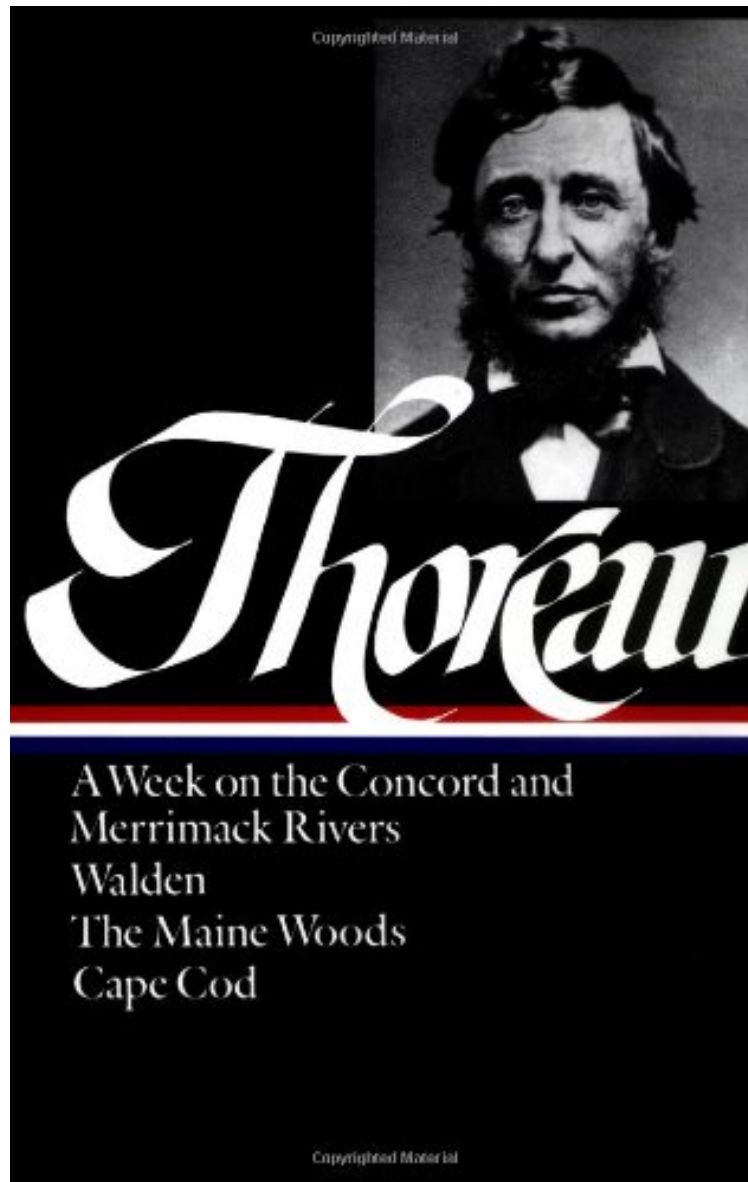


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3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Finest Quality By MATTI now have several of these Library of America volumes and I love them. This one is no different. They are beautifully bound in various colors of fabric (uniform colored dust covers) with matching ribbon book mark. The binding is solid and durable. The pages are of a fine quality, print is a nice font. The collections within each volume are logical, complimentary, and often comprehensive of a particular author's type of work (e.g. collected poems, essays). These original works were written in English, so translation is not an issue. Editing has been accurate. As these are the works of the original authors, the true value of these volumes are in the works collected and the presentation. For any price, you could not be more pleased. However, because they are so well made, you can find excellent condition used versions for unbelievable prices. If you purchase books to own for your personal library, these will be a treasure on so many levels.

5 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Cure for the mind-rot... By Brian C. This review is for the Library of America edition of Henry David Thoreau's four full-length works, A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, Walden, The Maine Woods, and Cape Cod. So far I have only read Walden so my review will limit itself to that book. As I make my way through the rest of the books I will add to my review. Since writing this review I have read A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers so I have added my review of that book to this review.

A WEEK ON THE CONCORD AND MERRIMACK RIVERS A Week is like Walden in the sense that it is a mix of natural description and philosophical musing but it is not quite as successful as Walden. The book tends to follow a specific pattern: Thoreau will describe the river each morning when they set off, but the trip itself is usually fairly uneventful so he will go on philosophical digressions, and then return for lunch, and return again when they stop for the evening. I love the combination of naturalist and philosopher but in this book it seemed to me Thoreau was still developing a form of writing that he would eventually perfect in Walden. There are lots of gems in the book that definitely make it worth reading but it is not quite as successful as Walden.

