

“I think I could write a poem to be called Concord”: Thoreau Expresses the Inexpressible
Beth Witherell
Concord Free Public Library, September 16, 2017

2017 has been a great year for Thoreau and for Thoreauvians—wonderful books, conferences, exhibitions, and especially the encouragement to spend some time thinking about Henry. I’m just delighted to be able to be in Concord during this anniversary year—you all are so lucky to live in or near the place where Thoreau was so firmly rooted. As Laura Dassow Walls writes in her introduction to the catalog of the wonderfully rich exhibition that Leslie has created, “No American writer is more place-centered than Henry David Thoreau, and the place that mattered more to him than any other was Concord, Massachusetts” (*Thoreau: A Life*, p. 9).

I’m going to talk this evening about two of the products of Thoreau’s deep love for and involvement in this town. Both are poetic:

the earlier one is literally poetry—written in stanzas, rhyming

the later one is based on the seasonal repetition with variation of the phenomena of nature—the poetry that nature writes and that Thoreau transcribes, so to speak.

I have lots of images of Thoreau’s MSS to show you. The quality varies, and I’m using many of them only to give you a feel for what Thoreau is doing, not because I want you to read them from the screen. I’ll read you a few examples of the literal poetry, and some much more interesting passages from the Journal.

Thoreau believed poetry to be inherently the most heroic and beautiful form of language, the highest form of expression, and it’s no surprise that he would choose the form, early in his writing career, to describe his home town.

Here is his own statement of his project, set down in a Journal entry of September 4, 1841:

I think I could write a poem to be called Concord—For argument I should have the River—the Woods—the Ponds—the Hills—the Fields—the Swamps and Meadows—the Streets and Buildings—and the Villagers. Then Morning—Noon—and Evening—Spring Summer—Autumn and Winter—Night—Indian Summer—and the Mountains in the Horizon. (*Journal 1*, p. 330)

The argument is a summary that precedes the work itself—a prologue. Thoreau suggests here that the argument for his poem will cover the natural and man-made features of Concord, along with the people themselves. The poem proper will deal primarily with the daily and seasonal cycles as they affect the town and its inhabitants. The hills and mountains that make the far horizon to the north and west of Concord, especially Wachusett and Monadnock, will also be part of the poem.

When Thoreau wrote this outline, he was living with the Emerson family. He thinks he is able write this poem at this time because he has been preparing for such a task since he moved into the Emerson household in April 1841. Emerson invited him after he and John had to close their school because tuberculosis was sapping John's strength. Henry was 24, he had been out of college for four years, and he needed to support himself: Emerson, writing to his brother William, says he offered Thoreau "his board &c for what labor he chooses to do." There were advantages for Emerson in this arrangement, as he tells William: he writes that Thoreau "is thus far a great benefactor & physician to me for he is an indefatigable & a very skilful laborer & I work with him as I should not without him. and expect to be suddenly well & strong though I have been a skeleton all the spring until I am ashamed." He describes Thoreau as "a scholar & a poet & as full of buds of promise as a young apple tree" (*RWE Letters*, 2:402). Surely Emerson's desire to encourage his protege figured into the offer: Thoreau would be freer than he had been in his parents' home to try to establish himself as a writer.

Ensconced at Emerson's, Thoreau begins his writer's work by copying his Journal, started in October 1837, into new manuscript volumes. He edits as he goes, and in the process he re-reads the fifty or so poems he had completed over the previous four years. He also reads, for the first time, Sir William Jones's translation of *The Institutes of Hindu Law: or, The Ordinances of Manu . . . Comprising the Indian System of Duties, Religious and Civil*. This book codifies the teachings of Brahma that are basic to Hinduism; it is described in a 1991 translation as "an encompassing representation of life in the world—how it is, and how it should be lived" (*Laws of Manu*, p. xvii). Thoreau is enraptured—the book lifts him to a higher plane of existence, and he sees Concord and its surroundings in a new and sacred light. The style of the writing affects him deeply: in Journal entries for August 1841, he writes, "it has such a rythm as the winds of the desert—such a tide as the Ganges" (August 6, 1841; *Journal 1*, p. 316), and says each sentence "opens unexpensively and almost unmeaningly—as the petals of a flower" (August 30, 1841; *Journal 1*, p. 325).

The poetry Thoreau finds in the laws of Manu, which come to him from the “remote years of the gods,” the “habitation of the morning” (May 31, 1841; *Journal 1*, p. 311), sets a new standard, and by comparison the poetry he knows lacks vigor and strength. Again in August he writes,

The best poets . . . exhibit only a tame and civil side of nature— They have not seen the west side of any mountain.

Day and night—mountain and wood are visible from the wilderness as well as the village— They have their primeval aspects—sterner savager—than any poet has sung. It is only the white man's poetry—we want the Indian's report. Wordsworth is too tame for the Chippeway. (August 18, 1841; *Journal 1*, p. 321)

And in September:

When I observe the effeminate taste of some of my contemporaries in this matter of poetry—and how hardly they bear with certain incongruities, I think if this age were consulted it would not choose granite to be the back bone of the world—but Bristol spa—or Brazilian diamonds. (September 1, 1841; *Journal 1*, p. 326) [These are not close-grained, stable rock, like granite, but crystalline ones, prone to fracture into pieces with shiny surfaces.]

Inspired by his reading of Manu, buoyed by his review of what he had accomplished as a writer in the previous four years, and energized by the approaching fall, Thoreau sets to work. In a few months, from mid-summer until mid-autumn 1841, he writes more lines of poetry than he has altogether up to that period, and more than he will write in the rest of his career.

Emerson writes to Margaret Fuller on September 13, “H. T. is full of noble madness lately, and I think more highly of him than ever” (*RWE Letters*, 2:447). This madness is going on right under Emerson's nose, and his journal for September contains a description that doesn't name Thoreau but that matches Thoreau's own account of his mood very closely (a slightly revised version appears in his essay, “The Poet”):

I was astonished one morning (Emerson writes) by tidings that genius had appeared in a youth who sat near me at table. He had left his work, he had gone rambling none knew whither, he had written hundreds of lines, but he could not tell whether that which was in him was therein told, he could tell nothing but that all was changed, man, beast, heaven, earth, & sea. How gladly we listened!

