

English 479/579
Spring 2020
Henry Thoreau

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Henry in Our Time

“There are probably words addressed to our condition exactly, which, if we could really hear and understand, would be more salutary than the morning or the spring to our lives, and possibly put a new aspect on the face of things for us. How many a man has dated a new era in his life from the reading of a book.”

Frightening and unpredictable as it is, this extraordinary time offers an excellent opportunity to focus for ten weeks on the work of one of our country’s best known, though sometimes least understood writers. Henry David Thoreau has much to say to what he calls “our condition” in the quotation above from the chapter “Reading” in *Walden*. Consider, for instance, that he invented social distancing and practiced a modified form of it for most of his life. Unlike us, Thoreau chose this mode of life, and he did so primarily because it secured him precious time to do what he valued most: walking, thinking, reading, and writing. Although for many reasons “Thoreau” became a household name (for simple living, social activism, environmentalism, and so on), we would know little or nothing about him and his accomplishments he had not also been an extraordinary writer.

In order to dive “deep and suck out all the marrow of” his writing, as he said he wanted to do with life, we will focus primarily on *Walden*, while also spending time with a variety of other writings, some of them quite different, spanning most of his twenty-year career. With new time to think and write, thanks to a series of chance occurrences and global connectedness, I look forward to finding “words addressed to our condition exactly” together with you all. Having read, studied, and written about Thoreau’s work for over forty years, I’m pretty confident that “if we [can] really hear and understand,” many of those words will “be more salutary than the morning or the spring to our lives, and possibly put a new aspect on the face of things for us.”

Course Policies

Communicating with Me

Our class will communicate through our Canvas site. Announcements and emails are archived there and automatically forwarded to your UO email, and can even reach you by text. Check and adjust your settings under Account > Notifications.

I will host “live” office hours through Zoom each week on Monday and Wednesday, 3-4 pm. I am also happy to make myself available outside these regular office hours. To arrange a Zoom meeting just email me either through Canvas or, for a quicker response, at rossiw@uoregon.edu.

Academic Integrity for Remote Learning

The University rules and policies governing academic integrity apply to our course just as they do for in-person classes on that meet on campus. All work completed for this class must be your own. If you cheat (hand in your friend's work or copy directly from the internet or a book, etc.)

you will (at the very least) fail the class and your name will be registered with the University. For guidelines and University rules on this very serious matter, see the University Student Conduct Code (available at <https://policies.uoregon.edu/vol-3-administration-student-affairs/ch-1-conduct/student-conduct-code>), which defines academic misconduct. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please don't hesitate to ask me.

Class Materials

Henry D. Thoreau, *Walden and Other Writings*, 3rd ed. edited by William Rossi (W.W. Norton).
Henry D. Thoreau, *A Year in Thoreau's Journal: 1851*, edited by H. Daniel Peck (Penguin).

These books are readily available at the Duck Store, which has plenty of used copies in stock. They may be purchased or rented in-store or online through UODuckStore.com; print materials will be shipped free to UO students.

Class "Meetings" and Graded Work

As indicated in the Schedule, after the first short meeting on March 30, the class will meet via Zoom every Wednesday from 2-3pm. Participation in these weekly group discussions is crucial to the success of the course. At the same time, because the COVID-19 situation is uncertain, I am mindful that unfolding events related to it may affect each of us unpredictably. For that reason, participation will not be graded.

The graded work for the class will consist of weekly posts and responses to others' posts (18 points each or 63% of the total) on our readings, beginning Week 2; a 4-5 page paper (200 points) and short paper prospectus (20 points); and a short reflection paper (150 points) at the end of the term. Detailed instructions for each assignment, including deadlines and discussion prompts for each post, will be provided in Canvas modules for each week. For discussion guidelines, see below.

Accessibility

I will make every effort to accommodate students with disabilities. If you have a documented disability and anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please meet with me in office hours soon. In addition, please request that the Accessible Education Center 541-346-1155 (<http://aec.uoregon.edu/>) send me a letter outlining your approved accommodations.

Discussion and Engagement Guidelines for Remote Participation

General Guidelines

1. **Participate and Contribute:** Students are expected to participate by sharing ideas and contributing to the collective learning environment. This entails preparing, following instructions, and engaging respectfully and thoughtfully with others.
2. **Use Proper Netiquette:** Please use good "net etiquette": identify yourself with your real name, write or speak in the first person, and use a subject line that clearly relates to your contribution. Good netiquette also means using humor or sarcasm carefully, remembering that non-verbal cues (such as facial expressions) are not always possible or clear in a remote context. Needless to say, your language should be free of profanity, appropriate for an academic

context, and exhibit interest in and courtesy for others' contributions. Certain breaches of netiquette can be considered disruptive behavior.

3. Interact Professionally: As much as possible, use correct spelling, grammar, and style for academic and professional work. Think of our discussions as opportunities to practice the kind and quality of work expected for assignments, to learn from others, and to develop our interpersonal skills. We should try to be mindful listeners while also being aware of our own tendencies (e.g. Do I contribute too much? Too little?).

4. Expect and Respect Diversity: All classes at the University of Oregon welcome and respect diverse experiences, perspectives, and approaches. What is not welcome are behaviors or contributions that undermine, demean, or marginalize others based on race, ethnicity, gender, sex, age, sexual orientation, religion, ability, or socioeconomic status. We will value differences and communicate disagreements with respect.

