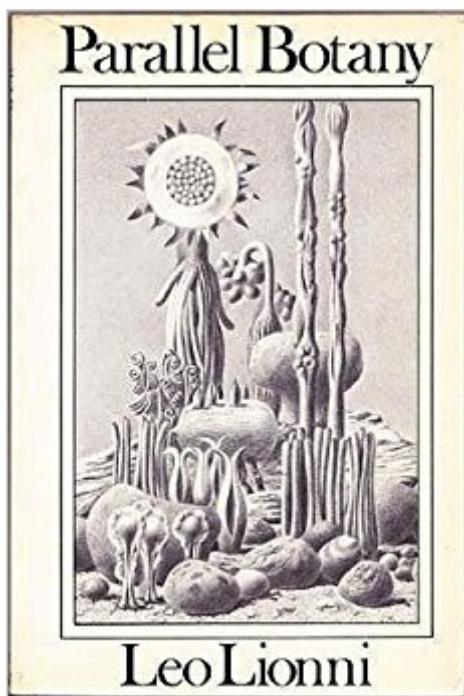


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Parallel Botany



Synopsis

This book is a detailed catalog of imaginary plants, with fascinating drawings in charcoal and pencil, done with care and in scientific style. It includes some actual botanical history and facts.

Book Information

Paperback: 181 pages

Publisher: Random House Inc (P); 1st edition (June 1978)

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Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 3 customer reviews

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Customer Reviews

Text: English, Italian (translation) --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

GREAT!

Leo Lionni created a baffling, even maddening, encyclopedic compendium that describes, illustrates, arrays, and summarizes a host of imaginary plants---his parallel botany. Besides the detailed descriptions of these odd plants, Mr. Lionni, who is best known for his various children's books, rendered numerous illustrations of the various parallel plants. But he doesn't stop here: 23 figures and photographs of various scientists, researchers, explorers and parallel plants together paired with another 32 plates or charcoal or pencil drawings fortify the seeming reality of the world of parallel botany. (Keep in mind that a number of these plants are not visible.) The end notes to the chapters add more authenticity, and I assume, that many of the publications cited are real. The only component lacking is an index. There are layers and layers of complexity to this spoof, for Mr. Lionni draws the reader into more than the facts and lore of his creations by also intertwining issues about philosophy, language, and the scientific method. He presents multiple points of view bantered by experts in this subject matter, and this debate enlivens the discussion. He firmly roots the research

by drawing upon imaginary but real-sounding folk tales and legends, made more real by invoking actual historical figures. Hence, imaginary notes from Magellan's historian or the Greek philosopher Heraclitus are dissected and scrutinized for clues and encounters with various specimens from the realm of parallel plants. Such luminaries as the Swiss biologist Max Spinder or the Greek botanist Professor Spyros Rodokanakis, and many more, espouse their various theories and findings, often disagreeing about their findings and the implications of their research. His methods remind one of both Borges and Lovecraft, two masters at creating real-sounding imaginary worlds supported by tier upon tier of crafted scholarship and science. This book is unique and arguably the last, and the only, word on the subject of parallel botany. Some consider it hilarious, others a mere spoof, but certainly it is more than that, for Mr. Lionni expended considerable effort and time to document this imaginary segment of the plant kingdom. The fact that a major publisher issued the book in hardback suggests someone thought highly of this idea. I take away a sense of astonishment at the amount of detail invoked to underscore the verisimilitude of the premise, and see this book as a wry jab at the reductionistic tendencies of a scientific method that seems at times to value cataloging over understanding our world. (I also once had a vision many years ago that may have come from whatever source Mr. Lionni tapped for Parallel Botany, a vision of an asylum that housed crazed and dangerous plants that I rendered in an oil painting a friend of mine smuggled into the art gallery in the Saturn Bar down in New Orleans.)

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