Here's Thoreau's own description, fairly bursting from the pages of a letter he wrote on September 8 to Lucy Jackson Brown, Lidian Emerson's sister (both women were muses of sorts to Thoreau):

Dear Friend

Your note came wafted to my hand, like the first leaf of the Fall on the September wind, and I put only another interpretation upon its lines, than upon the veins of those which are soon to be strewed around me. It is nothing but Indian summer here at present—I mean that any weather seems reserved expressly for our late purposes, whenever we happen to be fulfilling them. I do not know what right I have to so much happiness, but rather hold it in reserve till the time of my desert. What with the crickets, and the lowing of kine, and the crowing of cocks, our Concord life is sonorous enough. Sometimes I hear the cock bestir himself on his perch under my feet, and crow shrilly long before dawn, and I think I might have been born any year for all the phenomena I know.

...

Just now I am in the mid-sea of verses, and they actually rustle round me, as the leaves would round the head of Autummus himself, should he thrust it up through some vales which I know.—but alas! many of them are but crisped and yellow leaves like his, I fear, and will deserve no better fate than to make mould for new harvests. I see the stanzas rise around me, verse upon verse, far and near, like the mountains from Agiocochook, not all having a terrestrial existence as yet, even as some of them may be clouds, but I fancy I see the gleam of some Sebago lakes and Silver Cascades, at whose well I may drink one day. I am as unfit for any practical purpose, I mean for the furtherance of the world's ends, as gossamer for ship timber— And I who am going to be

a pencil-maker to-morrow, can sympathise with god Apollo, who served king Admetus for awhile on earth— But I believe he found it for his advantage at last—as I am sure I shall—though I shall hold the nobler part at least out of the service.

Dont attach any undue seriousness [to] this threnody—for I love my fate to the very core and rind, and could swallow it without paring I think

You ask if I have written any more poems—excepting those which Vulcan is now forging, I have only discharged a few more bolts into the horizon, in all three hundred verses, and sent them as I may say over the mountains to Miss Fuller. . . .

(*Correspondence 1*, pp. 79-80)

[image: MS of letter]

And now to the poem itself. When you see these manuscripts, you'll understand exactly what Thoreau means by the leaves rustling around him—there are pages and pages of poetry! Here again are his proposed subjects, underlined.

Sat Sept. 4th 1841.

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argument I should have the River—the Woods—the Ponds—the
Hills—the Fields—the Swamps and Meadows—the Streets and
Buildings—and the Villagers. Then Morning—Noon—and
Evening—Spring Summer—Autumn and Winter—Night—Indian
Summer—and the Mountains in the Horizon.

He had already written the final segment—in July 1841 he had composed “The Mountains in the Horizon,” incorporating into it a revised version of a shorter poem titled “Wachusett” that appears in a Journal entry for May 2, 1841. This is a shorter version of the poem he sent Fuller—this one has only 158 lines. The manuscript is at the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

[images: MS of poem]

In composing the other poems he followed a method I've never seen in his MSS—and I've seen most of them. I'll take you through nineteen pages of the existing twenty-page draft (I have images of all the pages but one). The manuscripts for the first eighteen pages are at the Huntington Library, San Marino, CA; the manuscript for the last page is in the Berg Collection

at the New York Public Library (for a digital image of the last page, see <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/ba964070-e8e0-0131-78b9-58d385a7bbd0>; click on the last thumbnail at the bottom of the large window that opens).

[images: MS of poem]

These pages as I'm showing them follow the order of Thoreau's large numbers, but the numbers are actually from a later stage of work. Initially, I think he simply let the language flow, filling page after page of stanzas about autumn, the experience of inspiration, and the task of the poet. Thoreau worked with these stanzas, revising and rearranging them to create fair copies of several poems: one describes the condition of inspiration, and three are on topics included in his poetic plan—morning, the transition of summer into autumn, and autumn itself.

The poem titled “Inspiration” exists in two versions. The manuscript for the sixteen-stanza version below is in the Morgan Library & Museum, NY.

Inspiration.

Always the general show of things
Floats in review before my mind,
And such true love and rev'rence brings
That sometimes I forget that I am blind.

But straight there comes unsought, unseen,
Some clear divine electuary,
And I who had but sensual been,
Grow sensible, and as God is am wary.

I hearing get, who had but ears,
And sight, who had but eyes before,
I moments live, who lived but years,
And truth discern, who knew but learning's lore.

I hear beyond the range of sound,
I see beyond the verge of sight,
New earths—new skies—new seas around,
And in my noon the sun doth pale his light.

More swift its bolt than lightning is,
Its voice than thunder is more loud,
It doth expand my privacies
To all, and leave me single in the crowd.

Speaking with such authority,

With so serene and lofty tone,
That idle Time runs gadding by,
And leaves me with Eternity alone.

Then chiefly is my natal hour,
And only then my prime of life,
Of manhood's strength it is the flower,
'T is peace's end and war's beginning strife.

'T hath come in summer's broadest noon,
By a grey wall, or some chance place,
Unseasoned Time, insulted June
And vexed the day with its presuming face.

Such fragrance round my sleep it makes,
More rich than are Arabian drugs,
That my soul scents its life, and wakes
The body up, beneath its perfumed rugs.

Such is the Muse, the heavenly maid,
The star that guides our mortal course,
Which shows where life's true kernel's laid,
Its wheat's fine flower, and its undying force.

Whose clear and ancient harmony
Pierces my soul through all its din,
As through its utmost melody,
Further behind than they, further within.

Who with one breath attunes the spheres,
And also my poor human heart,
With one impulse propels the years
Around, and gives my throbbing life its start.

I will not doubt forevermore,
Nor falter from an iron faith,
For if the system be turned o'er,
God takes not back the word which once he saith.

My memory I'll educate
To know the one historic truth,
Remembering to the latest date
The only true and sole immortal youth.

Be but thy inspiration given,
No matter through what dangers sought,
I'll fathom hell or climb to heaven,

And yet esteem that cheap which love has bought.

Fame cannot tempt the bard
Who's famous with his God,
Nor laurel him reward
Who hath his maker's nod.

[images: MS of poem]

The second version, made up of twenty-one stanzas, is better organized and more concise in conveying Thoreau's experience. The manuscript has not been located; the text below is based on a photograph.

I'll read the first four stanzas, to give you a flavor of the poem. [In poetry that follows, boldface indicates portions I read aloud in Concord.]

Inspiration.

