humanism that only deals with human affairs has little to offer the modern world during this unprecedented environmental disaster.

In his appropriately named essay *Manifeste pour la terre et l’humanisme*, Rabhi (re)-appropriates the term “consciousness” in order to emphasize the importance of concrete actions. He criticizes any branch of humanistic thought that is not linked to engagement. Even though the relationship between humanism and engagement is unclear at best for many contemporary authors including J.M.G. Le Clézio,³³ Rabhi unwaveringly promotes an engaged form of ecological humanism. In a universe that is spiraling out of control due to the deleterious effects of climate change, he explains that the time for reflection is over. On the first page of *Manifeste pour la terre et l’humanisme* after Nicolas Hulot’s³⁴ preface, Rabhi redefines consciousness to in-

clude deeds, “Par ‘conscience’, j’entends ce lieu intime où chaque être humain peut en toute liberté prendre la mesure de sa responsabilité à l’égard de la vie et définir les engagements actifs que lui inspire une véritable éthique de vie pour lui-même, pour ses semblables, pour la nature et pour les générations à venir”³⁵ (10). Not only does Rabhi’s humanism compel us to act on behalf of the collective good in human societies, but it also urges us to protect the sanctity of life itself. In this regard, he is different from both classical humanists and twentieth-century humanistic thinkers like Sartre, Camus, and Malraux. His strand of humanism is inseparable from the field of environmental ethics.³⁶

Rabhi also posits that consciousness, as it is traditionally defined, is not enough to stem the tide of the ecological catastrophe that has placed the existence of every material entity in serious jeopardy. Dismissing the naïve, widespread notion that a solution will eventually present itself given the supposedly increased environmental awareness of world leaders and the general public, he writes, “Face à ces problèmes, on nous dit qu’il y a de plus en plus de prise de conscience comme s’il s’agissait d’une connexion électrique. Le temps n’est plus à la prise de conscience, mais à des règles, des décisions et des actions honnêtes et déterminées”³⁷ (44). Referencing disconcerting scientific studies which affirm that time is of the essence, Rabhi dismisses the idea that global society can simply wait for the answers that we need to rediscover our lost sense of ecological balance. According to him, all of the humanists of the world must unite in a collective effort to engage in meaningful reform. The impending cloud of doom that covers the entire planet requires immediate and swift action. This is why his engaged humanism does not permit anyone to be a passive spectator who criticizes the current social order from the sidelines.

The philosopher specifies that the collective fate of the planet and humanity hinges on the individual efforts of ordinary citizens willing to confront daunting environmental problems and to effect change. The process of restructuring the modern world according to a more sustainable paradigm begins with each individual. As Nelly Pons notes, Rabhi clearly articulates his humanistic vision related to “le changement individuel pour un changement collectif”³⁸ (74). Finding philosophical inspiration in the Amerindian legend of the hummingbird and the armadillo, the Franco-Algerian writer encourages us all to emulate the engaged consciousness of the hummingbird. As Catherine Maillard underscores, the “principe du colibri”³⁹ suggests that

le pouvoir de transformer le monde est entre nos mains [...] l’effort individuel du colibri peut contribuer à la libération de tous [...] Appliquer le principe du colibri, c’est résister, chacun à notre niveau, à la logique du profit pour lui préférer celle du vivant. Il nous appartient, à travers nos choix de vie, nos modes de consommation, nos gestes quotidiens, de défendre les valeurs auxquelles nous croyons”⁴⁰ (n.p.).

Offering a similar interpretation of the metaphor of the hummingbird in *La Part du Colibri* in addition to Amerindian philosophy and spirituality, Nelly Pons explains, “Colibris c’est aussi, selon la légende amérindienne, la croyance que la réussite d’une entreprise collective est liée à la convergence de tous les actes individuels”⁴¹ (110). Rabhi staunchly maintains that when individuals change, the institutions around them are forced to evolve as well. Although the armadillo scoffs at the hummingbird carrying small drops of water in his tiny beak when a massive forest fire erupts, the writer asserts that the world would be a much better place if more people were to follow the hummingbird’s lead. One person cannot put out the raging flames, or end the war that threatens to destroy all life on this biosphere, but Rabhi’s decentered humanism imagines a universe full of “human hummingbirds” making more environmentally responsible decisions.

Moreover, he asserts that true change, which transcends empty rhetoric designed to placate the masses, initially emerges from outside of the political sphere. Rabhi affirms that we cannot depend on those in power to correct or dismantle an economic system from which they derive colossal monetary benefits. The sweeping kind of genuine reform which is paramount to saving the planet runs counter to the narcissistic interests of the political establishment and the powerful organizations like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund that (mis-)manage the global economy. Instead of appealing to “les grands de ce monde,”⁴² Rabhi attempts to empower the individual (44), and contends that “l’écologie et l’humanisme sont d’ordre incompatible avec l’étroitesse du système politique actuel”⁴³ since political figures are only interested in preserving their own privileges at all costs (15). This conviction explains why Rabhi has now abandoned the political arena adopting a different approach which focuses on the individual and community involvement.