5. Help Everyone Learn: Our goal is to learn together by learning from one another. As we move forward learning during this challenging time, it is important that we work together and build on our strengths. Not everyone is savvy in remote learning, (including your instructor!), So we will need to be patient with each other, identify ways we can assist others, and be open-minded to receiving help and advice from others.

Specific guidelines for Canvas Discussion

1. Remember that both your posts and your responses need to be well-thought out and substantive. Posts should strive to engage the discussion prompt and offer insight into the week's readings. These are the criteria on which they will be evaluated.
2. Use subject lines that clearly communicate the content of your post
3. Write clearly and concisely and be aware that humor or sarcasm often doesn't always translate in an online environment.
4. Be supportive and considerate when replying to others' posts. This means avoiding use of jargon or inappropriate language, and it means disagreeing with respect and providing clear rationale or evidence to support your different view.
5. Keep focused on the topic and reference readings to support your points.
6. As much as possible, try to use correct spelling and grammar, and be sure to proofread your submissions.

Specific guidelines for using Zoom

1. Please test your video and audio prior to joining a live class session. You can learn more about testing your audio and video by visiting the Zoom Help Center at <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us>
2. Be on time when the meeting starts. It can be distracting to have participants join late.
3. Be mindful that others can see you and your surroundings if your video is on. Try to find a quiet setting without lots of noise or busy activities in the background. Please minimize distractions like eating or multitasking and speak and use gestures like you would in person.
4. Use earbuds or headphones (recommended) for clearer audio.
5. Use a microphone or speak closely to your computer microphone so that others can hear you. If you have video on, try to look at your camera, not the screen, when you are contributing.

6. Mute your audio when you are not actively contributing. When contributing, avoid making other noises such as typing or eating or having side conversations with others that might be present with you.
7. Use chat to pose questions or offer insights “on the side” while others are contributing.
8. If you prefer to use a static image instead of video, you can keep your video off.
9. For help and troubleshooting with Zoom, visit the Zoom Help Center at <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us>

Schedule (subject to change)

Week One Course Intro/ Which “Thoreau”?

Meetings: 3/30, 2-2:25 pm

4/1, 2-3 pm

Materials:

Video, “Political Theory”

Readings:

Kathryn Schulz, “Pond Scum, or The Moral Judgments of Henry David Thoreau” (2015)

Rebecca Solnit, “The Mysteries of Thoreau, Unsolved” (2011)

Thoreau, “The Village”

Week Two Nineteenth-Century Concord / Henry as Social Critic, Experimentalist and Humorist,

Meeting: 4/8, 2-3 pm

Materials:

Powerpoint

Readings:

Thoreau, *Walden* (1854), “Economy” (selections tba), “Where I Lived and What I Lived For”

Thoreau, Journal excerpt, “In the evening went to a party” (1851)

Week Three Thoreau and Transcendentalism

Meeting: 4/15, 2-3 pm

Materials:

Powerpoint

Readings:

Ralph Waldo Emerson, selections from “The American Scholar” (1837), “The Divinity School Address” (1838), “Self-Reliance” (1841)

Emerson, “The Transcendentalist” (1841)

Thoreau, “The Inward Morning” (1842)

Thoreau, *Walden*, “Solitude”

Week Four Henry as Strange Friend--of Self and Others, Living and Dead

Meeting: 4/22, 2-3 pm

Materials:

Powerpoint

Video, “Thoreau at 200” (Lawrence Buell)

Readings:

Thoreau, Journal, 1845-46

Thoreau, on Friendship (from *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, 1849)

Thoreau, "Brother, where dost thou dwell?" (1843)

Thoreau, *Walden*, "Where I Lived and What I Lived For": "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately . . ."; and "Former Inhabitants"

Week Five Henry as Strange Friend (2)

Meeting: 4/29, 2-3 pm

Readings:

Thoreau, *Walden*, "Reading," "Visitors," "Winter Visitors," "Brute Neighbors," "Winter Animals"

Week Six The Journal and Walden: A Higher Life

Meeting: 5/6, 2-3 pm

Materials:

Powerpoint

Readings:

Thoreau, *Walden*, "Baker Farm," "Higher Laws," "Conclusion"

Thoreau, Journal selections (tba)

Week Seven The Journal and Walden: Concord's Naturalist

Meeting: 5/13, 2-3 pm

Readings:

Thoreau, *Walden*, "The Ponds," "Housewarming," "The Pond in Winter," "Spring"

Thoreau, Journal selections (tba)

Week Eight Slavery in Massachusetts

Meeting: 5/20, 2-3 pm

Materials:

Powerpoint

Readings:

Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience" (1849)

Thoreau, "Slavery in Massachusetts" (1854)

Week Nine The Tonic of Wildness

Meeting: 5/27, 2-3 pm

Materials:

Powerpoint

Readings:

Thoreau, "Ktaadn and the Maine Woods" (1848)

Thoreau, *Walden*, "Spring," "Or village life would stagnate . . ."

Thoreau, selections from *Maine Woods* (1863) and *Wild Fruits* (2000)

Week Ten "Glowing in the Midst of Our Decay"

Meeting: 6/3, 2-3 pm

Materials:

Powerpoint

Readings:

Thoreau, "Autumnal Tints" (1862)

Thoreau, Journal, last entries (tba)