**Whate'er we leave to God, God does,
And blesses us;
The work we choose should be our own,
God lets alone.**

**If with light head erect I sing,
Though all the muses lend their force,
From my poor love of anything,
The verse is weak and shallow as its source.**

**But if with bended neck I grope,
Listening behind me for my wit,
With faith superior to hope,
More anxious to keep back than forward it,**

**Making my soul accomplice there
Unto the flame my heart hath lit,
Then will the verse forever wear,
Time cannot bend the line which God hath writ.**

Always the general show of things
Floats in review before my mind,
And such true love and reverence brings,
That sometimes I forget that I am blind.

But soon there comes unsought, unseen,
Some clear divine electuary,
And I, who had but sensual been,
Grow sensible, and as God is am wary.

I hearing get who had but ears,
And sight who had but eyes before,
I moments live who lived but years,
And truth discern who knew but learning's lore.

I hear beyond the range of sound,
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And in my noon the sun doth pale his light.

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With one impulse propels the years
Around, and gives my throbbing pulse its start.

I will not doubt forever more,
Nor falter from an iron faith,
For if the system be turned oer,
God takes not back the word which once he saith.

I will believe the love untold,
Which not my worth nor want hath bought
Which wood me young and woos me old,
And call the stars to witness now my thought.

My memory I'll educate
To know the one historic truth,
Remembering to the latest date
The only true, and sole immortal youth.

Be but thy inspiration given,
No matter through what dangers sought,
I'll fathom hell or climb to heaven,
And yet esteem that cheap which love has bought.

Fame cannot tempt the bard
Who's famous with his God,
Nor laurel him reward,
Who hath his maker's nod.

[images: MS of poem]

“Cock-crowing” focuses on the sounds of early morning in Concord, sounds Thoreau mentions in his letter to Brown—the crowing of cocks, the single cock awake before the others, the lowing of cattle. The manuscript is in the Berg Collection at the New York Public Library; for a digital image, see <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/fbd60000-5331-0132-216e-58d385a7b928>.

Cock-crowing.

**Upon my bed at early dawn
I hear the cocks proclaim the day,
Though the moon shines serenely on,**

As if her queenly course they could not stay—

Nor pull her down with their faint din
From riding at that lofty height,
Who in her shining knows no sin,
As if unconscious of a nobler light.

Far in the east their larum rings,
As if a watchful host there thronged,
Where now its early clarion sings,
So bravely is their martial note prolonged.

One on more distant perch, more clear,
But fainter brags him still,
But ah! he promises, I fear,
More than his master's household will fulfill.

The stars withhold their shining not
Or singly or in scattered crowds,
But seem like Parthian arrows shot
By yielding night 'mid the advancing clouds.

**Some wakeful steer exalts his trump
Afar oer the sonorous ground,
And with a sounding eastern pomp
It grandly marcheth the horizon round.**

**Invades each recess of the wood,
Awakes each slumbering bird,
Till every fowl leads forth her brood,
Which on her nest the tuneful summons heard.**

**Methinks that Time has reached his prime,
Eternity is in the flower,
I hear their faint confused chime
Now ushering in the sacred hour.**

Over the hill top I have run
For fear to be too late,
I've left behind the laggard sun,
Travelling at such a rate,
To be in at creation,
To be up with fate.

And has time got so forward then?
From what perennial fount of joy,
Do ye inspire the hearts of men,

And teach them how the day-light to employ?

From your abundance pray impart
Who dost so freely spill,
Some bravery unto my heart,
Or let me taste of thy perennial rill.

There is such health and length of years
In the elixir of that note,
That God himself more young appears,
And a more youthful world through space doth float.

The tidy night with woolen feet,
I'm sure has lately passed this way,
And with her trim despatch so neat,
She has arranged the furniture of the day.

In yon thin sheet of mist spread oer
The lowland trees of leaves bereft,
Which round her head at eve she wore,
Methinks I see the housewife's duster left.

The fragrant mist exhales the scent
Of aromatic herbs, so you
Would say she blest where'er she went,
And through the fields had sprinkled perfumed dew.

[images: MS of poem]

“The Soul’s Season” describes the transition from summer into autumn. The manuscript is in Firestone Library, Princeton University.

The Soul’s Season

**Thank God who seasons thus the year,
And sometimes kindly slants his rays,
For in his winter he's most near,
And plainest seen upon the shortest days.**

**Who gently tempers now his heats,
And then his harsher cold, lest we
Should surfeit on the Summer's sweets,
Or pine upon the Winter's crudity.**

Grown tired of this rank summer's wealth,
Its raw and superficial show,

I fain would hie away by stealth
Where no roads meet, but still 't doth trivial grow.

Methinks by dalliance it hath caught
The shallow habits of the town,
Itself infected most, which ought
With sterner face upon our tameness frown.

A sober mind will walk alone
Apart from nature if need be,
And only its own seasons own,
For nature having its humanity.

**Sometimes a late Autumnal thought
Has crossed my mind in green July,
And to its early freshness brought
Late ripened fruits and an autumnal sky.**

**A dry but golden thought which gleamed
Across the greenness of my mind,
And prematurely wise it seemed,
Too ripe 'mid summer's youthful bowers to find.**

**So have I seen one yellow leaf
Amid the glossy leaves of June,
Which pensive hung, though not with grief,
Like some fair flower, it had changed so soon.**

**I scent my med'cine from afar,
Where the rude simpler of the year,
October leads the rustling war,
And strews his honors on the summer's bier.**

[images: MS of poem]

And “The Fall of the Leaf,” in two versions, presents the sights and sounds of autumn, and their effect on the poet. Here is the twenty-one-stanza version; the manuscript is in the Berg Collection at the New York Public Library; for a digital image, see

<https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/a85bfc10-561c-0132-7942-58d385a7b928>.

The Fall of the Leaf.

**The evening of the year draws on,
The fields a later aspect wear,
Since summers garishness is gone**

Some grains of night tincture the noontide air.

Behold the shadows of the trees
Now circle wider 'bout their stem,
Like sentries which by slow degrees
Perform their rounds, softly protecting them.

And as the year doth decline,
The sun affords a scantier light;
Behind each needle of the pine
There lurks a small auxiliar to the night.

After each shrub and straggling fence
That marks the meadows pensive green,
And shows the meadows opulence,
Evening's insidious foot at noon is seen.

**Wave upon wave a mellower air
At length floods all the region,
As if there were some tincture there
Of ripeness, caught from the long summer's sun.**

I hear the cricket's slumbrous lay
Around—beneath me—and on high,
It rocks the night, it lulls the day,
And everywhere is nature's lullaby.