In conclusion, this preliminary investigation of the ecocentric, decentered philosophy of Pierre Rabhi seeks to encourage other scholars to take this Franco-Algerian thinker more seriously. As this essay has demonstrated, Rabhi’s philosophy warrants much more critical attention than it is currently receiving. This research gap is troubling given that the works of this prolific writer delve into the most pressing environmental issues facing the modern world in an era of ecological non-sustainability. With humility, clarity, and compassion, he writes about a subject that is a matter of life and death. In *La Part du Colibri* and throughout his œuvre, Rabhi outlines a radically different sort of ecological humanism which more accurately represents the material realities of living in an interconnected and interdependent cosmos in comparison to classical humanism and the “engagement” of earlier twentieth-century writers. Rabhi strives to create a committed army of mobilized “hummingbirds” all doing their small part to end the war that humanity has been waging for far too long and to preserve the fragile equilibrium that sustains life. The question of how many hummingbirds are willing to take action in defense of our poorly-treated biosphere could very well determine the future of our species, or the lack thereof.

Notes

¹ In fact, I searched approximately seventy-five major American databases in the humanities without finding a single academic article about Pierre Rabhi. Given this dearth of scholarly writing, the recent special issue of the *Kaizen* magazine dedicated to Rabhi is an invaluable tool for those who wish to discover his philosophy. Here is a link to this special issue: <http://www.kaizen-magazine.com/hors-serie/>. It should be noted that the French database <http://rechercheisidore.fr> contains a few articles about Rabhi.

² Although Rabhi’s work has been translated into many languages including Japanese, Korean, German, Italian, and Hungarian, only one of his texts *As in the heart, so in the earth: reversing the desertification of the soul and the soil* (2006) has been translated into English. In her excellent article “You’re Missing Out on Great Literature,” Anna Clark explores the dearth of English translations of foreign texts in general which has often placed the United States in a negative light abroad. Clark provides a rather cogent and nuanced theoretical framework for understanding why this problem continues to persist in the US in the face of mounting international criticism.

³This conversation can be seen in its entirety via the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oo90R83mCtc>

⁴“Because even if he (Rabhi) possesses everything an intellectual does, he is also a true farmer, a man who has lived a simple and difficult life.” All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

⁵Yvan Saint-Jours explains that this term is a linguistic blend that combines the words “agriculture” and “écologie” (10). Offering a clear explanation of what this sustainable practice entails, Saint-Jours asserts, “On pourrait résumer cela comme étant une forme d’agriculture qui prend en compte toutes les données environnementales du lieu où elle se pratique. L’agroécologie [...] est avant tout un panel d’outils pour produire localement de la nourriture et résoudre la question de la faim dans le monde” “We could summarize this as a form of agriculture that takes into account environmental data from the place in which it is being practiced. Agroecology is above all an array of tools to produce food locally and to resolve the question of world hunger” (10; my trans.).

⁶“Movement for the Earth and Humanism”

⁷“The Hummingbird Movement”

⁸*Le Gardien du feu* is a novel. Rabhi is a gifted writer who attempts to convey his messages in several different genres.

⁹“Silent being of which we are merely one of its living manifestations”

¹⁰“Thus we are part of the same order in which plants, animals, and humans are all inextricably bound to the other elements that are water, air, heat, and light. It is in this vital order in which we are included”

¹¹“Nothing is lost, nothing is created, everything is transformed”

¹²“In the genus of mammals, we have self-proclaimed ourselves to be the best”

¹³“It is not true that we can subjugate nature and as long as this myth persists, we will be trapped in this mortal illusion. The proof that nature remains the game master is found in the fact that there is no escape from its draconian laws that apply to every living organism. This is clearly visible as we are born, when we blossom into development, and during our inevitable decline and death.”

¹⁴“Modernity is comprised of one imprisonment after another: from kindergarten to college, we are imprisoned, young people call this ‘bahut’ (a slang word for school with pejorative connotations); professional women and men say that they work in ‘boxes,’ large or small, young people have fun in ‘boxes’ (night clubs) and they drive there in their ‘crates’ (cars). Then, you have the box where one confines old people before the final box that I will allow you to guess for yourself [...] With this kind of programmed existence, how could we not see a form of social alienation?”