What I appreciated most about Walden was: Thoreau's careful descriptions of nature including the habits of wildlife and his philosophical thoughts. The descriptions of nature are still present in A Week. There are some good descriptions of birds and the various fish found in the rivers as well as the scenery along the way. However, the most beautiful passage in the book was a reminiscence of a hike that Thoreau took to the top of a mountain. He spent the night on the top of the mountain and when he woke up he found that he was above the clouds. His description of the shifting ethereal world is quite beautiful but it is a digression. There are times when it feels like Thoreau does not have enough to describe on the rivers so he puts in random thoughts and memories. They are often interesting and beautiful but it does not feel entirely organic. The philosophical reflections are interesting as well. Thoreau muses on religion, the art of writing, history, and friendship. I actually found Thoreau's long praise of friendship to be a little too heavy on the hyperbole for my tastes but there are definitely lots of interesting philosophical insights in the book.

I love Thoreau but there are a few small things that bother me about his writing and general outlook. Thoreau is always somewhat hyperbolic in his praise of the inhabitants of America. Thoreau compares them favorably to ancient Greek and Roman heroes. I think Thoreau is making a valid historical point. At the time Thoreau was writing, literature, I believe, was somewhat fixated on the past. There was a vague notion that Greek civilization was a lost golden age that would never return to earth. Poets were still celebrating Greece rather than their own countries and environments. Thoreau was making the valid point that life in present day America was just as rich as at any previous time. Thoreau valued the living present over the shadows of history. Thoreau wanted an American literature that celebrated our scenery and our own people. All of that is quite admirable and I am fully on board with it. However, I think Thoreau sometimes goes a little too far in touting the virtues of his surroundings, and to use a phrase I have already repeated twice, he tends to get hyperbolic with his praise (that will be the last time I use the phrase in this review, I promise).

Thoreau can also seem naively optimistic at times. There is a place in this book where Thoreau is reminiscing about a time when he was walking under some power lines and he could hear them humming and he compares the sound to an Aeolian harp and considers it divine music. I think in modern times, when we are more aware of the damage that human beings have done to nature, it is a little harder to celebrate naively the beauty of technology. One thing that is interesting in A Week are all the subtle signs that the world Thoreau is describing is dying. Factories are sprouting up along the river. The barges that Thoreau loves watching travel down the river are not going to be around much longer once new and faster modes of transport are invented. Thoreau is describing a dying world but he is not entirely aware of that fact and so he mixes celebrations of nature with celebrations of technology without seeing the potential threat that technology poses to nature. Despite those reservations I still wholeheartedly recommend A Week on the Concord and Merrimack River for anyone who enjoyed Walden. The reader will still find enough to enjoy in Thoreau's descriptions of nature, and enough philosophical wisdom, to make it more than worthwhile.

WALDEN Walden is an extremely rich book. It is rich in beauty, in description, in wisdom, in humor and in wit. It would be impossible, therefore, to encapsulate this book in a single review. Everyone reading this book is going to have different experiences, and take away different things. Someone whose primary interest is in philosophy, or economics, or political philosophy is necessarily going to have a