But most he chirps beneath the sod,
Where he hath made his winters bed,
His creak grown fainter but more broad,
A film of autumn o'er the summer spread.

Small birds in fleets migrating by
Now beat across some meadow's bay,
And as they tack and veer on high,
With faint and hurried click beguile the way.

**The moon is ripe fruit in the sky,
Which over hangs her harvest now,
The sun doth break his stem well nigh,
From summer's height he has declined so low.**

The greedy earth doth pluck his fruit
And cast it in night's lap,
The stars more brightly glisten, mute
Though their tears be, to see their Lord's mishap.

The harvest rattles in the wind,
Red apples overhang the way;
The cereal flavor of my mind,
Nathelless, tells me I am as ripe as they.

The sharp wind searcheth every vein,
And dries up humors crude,
I spring into my place again
With unwarped strength, like staunch and seasoned wood.

Far in the woods these golden days,
Some leaf obeys its Maker's call,
And through their hollow aisles it plays
With delicate touch the prelude of the fall.

Gently withdrawing from its stem,
It lightly lays itself along
Where the same hand hath pillow'd them,
Resigned to sleep upon the old year's throng.

The loneliest birch is brown and sear,
The farthest pool is strewn with leaves,
Which float upon their watery bier,
Where is no eye that sees, no heart that grieves.

I marked when first the wind grew rude
Each leaf curled like a living thing,
As if with the rich air it would
Secure some faint memorial of the spring.

Then for its sake it turned a boat,
And dared new elements to brave,
A painted palace which did float
A summer's hoarded wealth to save

**The jay screams through the chestnut wood,
The crisped and yellow leaves around,
Are hue and texture of my mood,
And these rough burs my heirlooms on the ground.**

**The threadbare trees, so poor and thin,
They are no wealthier than I,
But with as brave a core within
They rear their boughs to the October sky.**

Poor knights they are which bravely wait
The charge of winter's cavalry,
Keeping a simple Roman state,
Discumbered of their Persian luxury.

No greatness now need walk alone,
Lest nature should its ardor damp,
Which saw where their new armor shone
Or heard the rustling of the forest camp.

[images: MS of poem]

This version, with forty-one stanzas, contains all but two of the stanzas that are in the shorter version, as well as five stanzas from “Cock-crowing,” eight of the nine stanzas that make up “The Soul’s Season,” one stanza from “Inspiration,” and eight stanzas unique to it. Often one or two stanzas are kept together, but there’s a lot of rearrangement. The manuscript is in the Berg Collection at the New York Public Library; for a digital image, see <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/20293560-5622-0132-573f-58d385a7b928>.

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The farthest pool is strewn with leaves,
Which float upon their watery bier,
Where is no eye that sees, no heart that grieves.

I marked when first the wind grew rude
Each leaf curled like a living thing,
As if with the ripe air it would
Secure some faint memorial of the spring.

Then for its sake it turned a boat
And dared new elements to brave,
A painted palace which did float
A summer's hoarded wealth to save.

Oh could I catch these sounds remote,
Could I preserve to human ear,
The strains which on the breezes float,
And sing the requiem of the dying year.

I stood beside an oaken copse
When the first gale of autumn sighed,
It gently waved the birch tree tops
Then rustled the oak leaves and died

But not the strains which it awoke,
For in my inmost sense I hear
The melody of which it spoke
Still faintly rising on my inward ear.

A ripple on the river fell,
A shadow o'er the landscape passed,
And still the whispering ferns could tell
Whither the stranger travelled so fast.

How stand the cottages of men
In these so fair October days,
Along the wood along the fen
I see them looming through the mellow haze.

Immersed in Nature there they lie
Against some cliff or chestnuts shade
Scarce obvious to the travellers eye
Who thoughtful traverses the forest glade.

The harvest lies about the door
The chestnut drops its burs around
As if they were the stock that bore
The yellow crops that strew the ground.

The lily loves the river's tide
The meadow's are the daisy's haunt
The aspens on the mountain side
Here child of nature grows the human plant.

The jay screams through the chestnut wood
The crisped and yellow leaves around
Are hue and texture of my mood,
And these rough burs my heirlooms on the ground.

The thread bare trees so poor and thin
They are no wealthier than I,
But with as brave a core within
They rear their boughs to the October sky.

Poor knights they are which bravely wait
The charge of winter's cavalry,
Keeping a simple Roman state
Discumbered of their Persian luxury.

Thank God who seasons thus the year
And sometimes kindly slants his rays,
For in his winter he's most near
And plainest seen upon the shortest days.

Who gently tempers now his heats
And then his harsher cold, lest we
Should surfeit on the summer's sweets,
Or pine upon the winter's crudity.

[images: MS of poem]

Now that you've seen the titled poems that Thoreau drew out of the twenty-page penciled draft, and heard parts of them, I want to look again at that draft and offer a hypothesis about it. I think Thoreau arranged the pages of the draft after he made his fair copies, and that

he did so to bring his poem together in a new order. I think he was experimenting with integrating the individual poems into a larger, continuous work.

On the verso of the draft page numbered “1” Thoreau listed aspects of autumn in Concord that correlate with the contents of the first eight pages of the draft (the manuscript is in the Huntington Library, San Marino, CA):

Night shades
Migration of birds
Fall of the leaf
Harvest & its effects
Cricket
Appearance of the wood
~~Mellow air.~~

[image: list of topics]

Let’s take a look at these transcripts of the first eight pages (the manuscripts are in the Huntington Library, San Marino, CA). Stanzas on the first page describe evening (“Night shades”).

[images: transcript and MSS]

The page numbered “2” includes a couple of stanzas about migrating birds (“Migration of birds”).

[images: transcript and MSS]

The verso of “2” and both sides of “3” deal with falling leaves (“Fall of the leaf”).

[images: transcript and MSS]

The next three topics on the list are out of order in the manuscript. The cricket and the appearance of the wood are both on “4” (“Cricket,” “Appearance of the wood”).

[images: transcript and MSS]

And the harvest is on “5” (“Harvest & its effects”).

[images: transcript and MSS]

Finally, the “mellow air” is on “6” (“Mellow air”).

[images: transcript and MSS]

The draft pages numbered "7", "8", and "9" contain ten of the fifteen stanzas of the poem "Cock-crowing"; and the draft pages numbered "10" through "14" contain sixteen of the seventeen stanzas that are in the shorter version of "Inspiration" and seventeen of the twenty-one stanzas that are in the longer version of "Inspiration."

