

Tales of the Forest



How still the woods seem from here, yet how lively a stir the hidden animals are making; digging, gnawing, biting, eyes shining, at work and at play, getting food, rearing young, roving through the underbrush, climbing the rocks, wading solitary marshes, tracing the banks of rivers and streams!... The plants are as busy as the animals, every cell in a swirl of enjoyment, humming like a hive, singing a new song of creation.

John Muir, *The Boyhood of My Youth*

Forked River Mountain, in the Lacey Tract, is the center of the proposed city. With Herbert Smith, the planner, I went up there one morning to have a look at the site. It was a clear summer day with big clouds in the sky and a cool wind blowing. The view from the top of the hill was spacious, and unbroken pineland reached away for miles, streaked with dark lines of cedars. "I hope I don't start to cry," Smith said. "This is a planner's dream. From this elevation we could move right out onto the center-business-district platform – 240 acres [97 hectares] of stores and plazas and high buildings in middle city for pedestrians only.... This area of the pinelands simply begins to jump out at you if you're going to go for urbanization. It's magnificent. It's just magnificent. I can see those gol'darn structures now, surrounded with green.

John McPhee, *The Pine Barrens*

The Pine stays green all winter, the birch punches the clock in October; do I favor the tree that, like myself, braves the winter wind? The pine will shelter a grouse but the birch will feed him; do I consider bed more important than board?

Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*

Today, as always when I am afoot in the woods, I feel the possibility, the reasonableness, the practicability of living in the world in a way that would enlarge rather than diminish the hope of life. I feel the possibility of a frugal and protective love for the creation that would be unimaginably more meaningful and joyful than our present destructive and wasteful economy. The absence of human society, that made me so uneasy last night, now begins to be a comfort to me. I am afoot in the woods. I am alive in the world, this moment, without the help or the interference of any machine.

Wendell Berry, "An Entrance to the Woods,"
Recollected Essays 1965-1980

Water, soil, and the earth's green mantle of plants make up the world that supports the animal life of the earth. Although modern man seldom remembers the fact, he could not exist without the plants that harness the sun's energy and manufacture the basic foodstuffs he depends upon for life.

Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*

We recognize the forests as indispensable to civilization and public welfare. We regard the wise use, effective protection, especially from fire, and prompt renewal of the forests on land best adapted to such use, as a public necessity and hence a public duty devolving upon all forest owners alike, whether public, corporate, or individual.

Gifford Pinchot, *Breaking New Ground*

Yellowstone, it seemed to me, was the top of the world, a region of deep lakes and dark timber, canyons, and waterfalls. But, beautiful as it is, one might have the sense of confinement there. The skyline in all directions is close at hand, the high wall of the woods and deep cleavages of shade. There is a perfect freedom in the mountains, but it belongs to the eagle and the elk, badger and the bear. The Kiowas reckoned their stature by the distance they could see, and they were bent and blind in the wilderness.

N. Scott Momaday, *The Way to Rainy Mountain*

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Tales of the Forest (continued)



Some people have asked what the relationship is between peace and environment, and to them I say that many wars are fought over resources, which are becoming increasingly scarce across the earth. If we did a better job of managing our resources sustainably, conflicts over them would be reduced. So, protecting the global environment is directly related to securing peace.

Wangari Maathai,
 “Statement on the Occasion of Receiving the
 2004 Nobel Peace Prize”

In the woods is perpetual youth. Within these plantations of God, a decorum and sanctity reign, a perennial festival is dressed, and the guest sees not how he should tire of them in a thousand years. In the woods we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life-no disgrace, no calamity... which nature cannot repair.... I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Nature,” *Essays: Second Series*

There was a town set in the cup of the great hills. In the Alleghenies. A town of trees, two-story houses, redbrick hardware stores, church steeples, the clock tower, the courthouse, and over all the blue haze- partly dust, partly smoke, but mostly moisture-that veils the Appalachian world most of the time-that diaphanous veil that conceals nothing. And the field beyond the town, the zigzag of rail fences, the old gray barns and gaunt gothic farm houses, the webwork of winding roads, and the sulfurous creeks, and black coal mines- and scattered everywhere-the woods. The trees. The vegetation cradle of North America. All those trees transpiring patiently through the wet and exhilarating winds of spring, through the heavy, sultry, sullen summers and into the smoky autumns. Through seasons, years, millennia. Sensitive and sensible plants, with who knows what aspirations of their own.

Edward Abbey, “Appalachia,” *Appalachian Wilderness: The Great Smokey Mountains*

It’s amazing that trees can turn gravel and bitter salts into these soft-lipped lobes, as if I were to bite down on a granite slab and start to swell, bud, and flower. Trees seem to do their feats effortlessly. Every year a given tree creates from scratch 99 percent of its living parts. Water lifting in tree trunks can climb 150 feet per hour in full summer and a tree can heave a ton of water every day. A big elm in a single season might make as many as six million leaves, each wholly intricate; without budging one inch, a tree stands there, accumulating dead wood, mutely rigid as an obelisk, but secretly it seethes, splits, sucks, and stretches.

Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

And, maddened with despair, so that he laughed loud and long, did Goodman Brown grasp his staff and set forth again, at such a rate that he seemed to fly along the forest path rather than to walk or run. The road grew wilder and drearier and more faintly traced, and vanished at length, leaving him in the heart of the dark wilderness, still rushing onward with the instinct that guides mortal man to evil. The whole forest was peopled with frightful sounds-the creaking of the trees, the howling of wild beasts and the yell of Indians; while sometimes the wind tolled like a distant church bell, and sometimes gave a broad run around the traveller, as if all Nature were laughing him to scorn.

Nathaniel Hawthorne,
Young Goodman Brown