

C O L T 1 0 2

On Location: The Place of Literature in Global Cultures

The Place of Plants in Modernity,
Post-Coloniality, and Late Capitalism
Online | MW 10-11:20 a.m. | Professor Antónia Szabari

Botany has been a colonial science in modernity but plants have emerged as living organisms whose very life can resist regimes of domination. The “location” in this class will be the forest, the garden, and spaces that belong to plants. These spaces are not antithetical to urban and social spaces in the novels and short stories we will read and discuss. Stories we read make plants intervene in the truth of the authorities that be in ways that are life-changing. Italo Calvino examines the subversive power of botany in European industrialization; Marguerite Duras tells us that anticolonial revolt can be started by a flower seller; Richard Powers tells the saga of the modern history of the USA as not only a multi-ethnic history of immigration but also one in which we find ourselves addressed by trees, which tell us about the unspeakable dangers brought about by our “normal” lives; Han Kang asks if we can escape patriarchal structures of oppression through the artistic creativity that seems to be imitating vegetal beauty; and Shani Mootoo enlists flowers in telling the tale of the resilience of queer subjects living in the aftermath of colonial regimes and abuse. These stories take us to different parts of the world, but they have in common the suggestion that vegetal life is not inferior or secondary to human life and plants are not the objects of human management aimed at fitting them as décor into our urban lives. Instead, they reveal the unsettling and liberating vegetal quality of human subjectivity in modern, urban, post-colonial, and late capitalist life. Plants are us!