This poem would have been even longer than the longest of the fair copies. Was it going to be "the poem to be called Concord"? I just don't know. I have not discovered a fair copy that puts into practice the rearrangements Thoreau made in the long penciled draft, and I suspect it doesn't exist because I think the more he worked with this poetry—its conventional structure, formal language, and sedate rhymes—the more dissatisfied he became. This is decidedly not the poetry of the Chippeway. He could see that the faint praise he offered for "the best poets" in his August 18 Journal entry—that they "exhibit only a tame and civil side of nature"—applied to his own work.

I should mention two more factors that probably contributed to the fading of Thoreau's poetic ambition. One is that in early November, he met with the first rigorous criticism of his work, from Margaret Fuller, then the editor of the Transcendentalist periodical, the *Dial*. She sent "The Mountains in the Horizon" back to him to be reworked at least once, and she never published the poem. Even though Thoreau used it a year later in his essay "A Walk to Wachusett" he must have realized that the *Dial* was the most likely outlet for his poetry and that if he was having difficulty publishing there it would be almost impossible to reach a larger audience.

Another factor is that in late November and early December, Thoreau was in the Harvard Library copying poetry from Alexander Chalmers's 21-volume collection, *The Works of the English Poets, from Chaucer to Cowper*. He filled nearly three hundred pages in four notebooks with notes on and extracts of English poetry for an anthology he apparently hoped to publish ("Thoreau's Projected Work on the English Poets," p. 243).

[image: volumes of Chalmers]

But instead of being stirred and motivated by what he was reading, as he had expected, he found himself disappointed—this may be an echo of his reaction to his own poems. Two comments in a Journal entry for November 30 distill this disappointment:

When looking over the dry and dusty volumes of the English poets, I cannot believe that those fresh and fair creations I had imagined are contained in them. English poetry from Gower down collected into one alcove—and so from the library window compared with the commonest nature seems very mean. . . .

I can hardly be serious with myself when I remember that I have come to Cam. after poetry—and while I am running over the catalogue, and collating and selecting—I think if it would not be a shorter way to a complete volume—to step at once into the field or wood, with a very low reverence to students and librarians. (*Journal 1*, pp. 337-338)

Thoreau's projected anthology and his projected poem of Concord met similar fates. He never published an anthology, and of the many stanzas of verse he composed in fall 1841, he chose to publish only eighteen lines, eight years later, in his first book, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*. These lines are all from "Inspiration": he used twelve in "Monday" and six in "Friday." Publication, though, as he wrote in *A Week*, is not the most important test of either quality or significance:

The true poem is not that which the public read. There is always a poem not printed on paper, coincident with the production of this, stereotyped in the poet's life. It is *what he has become through his work*. (*A Week*, p. 343)

By that criterion, Thoreau's endeavor was a success. Through his work on poetry, his own as well as that of others, he became a much better writer of prose. He continued to privilege poetry, and to revere the true poet as a heroic, enlightened figure, open to the voice of the divine, but his attempt to complete the poem of Concord was the beginning of the end of his ambition to write conventional poetry.

I'm going to suggest, however, that Thoreau found another way to capture Concord, in words in his close observation and recording of the natural phenomena of the place as they changed through the seasons. This is his phenological work. In this endeavor, which began in earnest soon after *A Week* was published, he became a student of the poetry composed by nature, which he identifies in the final chapter of *A Week*. "But here on the stream of the Concord," he writes, "where we have all the while been bodily, Nature, who is superior to all

styles and ages, is now, with pensive face, composing her poem Autumn, with which no work of man will bear to be compared" (*A Week*, p. 377).

Thoreau's phenological work began between 1850 and 1851, when his casual interest in plants deepened into a more systematic study. He knew the names of most Concord species, but as he describes his new ambition in a Journal entry written several years after the fact, he wanted to become more knowledgeable in the habits of particular plant species, as well as of individual plants:

I soon found myself observing when plants first blossomed and leafed, and I followed it up early and late, far and near, several years in succession, running to different sides of the town and into the neighboring towns, often between twenty and thirty miles in a day. I often visited a particular plant four or five miles distant, half a dozen times within a fortnight, that I might know exactly when it opened, beside attending to a great many others in different directions and some of them equally distant, at the same time.

(December 4, 1856; *Journal* 1906, 9:158)

Thoreau's observations encompassed other phenomena that could be studied in Concord and the surrounding area as well, including birds and "whatever else might offer" (*Journal* 1906, 9:158). From 1851 through 1861, his Journal records the arrival and departure of various species of birds; the depth of snow in various locations on different dates; changes in the colors of leaves in autumn; freezing and thawing of Walden Pond, the Concord River, and other bodies of water; the composition of birds' nests; and other events that allowed him to understand nature in the context of seasonal change.

In April 1852—this is the third spring of his systematic study, which would become yet more systematic—Thoreau records a pivotal moment in his Journal: "For the first time I perceive this spring that the year is a circle—I see distinctly the spring arc thus far. It is drawn with a firm line" (April 18, 1852; *Journal* 4, p. 468). In the paragraph that follows he poses a series of questions that will shape his phenological work during the next nine years:

Why should just these sights & sounds accompany our life? Why should I hear the chattering of blackbirds—why smell the skunk each year? I would fain explore the mysterious relation between myself & these things. I would at least know what these

things unavoidably are— —make a chart of our life—know how its shores trend—that butterflies reappear & when—know why just this circle of creatures completes the world. Can I not by expectation affect the revolutions of nature—make a day to bring forth something new? (*Journal* 4 1992, p. 468)

Ten weeks after this April entry, on July 2, he declares 1852 his “year of observation” (*Journal* 5, p. 174). The activity he undertook during this year was demanding. His Journal entries for late spring and summer 1852 include almost twenty lists in which he records the growth, blooming, prevalence, and persistence of flowers; the leafing of trees; the migration and appearance of birds; the lichens he saw in winter 1851-1852; and “miscellaneous observations,” which include weather, the ripening of fruit and berries, the color of specific fields, and the behavior of birds, insects, and reptiles (*Journal* 5 , pp. 3-281 passim).