different experience reading this book than the "literary critic" or "the naturalist". Thoreau offers something to all these readers, but he offers somewhat different things to each (though there is certainly a unity of message). My review is necessarily going to have as much to do with my own personal preoccupations as it will have with Thoreau's book. It is only one possible perspective on this book, and certainly by no means "the best". I personally tend to read Thoreau as one of a long line of writers, beginning probably in the late eighteenth-century and moving all the way to modern times, who attempts to address the "spiritual" problems raised by a growing capitalist society (And I do not mean to imply any ontological dualism between matter and spirit with the term 'spiritual'). Thoreau, in *Walden* at least, is attempting to confront the very real despair he sees afflicting this modern form of society. Thoreau writes, "I have travelled a good deal in Concord; and every where, in shops, and offices, and fields, the inhabitants have appeared to me to be doing penance in a thousand remarkable ways. What I have heard of Brahmins sitting exposed to four fires and looking in the face of the sun; or hanging suspended, with their heads downward, over flames...even these forms of conscious penance are hardly more incredible and astonishing than the scenes which I daily witness" (pg. 326). And later, "A stereotyped but unconscious despair is concealed even under what are called the games and amusements of mankind" (pg. 329). What is the reason for this despair? What can be done about it? Underneath all the complexities of society, and our seemingly endless array of desires, what is it that we really want? These are the questions that motivate Thoreau, even when he is at his most "metaphysical". It does not seem to me that Thoreau is interested in "metaphysical" speculations simply for their own sake but only to the degree that they arise out of the very real problems of life. In this respect I see a real similarity between Thoreau and Plato, the "founder" of Western philosophy. Thoreau is in many ways more faithful to the tradition of philosophy begun by Plato than many professional philosophers today who concern themselves with far more abstract and esoteric problems without any obvious connection to life (and this should not necessarily be taken as a criticism since to some degree I count myself among the number of such philosophers who concern themselves with abstract and esoteric problems). Plato's question, "what is justice?" may seem abstract to us today, but it was a very urgent question to the Athenians at the time he was writing, especially among the youth, which I think any close reading of *The Republic* will make clear. Thoreau, like Plato before him, and like Marx, and Heidegger after, attempted to address the very real problems effecting his time; and, to the degree that Thoreau attempted to address the pressing problems of his own time, as opposed to getting lost in some eternal or timeless realm of absolute truth, I consider him a philosopher in the very best sense of the word. Thoreau will be much more palatable to many Americans than either Marx or Heidegger because unlike Marx he did not advocate full-scale social or political revolution, and unlike Heidegger he remained a committed democrat. Thoreau's solutions to the problems effecting the modern age were unique and well worth studying. It is probably not possible for most of us to follow Thoreau into the woods. I probably would not last a day; but the solutions Thoreau offers in *Walden* do not require that of us; they are more universal than that. So what is the sickness afflicting modern society that has caused life to become despair for so many? Thoreau attempts to diagnose this sickness quite early. Thoreau writes, "How many a poor immortal soul have I met well nigh crushed and smothered under its load, creeping down the road of life, pushing before it a barn seventy-five feet by forty, its Augean stables never cleansed, and one hundred acres of land, tillage, mowing, pasture, and wood-lot!" (pg. 326-327). "Why," he asks, "should they eat their sixty acres, when man is condemned to eat only his peck of dirt?" (pg. 396). Much later in the book Thoreau is even more explicit in diagnosing the problem, "I respect not his labors...who would carry the landscape, who would carry his God, to market, if he could get any thing for him; who goes to market for his god as it is...whose fields bear no crops, whose meadows no flowers, whose trees no fruits, but dollars....whose fruits are not ripe for him till they are turned to dollars. Give me the poverty that enjoys true wealth" (pg. 479). Clearly Thoreau believes something is wrong with our values. We have loaded ourselves with more than we can possibly carry, and more than we could ever need, and we have come to value nature, and the world, only in terms of its monetary value. This is where the committed Marxist would begin to complain of the "fetishization of commodities" under capitalism, and begin to yearn for a new form of society in which means and ends are not inverted in this perverse way (and I do not want to sound critical of Marx, or Marxists, who I personally admire). But Thoreau goes a different route from Marx. The difference, I believe, is largely a result of their different views on the relation between society and the individuals who compose it. Marx sees the individual as being shaped by society. Thoreau, on the other hand, though I'm not sure he ever makes this view explicit, would probably reverse this and see society as a reflection of the individuals who create it. If we live in a society where values are inverted, where money is treated as an end rather than as a means, and where possessions are valued more than the actual living of life, or the development of our own inherent capabilities, it is because our minds and our souls are sick. Towards the end of the book Thoreau writes, "Why level downward to our dullest perception always, and praise that as common sense?...While England endeavors to cure the potato-rot, will not any endeavor to cure the brain-rot, which prevails so much more widely and fatally?" (pg. 581). It is this 'brain-rot' which is responsible for our current despair. Our minds and our senses are dull. Thoreau's goal in writing *Walden* (or at least one of them) is to try to cure us of this brain-rot. While Marx seeks a fundamental transformation of society, Thoreau is attempting to cure us one person at a time. Thoreau is attempting to awaken us to reality, which is what, he believes, we really crave. Thoreau writes, "Be it life or death, we crave only reality. If we are