¹⁵“concerns every human being, every creature, the salvation or peril of all of us is at stake. This atypical adventure advocates in favor of a new paradigm: placing human beings and nature at the heart of our preoccupations, and reconsidering alternatives”

¹⁶“In all instances, the separation between city dwellers and nature induces a behavior and even a type of thought that conform to the urban structure that are often very narrow

in scope”

¹⁷ “It is not surprising that the absence of a nourishing earth and nature has generated a psychological rift that dogs, cats, hamsters, goldfish and geranium pots cannot reduce”

¹⁸ “We spend our time forgetting that we live on a finite planet upon which we have applied an unlimited principle; this has accelerated the process of the exhaustion of these limited natural resources”

¹⁹ “pretending that we can continue along this path and meet the needs of every human being on this basis is aberrant and misleading. As the WWF has demonstrated with ‘the ecological footprint,’ if all of the current six billion (human, my insertion) inhabitants lived like the average French person, we would need two more planets to satisfy everyone’s needs; (if everyone lived) like an American, six to seven planets! [...] Desperately attempting to perpetuate (the current system) at all costs like we continue to do with the absolutist dogma of constant growth condemns all of humanity”

²⁰ “We are thus strongly compelled to change in order to not disappear”

²¹ For instance, see the 2014 synthesis report published by the *International Panel on Climate Change* (IPCC). This disquieting report can be downloaded via the following link: <http://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/syr/>

²² “even more”

²³ “We must urgently place *human beings* and *nature* at the forefront of our concerns and construct our economy accordingly. Obstinate clinging to unlimited profit and constant growth as the basis of the world order is completely suicidal”

²⁴ It should be noted that Stiglitz dedicated an entire chapter of his book *Making Globalization Work* to environmental concerns, titled “Saving the Planet.” Stiglitz is one of the only major economists who even makes an attempt to address the ecological crisis in a meaningful way and to propose solutions.

²⁵ “economic growth as a problem and not a solution”

²⁶ “a dumb ideology that constantly advocates unlimited growth”

²⁷ “power of nonsense”

²⁸ “The planet has been reduced to a battlefield where man, against fellow humans and other life forms, has created a hypermarket [...] in which the earth that provides sustenance, the water and air have been poisoned and loaded with a toxic, noxious air”

²⁹ The important *décroissance* movement in France, as evidenced by the existence of the *Parti pour la décroissance* (<http://www.partipourladecroissance.net/?cat=3>), illustrates that many French people share Rabbi’s anxiety about the sustainability of a system predicated upon the principle of constant growth.

³⁰ “How is it possible that we have not realized the priceless value of our little planet, the only oasis of life [...] and that we incessantly continue to pillage it, to pollute it, and to destroy it blindly instead of taking care of it and making a peace agreement with it”

³¹ “a new relationship between man and nature”

³² “the principle of symbiosis between man and nature”

³³ Part of the problem is that the term “engagement” in French literary circles is laden with very specific connotations. It is nearly impossible to hear this word without thinking of writers like Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and André Malraux. Although contemporary authors like Le Clézio have undeniable humanistic tendencies, they often have a radically different vision concerning the role of the artist in society in comparison to their so-called “engaged” predecessors. For this reason, they do not consider themselves to be engaged writers, at least not in the same sense. See Perec, Georges. “Commitment or the Crisis of Language.” Trans. Rob Halpern. *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 29.1 (2009): 112-23 in addition to chapter four of my book titled *J.M.G. Le Clézio: A Concerned Citizen of the Global Village* and my essay “The De-centered Humanism and Cosmic Engagement of J.M.G. Le Clézio: Posing Questions in an Age of Suspicion.” *Sprachkunst: Beiträge zur Literaturwissenschaft* 42.1 (2011): 111-29.

³⁴ Hulot founded the environmental organization the *Fondation Nicolas Hulot pour la nature et l'homme* in 1990. He still serves as the president of this association. He is perhaps best known for his documentary show *Ushuaïa Nature* which is dedicated to ecological concerns.

³⁵ “By ‘consciousness,’ I am referring to the intimate space in which each human being can freely assess his responsibility with regard to life and define the active forms of commitment that inspire a true ethic of life for himself, for his fellow man, for nature and for future generations”

³⁶ This discipline is still an emerging interdisciplinary field in France.

³⁷ “In the face of these problems, we are told that there is more and more consciousness as if it were a matter of making a connection. It is no longer time for reflection, but for rules, decisions, and honest and determined actions”

³⁸ “personal change for collective change”

³⁹ “hummingbird principle”

⁴⁰ “the power to transform the world is in our hands [...] the hummingbird’s personal effort could play a part in everyone’s liberation [...] Applying the hummingbird principle is to resist, everyone at his or her level, the logic of profit in order to embrace life. It is up to us, by means of our choices, our methods of consumption, our daily gestures, to defend the values in which we believe”

⁴¹ “The hummingbird also represents, according to Amerindian legend, the belief that the success of a collective enterprise is linked to the convergence of every personal action”

⁴² “the powerful people of this world”

⁴³ “ecology and humanism are entirely incompatible with the narrow-mindedness of the current political system”

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