To give you an idea of how he threw himself into this work, I’ll show you most of the lists from April through August; the manuscript volume of the Journal that contains them is in the Morgan Library & Museum, NY. Bradford Torrey omitted some of these in the 1906 edition of the Journal; the Princeton Edition includes them all. He starts with flowers observed from April 211-28, recorded in his April 28 entry, and periodically throughout the summer he updates and expands his initial list:

April 28 52: (April 11-28) Are not the flowers which appear earliest in the spring the most primitive & simplest? They have been in this town thus far, as I have observed them this spring, putting them down in the order in which I think they should be named. (*Journal* 5, pp. 3-4)

[images: MSS]

May 14th 52: (April 28-May 13) Hastily reviewing this journal I find the flowers to have appeared in this order since the 28th of April—perhaps some note in my Journal has escaped me. (*Journal* 5, pp. 53-56)

[Plus birds and insects]

[images: MSS]

June 24: (May 14-June 24) On a hasty review of my journal since the 13th of May I find that I have observed the flowers in the following order— I did not attend particularly to the trees,

especially the evergreens—nor to the grasses &c &c. and have knowingly omitted several besides. (*Journal* 5, pp. 130-141; omitted from *Journal* 1906)

[Plus birds and miscellaneous observations]

[images: MSS]

July 7: To the 93 flowers observed in June before the 24th should be added 25 observed before the end of the month—and the following at least either overlooked before or observed not till July though they blossomed in June (*Journal* 5, pp. 196-197; omitted from *Journal* 1906)

[images: MSS]

July 25: Of flowers observed before June 11th the following I know or think to be still in blossom viz— (*Journal* 5, pp. 248-250)

[Plus those gone out of blossom since June 10 and those observed June 10-24 that are still common]

[images: MSS]

July 26: (June 23-July 25) Flowers observed between June 23d & July 27th [Thoreau miswrites—it's July 25]

x Those observed in very good season

xx " " " rather early

S Those which have been in blossom for a day or two

X " " some days

0 " " some time

V not quite open (*Journal* 5, pp. 252-259; omitted from *Journal* 1906)

[Plus miscellaneous observations]

[images: MSS]

August 5: Of the list of flowers "observed before June 11th" which I thought to be still in blossom July 25th—the following are now probably out of bloom viz. (*Journal* 5, pp. 276-281; omitted from *Journal* 1906)

[Plus flowers observed between June 23d & July 27 (list given July 26th) that are probably out of bloom, those very common, those abundant and conspicuous, those still common since July 25, and those still in bloom since June 10]

[images: MSS]

Thoreau is at the beginning of a very long project, and he does not yet see where it will lead. His sense of being overwhelmed by the amount of detail he is trying to assimilate is conveyed by another passage in the July 2 Journal entry: “At this season methinks we do not regard the larger features of the landscape—as in the spring—but are absorbed in details— ... You are a little bewildered by the variety of objects. There must be a certain meagreness of details and nakedness for wide views” (*Journal 5*, p. 174). We get another glimpse of his mental state during this period of intense absorption in phenomena in a July 13, 1852, letter to Sophia:

I am not on the trail of any elephants or mastodons, but have succeeded in trapping only a few ridiculous mice, which cannot feed my imagination. I have become sadly scientific. I would rather come upon the vast valley-like “spore” only of some celestial beast which this world’s woods can no longer sustain, than spring my net over a bushel of moles.
(*Correspondence 2*, p. 112)

He persevered, however, entering his observations in his Journal and marking many of them with double virgules for ease of locating them. (He must have realized that maintaining lists in his Journal like the ones he kept in 1852 just wasn’t tenable.)

He explored not only the events of nature but the relationship between himself and those events, as you’ll see in this example. In his Journal entry for October 26, 1858, he marks not only the flowing of sap in the largest scarlet oak in the neighborhood and the trees that are taking a long time to lose their leaves, but also the thickness of the coat he is wearing and the coolness of his fingers—and he comments on the effect of the cooler weather on the sale of gloves. The following is a transcription of the first part of Thoreau’s October 26 entry; the manuscript is in the Morgan Library & Museum, NY.

green.

Oct. 26th '58

The Sugar Maples are almost bare--except
a few small ones--

Minot remembers how he used to chop beech wood-- He says that when frozen it is hard & brittle first like glass, & you must look out for the chips, for, if they strike you in the face they will cut like a knife.

He says that some call the stake driver
“Belcher-squelcher”--& some “Wollerkertoot”
I used to call them Pump-er-go'r-- Some
say “slug-toot”

The largest Scarlet oak that I remember

Nov 2d

hereabouts stands by the Penthorum pool

also in another the ^{26th} it had a pleasant acorn like taste
in the Sleepy Hollow Cemetery & is now in
its prime--I found the sap was flowing fast in it

11

The scar O generally is not in prime till now or

1 2 3 4 5

White {even later}

Birches--elms--chestnuts--*salix alba*[^]--& White-maple are a long time falling.

I wear a thicker coat--my [single] thick
fall coat--at last--& begin to feel my
fingers cool early & late--

One
The shop keepers have begun to hang
out woolen gloves & even thick buck-skin
his
mittens by their doors--foreseeing what then
customers will want as soon as it is
finger cold--& determined to get the start
of his fellows

[images: MS]

At some time in the early 1860s, Thoreau collected his marked observations in lists ordered by year and category (general phenomena by month, growth and leafing, flowers,

birds, animals). Here you see his Journal observations as he transferred them to his list of October 1858 phenomena (the manuscript is in the Morgan Library & Museum, NY):

Sap flows in Scarlet oaks 26

(generally bare 29th)

white birches—elms—chestnuts—s. alba & small

willows—& white maples are a long time falling

Wear a thicker coat (not an outside one) & begin to

feel finger cold early & late

Shop keepers bring out woolen gloves

[image: MS]

From the lists, he moved the information into charts, many arranged on large sheets of paper with years across the top and phenomena down the left side, to provide a picture of the occurrence of particular phenomena over time. At this stage Thoreau made a choice about which chart was appropriate for the events he had recorded.

The note about sap flowing in scarlet oaks doesn't appear on any of the extant charts—there's no use mark through it, either.

The information about the leaves of white birches, elms, chestnuts, salix alba, small willows, and white maples—marked through with an ink line—was entered on a chart titled “Fall of the Leaf” (the manuscript is in the Morgan Library & Museum, NY):

p. 1	Chestnut	Oct 25 gen. bare long time falling
	White Birch	29 gen bare long time falling
p. 2	S. Alba	Oct 26 & <u>small willows long time falling</u>
	Am. Elm	26 long time falling
p. 5	White Maple	26 [almost] bare except small

[images: MSS]

The information about his reaction to the increasing cold, marked through in pencil, is on the chart titled “General Phenomena for October.” The manuscript is in the Beinecke Library, Yale University; for a digital image, see <http://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/3558329>.

