

# Tales of the Forest

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## **Wendell Berry, *An Entrance to the Woods*, Recollected Essays 1965-1980.**

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.

*Born in 1934, Wendell Berry writes most often about farming, wilderness, and the need for different attitudes toward the land.*

## **Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature Essays: Second Series***

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.

*Born in Boston in 1803, Ralph Waldo Emerson was educated at Harvard Divinity School. He taught and preached, and later became a renowned philosopher, writer, and poet.*

## **Edward Abbey, *Appalachia*, *Appalachian Wilderness***

There was a town set in the cup of the great hills. In the Alleghenies. A town of trees, two-story houses, red-brick 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 smokey autumns. Through seasons, years, millennia. Sensitive and sensible plants, with who knows what aspirations of their own.

*Edward Abbey was born in 1927. Much of his writing is based on his experiences as a fire lookout and park ranger in the Southeast.*

## **Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek***

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. *Born in Pittsburgh in 1945, Annie Dillard has written most about the Roanoke Valley of the Blue Ridge Mountains.*

## **Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Young Goodman Brown***

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 was born in 1804, in Salem, Massachusetts. Hawthorne was descended from Puritan settlers, and his writings often focused on and rebel against Puritanical teachings regarding good and evil.*

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