Henry David Thoreau was one of the first philosophers to challenge our exploitative and utilitarian view of nature. ‘Walden’, his most famous work, was published in 1854 after Thoreau had spent two years living in solitude in a small cabin beside Walden Pond, Massachusetts.

Some extracts from Walden relating to forests bear repeating. They not only represent some of the most beautiful prose in print, but also portray a love of nature that is profound.

I’ve written them out as poems – which is what they are.

**Extract from ‘Baker Farm’, Walden**

Sometimes I rambled to pine groves, standing like temples, or like fleets at sea, full-rigged, with wavy boughs, and rippling with light,
so soft and green and shady that the Druids would have forsaken their oaks to worship in them;
or to the cedar wood beyond Flints’ Pond, where the trees, covered with hoary blue berries, aspiring higher and higher, are fit to stand before Valhalla,
and the creeping juniper covers the ground with wreaths full of fruit;
or to swamps where the usnea lichen hangs in festoons from the white-spruce trees, and toadstools, round tables of the swamp gods, cover the ground, and more beautiful fungi adorn the stumps, like butterflies or shells, vegetable winkles; where the swamp-pink and dog-wood grow,
the red alder-berry glows like eyes of imps, the waxwork grooves and crushes the hardest woods in its folds, and the wild-holly berries make the beholder forget his home with their beauty, and he is dazzled and tempted by nameless other wild forbidden fruits, too fair for mortal taste.

**And from ‘House Warming’, Walden**

But I was interested in the preservation of the venison and the vert more than the hunters or wood-choppers, and as much as though I had been the Lord Warden himself; and if any part was burned, though I burned it myself by accident, I grieved with a grief that lasted longer and was more inconsolable than that of the proprietors; nay, I grieved when it was cut down by the proprietors themselves.
I would that our farmers when they cut down a forest felt some of that awe which the old Romans did when they came to thin, or let in the light to, a consecrated grove, (lucum conlucare,) that is, would believe that it is sacred to some god. The Roman made an expiatory offering, and prayed, Whatever god or goddess thou art to whom this grove is sacred, be propitious to me, my family, and children, etc.

Chris Perley