[images: MSS]

In the category “Wear a thicker coat than thin” under the year “58” we see “26 a thicker (not outside one)” – he must have had at least three coats of different weights (Journal—greatcoat, thin coat, outside coat); in the next category, “Finger cold early or late” we have “26 beg. to feel finger cold early & late.”

The chart allows him to see the variation year by year from 1852 through 1861. He doesn’t have a Journal entry every year for these two observations, but there are enough for him to create an average

In 1852, he changed coats “Before Oct 2d”; in 1856, he wore “a thicker coat” on October 1; in 1857, it was “Before Oct 5th"; in 1858, October 26. In the leftmost column he recorded what seems to be a mean or an average date for the changing of the coats—“3 or earlier.”

The cold began to affect his fingers on the 14th in 1856 (“after rains in night suddenly changes to finger cold”); on the “21st at least” in 1857; on the 26th in 1858 (“beg to feel finger cold early & late”); on two days in 1859, the 16th (“hands cool when rowing at eve”) and the 20th (“at eve”); and on October 1 in 1860 (“cold enough for mittens in am”). The average date for this is the 14th, I think—the pencil is very faint.¹

He has much more data for some events than for others: there are annual observations about the river at its lowest, about hard frosts, about Indian Summer, and about gossamer—that is, spider silk—and for almost every year about when it rained (first or last half), about the temperature and the wind, and, in the very last row, in pencil, “Shadbush &c &c leaf after Ind. Summer.”

Thoreau put a tremendous amount of time and effort into this project, which he called his “Kalendar,” with a capital “K,” and the work involved several stages, as you’ve seen. Observing and recording the phenomena was only the beginning. He had to decide which events were significant for his study (at the outset he probably included more than he ended up using). Then he had to figure out how best to organize the information. Finally, he had to apply the organization he had chosen, first copying the information into the lists, and then creating the charts.

As I said, I believe that he started extracting the Journal information into lists sometime in 1860. I think that much of the chart-making took place in the later summer and fall of 1861

¹ In *Walden’s Shore*, Robert Thorson includes his hypothesis about why Thoreau was interested in the mean date of occurrence for the phenomena he recorded in his charts. The explanation is necessarily somewhat complex; see pp. 318-322.

after he returned from Minnesota in July. Altogether, seventeen charts survive; they compile data in the categories of general phenomena for April, May, June, October, and November, all phenomena for December, phenomena for winter, leafing, flowering (three charts), the fall of the leaf, birds (three charts), insects, and the freezing and thawing of Walden, White's, and Flint's Ponds. Most include phenomena for dates from 1850 through 1861. It's not clear whether the gaps represent uncollected data or data he didn't live long enough to transfer—a close study of one category of lists and the charts that resulted could help answer that question.

The charts seem to be the only substantial end product for this project—but do they represent all that he wanted to do with this data? I'm sure they do not. They look like the end product because they're as far as he got with the project—he ran out of time, literally, before he could put the information to any other use.

What would he have done with it had he lived another several decades? He didn't tell us, and I don't think there's enough indirect evidence to know.

He mentions the Kalendar in his Journal one time only, in an entry for Sunday, October 16, 1859:

When I get to Willow Bay I see the new musquash houses erected—conspicuous on the now nearly leafless shores— To me this is an important & suggestive sight—as, perchance, in some countries new hay-stacks in the yards.

I remember the phenomenon annually for 30 years. A more constant phenomenon here than the new haystacks in the yard—for they were erected here probably before man dwelt here & may still be erected here when man has departed. For 30 years I have annually observed about this time, or earlier—, the freshly erected winter lodges of the musquash along the river side reminding us that if we have no gypsies we have a more indigenous race of furry quadrupedal men maintaining their ground in our midst still— This may not be an annual phenomenon to you— It may not be in the Greenwich almanack—or ephemeris—but it has an important place in my Kalendar. So surely as the Sun appears to be in Libra or Scorpio—I see the conical winter lodges of the musquash rising above the withered pontederia & flags— There will be some reference to it, by way of parable or otherwise in my New Testament. Surely, it is a defect in our Bible—that it is not truly ours, but a Hebrew Bible— The most pertinent illustrations for us are to be drawn, not from Egypt or Babylonia—but from New England.

Talk about learning our letters & being literate—why the roots of letters are things. Natural objects & phenomena are the original symbols or types which express our thoughts & feelings—& yet American scholars—having little or no root in the soil—commonly strive with all their might to confine themselves to the imported symbols alone— All the time growth & experience—the living speech, they would fair reject as "Americanism". It is the old error—which the church—the state—the school ever commit—choosing darkness rather than light—holding fast to the old—& to tradition. A more intimate knowledge—a deeper experience will surely originate a word. When I really know that our river pursues a serpentine course to the Merrimack—shall I continue to describe it by referring to some other river no older than itself which is like it—& call it a meander? It is no more meandering than the meander is Musketaquidding.

What if there were a tariff on words—on language—for the encouragement of home manufactures. Have we not the genius to coin our own? Let the schoolmaster distinguish the true from the counterfeit.

They go on publishing the "chronological cycles" & "Moveable festivals of the Church" & the like—from mere habit—but how insignificant are these compared with the annual phenomena of your life—which fall within your experiences. The signs of the zodiac are not nearly of that significance to me—that the sight of a dead sucker in the spring is. That is the occasion for an immovable festival in my church. Another kind of Lent then begins in my thoughts than you wot of—I am satisfied then to live on fish alone—for a season

Men attach a false importance to Celestial phenomena as compared with terrestrial—as if it were more respectable & elating to watch your neighbors than to mind your own affairs. The nodes of the stars are not the knots we have to untie The phenomena of our year are one thing—those of the almanac another!

For october, for instance, instead of making the sun enter the sign of the scorpion I would much sooner make him enter a musquash-house

The snapping turtle too—must find a place among the constellations—though it may have to supplant some doubtful character already there. If there is no place for him over head—he can serve us bravely underneath supporting the earth—

In March 1860 Journal entries he did use information drawn from his March lists to try to tell the story of a typical March, but after a robust start the narrative diminishes into a daily weather report. I suspect that he moved to the chart format after that because he had an idea that the charts would yield more or different information. His vision for the project was vast—to explore what he called the “mysterious relation” between himself and the phenomena of nature—and I doubt that vision diminished over time.

