

Poems Of The Forest

Forest Faith – A Reflection

When the edges of my mind fray,
and the golden sacred thread
seems pulled, gathered, caught
upon the briar of my broken being,
and my hearthome holds too much
behind its ancient doors
so there is no breathing space at all,
I take myself to the woods.
For there I become not young,
but small again and feel the rising
ocean tides of sap lull me at last
into the deep greening rest of soul
only the old tall ones know
the sky touchers, earth drinkers
we call in our dull infant speech, simply Trees.
So I place my foot upon the winding path
and dew the way with tears and sometimes even blood,
until their windleaf song sounds soul deep, and slows and halts
me long enough
to feel their verdant canopy of calm,
and I greet them then,
as the keepers of the way they are;
the blessed Beech and noble Holly,
the Oak and Ash and Thorn,
grey brown brothers and sisters
of the branching dance of being.
Their familiar oldness a reminder
of my passing place
in all this; they leaflean down
to teach me once again the way of prayer
as being and being as prayer,
allowing the holy breath to play along my spine as within their trunked tallness
while standing through the shifting seasons
they grow slowly, imperceptibly, always,
until flower and fruiting follow in their turn,
then the seeming fall, asleep asunder for awhile,
as my life now flutters, cast upon the winds
lost in wildness, a wintered leaf, dry and brittle,
but here in their stately shadows
daring to read the scripture of their state,
and hear their prophecy proclaimed in stillness; that old roots dig deep and deeper still, that branches bend so
not to break and that there is a joy in storms when yielded to.
So for a while I breathe the sylvan air
and greet the great and green,
these guardians of natural grace,
and then when I have walked long enough to become reminded, rewilded and rehomed in heart, I bow in
thanks
and leave the woods to plant their sainted seeds throughout my world and life;
to feel a forest grow within
and make the faith feathered one
a home.



by Brother Richard Hendrick Ofm Cap

Lost”



Stand still. The trees ahead and bushes beside you
Are not lost. Wherever you are is called Here,
And you must treat it as a powerful stranger,
Must ask permission to know it and be known.
The forest breathes. Listen. It answers,
I have made this place around you.
If you leave it, you may come back again, saying Here.
No two trees are the same to Raven.
No two branches are the same to Wren.
If what a tree or a bush does is lost on you,
You are surely lost. Stand still. The forest knows
Where you are. you must let it find you.

by David Wagoner, from *Collected Poems 1956-1976*

When I Am Among The Trees

When I am among the trees,
especially the willows and the honey locust,
equally the beech, the oaks and the pines,
they give off such hints of gladness.
I would almost say that they save me, and daily.
I am so distant from the hope of myself,
in which I have goodness, and discernment,
and never hurry through the world
but walk slowly, and bow often.
Around me the trees stir in their leaves
and call out, “Stay awhile.”
The light flows from their branches.
And they call again, “It’s simple,” they say,
“and you too have come
into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled
with light, and to shine.”

by *Mary Oliver*



Mighty Oak Tree
Reflection On Oak Tree In Charleville Castle, Tullamore, Co Offaly

Forty years ago
A thunderbolt
Struck you
Splitting you
Right down the centre of your being.

But you did not become a victim
You learnt how to survive
By drawing up water
Through what remained of your trunk
Constantly giving water and life
To a great cloud
Of Summer leaves.
And in return
receiving life.
How much we could learn from you
Of what it means to be truly
Interconnected.

Though your heavy elbows
Almost droop to the grass
Little else indicates
Your great age
Of four hundred years.

What changes you have witnessed
Over your great life span
How much wisdom you hold
In your cellular memory

You witnessed the town
Your are rooted in
Burn to the ground
In the fire of 1785
Just as you witnessed it rise
phoenix like
From the ashes

Will you live long enough
To witness our evolution
Into homo universalis
As we rise phoenix like
out of the ashes
Of the civilization that is now
Burning up

Perhaps you will
For there is a lot of life left in you yet
And our time of quantum leap
Is near at hand.

by Carmel Bracken



Optimism

More and more I have come to admire resilience.
Not the simple resistance of a pillow, whose foam
returns over and over to the same shape, but the sinuous
tenacity of a tree: finding the light newly blocked on one
side,
it turns in another. A blind intelligence, true.
But out of such persistence arose turtles, rivers,
mitochondria, figs — all this resinous, unretractable earth.

by Jane Hirshfield



Trees

I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree.

A tree whose hungry mouth is prest
Against the sweet earth's flowing breast;

A tree that looks at God all day,
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;

A tree that may in summer wear
A nest of robins in her hair;

Upon whose bosom snow has lain;
Who intimately lives with rain.

Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree.

by Joyce Kilmer, 1886 - 1918



I Saw in Louisiana A Live-Oak Growing

I saw in Louisiana a live-oak growing,
All alone stood it and the moss hung down from the branches,
Without any companion it grew there uttering joyous leaves of dark green,
And its look, rude, unbending, lusty, made me think of myself,
But I wonder'd how it could utter joyous leaves standing alone there without its friend near, for I knew
I could not,
And I broke off a twig with a certain number of leaves upon it, and twined around it a little moss,
And brought it away, and I have placed it in sight in my room,
It is not needed to remind me as of my own dear friends,
(For I believe lately I think of little else than of them,)
Yet it remains to me a curious token, it makes me think of manly love;
For all that, and though the live-oak glistens there in Louisiana solitary in a wide flat space,
Uttering joyous leaves all its life without a friend a lover near,
I know very well I could not.

by [Walt Whitman](#)

Love Letter To Earths Forests

Under the volcanoes, beside the snow-capped mountains, among the huge lakes, the fragrant, the silent, the tangled Chilean forest... My feet sink down into the dead leaves, a fragile twig crackles, the giant rauli trees rise in all their bristling height, a bird from the cold jungle passes over, flaps its wings, and stops in the sunless branches. And then, from its hideaway, it sings like an oboe... The wild scent of the laurel, the dark scent of the boldo herb, enter my nostrils and flood my whole



being... The cypress of the Guaitecas blocks my way... This is a vertical world: a nation of birds, a plenitude of leaves... I stumble over a rock, dig up the uncovered hollow, an enormous spider covered with red hair stares up at me, motionless, as huge as a crab... A golden carabus beetle blows its mephitic breath at me, as its brilliant rainbow disappears like lightning... Going on, I pass through a forest of

ferns much taller than I am: from their cold green eyes sixty tears splash down on my face and, behind me, their fans go on quivering for a long time... A decaying tree trunk: what a treasure!... Black and blue mushrooms have given it ears, red parasite plants have covered it with rubies, other lazy plants have let it borrow their beards, and a snake springs out of the rotted body like a sudden breath, as if the spirit of the dead trunk were slipping away from it... Farther along, each tree stands away from its fellows... They soar up over the carpet of the secretive forest, and the foliage of each has its own style, linear, bristling, ramulose, lanceolate, as if cut by shears moving in infinite ways... A gorge; below, the crystal water slides over granite and jasper... A butterfly goes past, bright as a lemon, dancing between the water and the sunlight... Close by, innumerable calceolarias nod their little yellow heads in greeting... High up, red copihues (*Lapageria rosea*) dangle like drops from the magic forest's arteries... A fox cuts through the silence like a flash, sending a shiver through the leaves, but silence is the law of the plant kingdom... The barely audible cry of some bewildered animal far off... The piercing interruption of a hidden bird... The vegetable world keeps up its low rustle until a storm chums up all the music of the earth.

Anyone who hasn't been in the Chilean forest doesn't know this planet.

I have come out of that landscape, that mud, that silence, to roam, to go singing through the world.

By Pablo Neruda, Chilean Poet

A Passage About Trees

For me, trees have always been the most penetrating preachers. I revere them when they live in tribes and families, in forests and groves. And even more I revere them when they stand alone. They are like lonely persons. Not like hermits who have stolen away out of some weakness, but like great, solitary men, like Beethoven and Nietzsche. In their highest boughs the world rustles, their roots rest in infinity; but they do not lose themselves there, they struggle with all the force of their lives for one thing only: to fulfill themselves according to their own laws, to build up their own form, to represent themselves. Nothing is holier, nothing is more exemplary than a beautiful, strong tree. When a tree is cut down and reveals its naked death-wound to the sun, one can read its whole history in the luminous, inscribed disk of its trunk: in the rings of its years, its scars, all the struggle, all the suffering, all the sickness, all the happiness and prosperity stand truly written, the narrow years and the luxurious years, the attacks withstood, the storms endured. And every young farm boy knows that the hardest and noblest wood has the narrowest rings, that high on the mountains and in continuing danger the most indestructible, the strongest, the ideal trees grow.

Trees are sanctuaries. Whoever knows how to speak to them, whoever knows how to listen to them, can learn the truth. They do not preach learning and precepts, they preach, undeterred by particulars, the ancient law of life.

A tree says: A kernel is hidden in me, a spark, a thought, I am life from eternal life. The attempt and the risk that the eternal mother took with me is unique, unique the form and veins of my skin, unique the smallest play of leaves in my branches and the smallest scar on my bark. I was made to form and reveal the eternal in my smallest special detail.



A tree says: My strength is trust. I know nothing about my fathers, I know nothing about the thousand children that every year spring out of me. I live out the secret of my seed to the very end, and I care for nothing else. I trust that God is in me. I trust that my labor is holy. Out of this trust I live.

When we are stricken and cannot bear our lives any longer, then a tree has something to say to us: Be still! Be still! Look at me! Life is not easy, life is not difficult. Those are childish thoughts... Home is neither here nor there. Home is within you, or home is nowhere at all.

A longing to wander tears my heart when I hear trees rustling in the wind at evening. If one listens to them silently for a long time, this longing reveals its kernel, its meaning. It is not so much a matter of escaping from one's suffering, though it may seem to be so. It is a longing for home, for a memory of the mother, for new metaphors for life. It leads home. Every path leads homeward, every step is birth, every step is death, every grave is mother.

So the tree rustles in the evening, when we stand uneasy before our own childish thoughts: Trees have long thoughts, long-breathing and restful, just as they have longer lives than ours. They are wiser than we are, as long as we do not listen to them. But when we have learned how to listen to trees, then the brevity and the quickness and the childlike hastiness of our thoughts achieve an incomparable joy. Whoever has learned how to listen to trees no longer wants to be a tree. He wants to be nothing except what he is. That is home. That is happiness.

by Herman Hesse