really dying, let us hear the rattle in our throats and feel cold in the extremities; if we are alive, let us go about our business" (pg. 400). We should begin to feel the 'spring of springs' in our life which would of necessity raise us "to a higher and more ethereal life" (pg. 355). Thoreau has an entire theology built around this view of life. Thoreau writes, "God himself culminates in the present moment, and will never be more divine in the lapse of all the ages. And we are enabled to apprehend at all what is sublime and noble only by the perpetual instilling and drenching of the reality which surrounds us" (pg. 399). And later, "There is an incessant influx of novelty into the world, and yet we tolerate incredible dullness" (pg. 586). This view has a great deal in common with the philosopher Heidegger (another philosopher I admire). According to Heidegger we are universally in the habit of focusing on beings instead of Being (the very process of coming to presence). We get caught up in our everyday concerns, we treat objects as tools, we analyze their objective properties, but we miss the Event of Being which is happening every moment. This, I believe, is the "perpetual instilling and drenching of the reality which surrounds us" that Thoreau is describing. So in conclusion I would simply say that I would recommend Walden to anyone interested in philosophy or the great questions of life. It is a book full of beautiful description, insight, and wisdom.² of 5 people found the following review helpful. I respect no one more than I do Henry David Thoreau By Thomas Lapins It was Thoreau who made me understand that writing had everything to do with one's sum total and worth as a human being, and everything to do with one's passion and sense of purpose in life. It was while reading from an anthology of his work that I first made contact with a superior being. I recognized a mind that I could be intimate with, a mind and soul of someone with whom I could spend endless hours and never cease to learn from. Thoreau's style is cumbersome. He can be terribly dry, and his paragraphs run way too long. But who cares when passages ignite the page with brilliance, flame from the black and white of paper into the depths of one's being. 'Walden' has more profound and relevant quotes than any other book I've read. They're the purest gems to be found in the rough of a larger work. A work that I wouldn't dare to diminish, but forewarn the reader so that they have the patience and perseverance to continue. I would like to mention a superb biography written on the life and mind of Thoreau, a biography that exceeds and exceeds in going deeper into the life and mind of this great and humane and very misunderstood man, it is called: 'Henry Thoreau -- A Life Of The Mind,' by Robert D. Richardson Jr. Mr. Richardson not only wrote a biography, he was on a mission, for he knew and believed in what his subject was about. As comprehensive, insightful and exhilarating as any biography can or should be. The price and quality of this anthology can't be beat. Beautiful to read and beautiful to see on my book shelf. Buy it! Get to know this man of yesterday, today and tomorrow.

This Library of America edition collects for the first time in one volume the four full-length works in which Henry David Thoreau combined his poetic sensibility, classical learning, philosophical austerity, and Yankee love of practical detail into literary masterpieces on humanity's communion with nature. *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* is based on a boat trip Thoreau took with his brother in 1839 from Concord, Massachusetts, to Concord, New Hampshire. Ten years in the writing (it was the book he retired to Walden to work on) and incorporating essays, passages from his journal, and some of his best poems, it is a superbly crafted achievement, its texture enriched by the idealism of the Transcendentalists, the delighted wordplay of an imaginative linguist, the individualism of a young America, and the earthiness of a lover of nature. *Walden* is a personal declaration of independence, a social experiment, and a voyage of spiritual discovery, set within the seasonal cycle of a year's *Life in the Woods*. *Simplify*, *simplify* is the beat of its more distant drummer to abandon waste and illusion, to get to the bottom of life's essential needs, and to practice a new economy for humane living. Its witty and pointed rhetoric brings together language and nature, the human and nonhuman in unusual conjunctions that resonate with symbolic meanings. A manual of self-reliance as well as a masterpiece of style, it is one of the most fervently loved classics of American literature. *The Maine Woods* is an account of three trips taken by boat and canoe in 1846, 1853, and 1857 through an unexplored interior bypassed by westward expansion. It describes the virgin rivers and forests of Maine, the customs of woodsmen and Indian guides, the hunting of moose, and the effects of the timber industry and encroaching settlement. An early and eloquent plea for conservation by a farsighted naturalist, its close observation of the American wild becomes an examination of the motives which carry men into the wilderness. *Cape Cod* is the bleakest of Thoreau's works, resembling Melville's prose in its vision of the titanic indifference of nature. *Cape Cod* appears as both ocean and desert, a vast expanse of shipwrecks and barren soil, peopled by hardy, weathered inhabitants who seem survivors from the age of the first Pilgrims. Based upon his own visits and upon accounts from the earliest times, it is an unsentimental study of human endurance in the face of hostile elements, historical change, and natural decay.

From the Publisher The Library of America is an award-winning, nonprofit program dedicated to publishing America's best and most significant writing in handsome, enduring volumes, featuring authoritative texts. Hailed as "the most important book-publishing project in the nation's history" (Newsweek), this acclaimed series is restoring America's literary heritage in "the finest-looking, longest-lasting edition ever made" (New Republic). About the Author Henry David Thoreau was born in Concord, Massachusetts in 1817. He graduated from Harvard in 1837, the same year he

began his lifelong Journal. Inspired by Ralph Waldo Emerson, Thoreau became a key member of the Transcendentalist movement that included Margaret Fuller and Bronson Alcott. The Transcendentalists' faith in nature was tested by Thoreau between 1845 and 1847 when he lived for twenty-six months in a homemade hut at Walden Pond. While living at Walden, Thoreau worked on the two books published during his lifetime: *Walden* (1854) and *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849). Several of his other works, including *The Maine Woods*, *Cape Cod*, and *Excursions*, were published posthumously. Thoreau died in Concord, at the age of forty-four, in 1862.