Let me close with my own thoughts about this product of Thoreau’s intense involvement with Concord.

Like all phenological charts, Thoreau’s demonstrate the persistent cycles of phenomena through the passage of time. They present the facts of nature, set down as they occurred, but organized so that they reveal cycles of repetition with variation. But thousands of events take place every days and there has to be some principle of selection—these charts contain the phenomena that Thoreau chose, the events he saw as important. The charts have a numinous, essential quality for me because they distil the Concord that Thoreau experienced from 1850 through 1861, allowing me to view that place at that time through his own filter.

I can also imagine Thoreau using the charts as a mnemonic device. He had a prodigious intellectual capacity and a memory to match—he could hold and synthesize details in his mind, and allow the synthesis to evolve there. In an April 8, 1854, Journal entry he wrote:

I find that I can criticise my composition best when I stand at a little distance from it—when I do not see it, for instance—. I make a little chapter of contents which enables me to recall it page by page to my mind—& judge it more impartially when my MSS is out of the way. (*Journal 8*, pp. 59-60)

When he saw his 1851 note on “Gossamer” in the October chart—“Nov. 1 -51 remarkable a bright clear warm day—” [observations often lapse back into the month before or jump forward into the month after the nominal month of the chart]—I can see it calling to his mind the details that made the phenomenon worth noting, as set down in his Journal:

It is a remarkable day for fine gossamer cob-webs. Here on the causeway as I walk toward the sun I perceive that the air is full of them streaming from off the willows

& spanning the road—all stretching across the road—and yet I cannot see them in any other direction—and feel not one It looks as if the birds would be incommoded. They have the effect of a shimmer in the air. This shimmer moving along them as they are waved by the wind gives the effect of a drifting storm of light. It is more like a fine snow storm which drifts athwart your path than anything else. What is the peculiar condition of the atmosphere to call forth this activity. If there were no sunshine I should never find out that they existed—I should not know that I was bursting a myriad barriers. Though you break them with your person you feel not one. Why should this day be so distinguished. (*Journal 4*, pp. 159-160)

For him, the charts would have been like a honeycomb, with each chamber filled with material for his writing.

Cycles form the structure of Thoreau's two books—going out and returning, moving through a week on the water (condensed from two weeks), living through a year (condensed from two years). In his phenological work, he immerses himself in the most significant cycle of all, the cycle on nature, knowing that it started long before he began recording, or began to be, and would continue long after he was gone. The charts memorialize his personal slice of that vast cycle.

And to return to Thoreau's aspiration to write a "poem to be called Concord," though these charts bear no outward resemblance to poetry, I see them as Thoreau's transcription of the poems that nature composed in Concord year after year, during the last full decade of his life. He never characterized his phenological work this way, but in a Journal entry for Sunday, December 7, 1856, he describes the poem of winter in a way that makes me think he wouldn't object to being seen as the scribe of nature's poetry:

That grand old poem called Winter is round again without any connivance of mine— As I sit under Lees Cliff where the snow is melted—amid sere penny royal & frostbitten catnep—I look over my shoulder upon an arctic scene. I see with surprise the pond a dumb white surface of ice speckled with snow, just as so many winters before,—where so lately were lapsing waves or smooth reflecting water. I see the holes which the pickerel fisher has made—& I see him too retreating over the hills drawing his sled behind him. The water is already skimmed over again there. I hear too the familiar belching voice of

the pond. It seemed as if winter had come without any interval since mid-summer & I was prepared to see it flit away by the time I again looked over my shoulder. It was as if I had dreamed it. But I see that the farmers have had time to gather their harvests as usual, and the seasons have revolved as slowly as in the first autumn of my life. The winters come now as fast as snow-flakes— It is wonderful that old men do not lose their reckoning. It was summer—& now again it is winter. Nature loves this rhyme so well that she never tires of repeating it. So sweet & wholesome is the winter—so simple & moderate—so satisfactory & perfect that her children will never weary of it. What a poem! An epic, in blanc verse enriched with a million tinkling rhymes. It is solid beauty. It has been subjected to the vicissitudes of millions of years of the gods & not a single superfluous ornament remains— The severest & coldest of the immortal critics have shot their arrows at & pruned it till it cannot be amended.

(Transcript: http://thoreau.library.ucsb.edu/writings_journals_pdfs/J11f4-f6.pdf, pp. 123-124; manuscript:

http://thoreau.library.ucsb.edu/writings_journals_pdfs/J11TMS22.pdf, pp. 65-66)

Thank you.

Short Titles

- Correspondence 1* *The Correspondence of Henry D. Thoreau*, ed. Robert N. Hudspeth, vol. 1, 1834-1848 (Princeton UP, 2013)
- Correspondence 2* *The Correspondence of Henry D. Thoreau*, ed. Robert N. Hudspeth, with Elizabeth Hall Witherell and Lihong Xie, vol. 2, 1849-1856 (Princeton UP, 2018)
- Journal 1* Henry D. Thoreau, *Journal 1: 1837-1842*, ed. Elizabeth Hall Witherell, et. al (Princeton UP, 1981)
- Journal 4* Henry D. Thoreau, *Journal 4: 1851-1852*, ed. Leonard N. Neufeldt and Nancy Craig Simmons (Princeton UP, 1992)
- Journal 5* Henry D. Thoreau, *Journal 5: 1852-1853*, ed. Patrick F. O'Connell (Princeton UP, 1997)
- Journal 8* Henry D. Thoreau, *Journal 8: 1854*, ed. Sandra Harbert Petrulionis (Princeton UP, 2002)
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- Laws of Manu* *The Laws of Manu*, trans. by Wendy Doniger with Brian Smith (Penguin, 1991), p. xvii
- RWE Letters* Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Ralph L. Rusk, 6 vols. (Columbia UP, 1939)
- Thoreau: A Life* Laura Dassow Walls, *Henry David Thoreau: A Life* (U of Chicago P, 2017)
- “Thoreau’s Projected Work on the English Poets” Robert Sattelmeyer, “Thoreau’s Projected Work on the English Poets,” *Studies in the American Renaissance 1980*, ed. Joel Myerson (Twayne, 1980), pp. 239-257
- Walden’s Shore* Robert Thorson, *Walden’s Shore: Henry David Thoreau and Nineteenth-Century Science* (Harvard UP, 2014)
- A Week* Henry D. Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, ed. Carl F. Hovde, William L. Howarth, and Elizabeth Hall Witherell (Princeton UP, 1980)