



Readings in Wood: What the Forest Taught Me

John Leland

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Award-winning nature writer John Leland offers a collection of twenty-seven short, poetic essays that marry science and the humanities as the author seeks meaning in trees. *Readings in Wood* is an investigation of trees and forests and also of wood as a material that people have found essential in the creation of society and culture. Leland views with wit and erudition the natural world and the curious place of human beings as saviors and destroyers of this world.

At once personal memoir, natural history, and cultural criticism, the book reflects Leland's idiosyncratic vision. In one essay Leland asks the trees, "Do you, like us, rejoice in sunny days, dance with the wind, and blush to have your sexual desires known by prurient passersby? Why, like us, do you torture yourselves reaching for a heaven beyond your grasp? Why twist yourselves so that your grain becomes a record of your grief? What mystic patterns of science, math, and religion hide in your whirls of leaf and branch?"

As vast as a forest, topics range from tree grain and leaf shape to economic theories, mathematics, and engineering. *Readings in Wood* is a hybrid testament of science, faith, superstition, and disbelief learned from sitting on tree trunks and peering at leaves and fungi. Leland hopes others will join him in nature's classroom. Quite aware of the irony, he reminds us, "These leaves you desultorily turn over once hung in a green wood gone to make this book. Touching a book, you touch a tree. I pray that *Readings in Wood's* essays, touching you, may justify in some small way the trees who died in their making."

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