



# The Journal of Henry David Thoreau, 1837-1861 (New York Review Books Classics)

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Henry David Thoreau's *Journal* was his life's work: the daily practice of writing that accompanied his daily walks, the workshop where he developed his books and essays, and a project in its own right—one of the most intensive explorations ever made of the everyday environment, the revolving seasons, and the changing self. It is a treasure trove of some of the finest prose in English and, for those acquainted with it, its prismatic pages exercise a hypnotic fascination. Yet at roughly seven thousand pages, or two million words, it remains Thoreau's least-known work.

This reader's edition, the largest one-volume edition of Thoreau's *Journal* ever published, is the first to capture the scope, rhythms, and variety of the work as a whole. Ranging freely over the world at large, the *Journal* is no less devoted to the life within. As Thoreau says, "It is in vain to write on the seasons unless you have the seasons in you."

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### Editorial Review

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Thoreau began keeping a journal at age 20, ultimately filling 14 notebooks and a collection he titled "Gleanings; or, What Time Has Not Reaped of My Journal." Writer, editor, and translator Searls selected passages from this vast sea of words to create the largest and most cohesive one-volume reader's edition ever published. Thoreau's journal was the wellspring for all his books, and Searls is acutely attuned to its grand continuity and "synthesizing quality," ensuring that readers will be able to fully appreciate Thoreau's sustained contemplation of the cycles, patterns, and interconnectivity of nature. What is also apparent is how the rhythms and revelations of Thoreau's long walks inspired the flow and radiance of his poetic prose. Searls' sensitive editing casts new light on Thoreau's abiding fascination with weather, trees, turtles, the moon, birds, berries, and, of course, human nature. Observant, philosophical, and rhapsodic, Thoreau parses his own moods, portrays friends and neighbors, decries slavery and the destruction of the living world, and rejoices in beauty. This is a superb and uniquely accessible edition of an essential American masterpiece. -- Donna Seaman

#### Review

"[Searls's selection] admirably preserves the feel of the 7,000-page original. This lightweight, sturdy edition ... practically begs to be read outside." —Thomas Meaney, *Times Literary Supplement*

"Writer, editor, and translator Searls selected passages from this vast sea of words to create the largest and most cohesive one-volume reader's edition ever published...This is a superb and uniquely accessible edition of an essential American masterpiece." —*Booklist*

"It is the unflagging beauty of the writing, day after day, that confirms its greatness among writers' journals." —Alfred Kazin

"Thoreau could lift a fish out of the stream with his hands; he could charm a wild squirrel to nestle in his coat; he could sit so still that the animals went on with their play round him. [In the Journal] we have a chance of getting to know Thoreau as few people are known, even by their friends." —Virginia Woolf

"Reading Thoreau's *Journal* I discover any idea I've ever had worth its salt."—John Cage

#### About the Author

**Henry David Thoreau** (1817–1862) was born and lived the greater part of his life in Concord, Massachusetts. He studied at Harvard, where he became a disciple of Emerson, and after graduating in 1837 returned to Concord to teach school with his brother. In Concord, he became acquainted with the members of the Transcendentalist Club and grew especially close to Emerson, for whom he worked as a handyman. Thoreau also began to write for *The Dial* and other magazines, and in 1839 he made the boat trip that became the subject of his first book, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849). On July 4, 1845, he moved into the hut he'd constructed on Walden Pond, where he remained until September 6, 1847—a sojourn that inspired his great work *Walden*, published in 1854. In the 1850s, Thoreau became increasingly active in the abolitionist cause, meeting John Brown at Emerson's house in 1857 and, after the attack on Harpers Ferry, writing passionately in Brown's defense. Short trips to Maine and Cape Cod resulted in two posthumously published books (*The Maine Woods* and *Cape Cod*), and a visit to New York led to a meeting with Walt Whitman. Suffering from tuberculosis, Thoreau traveled to the Great Lakes for the sake of his

health, but finding no improvement and realizing that he was going to die, returned home to Concord to put his papers in order and to write his final essays, drawing as always on the *Journal*, the work that was the source of all his other works and the defining undertaking of his adult life.

**Damion Searls** is the author of *Everything You Say Is True*, a travelogue, and *What We Were Doing and Where We Were Going*, stories. He is also an award-winning translator from German, French, Norwegian, and Dutch, most recently of Rainer Maria Rilke's *The Inner Sky: Poems, Notes, Dreams* and Marcel Proust's *On Reading*. He has produced an experimental edition of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, called ; or *The Whale*, and his translation of the Dutch writer Nescio's stories is forthcoming from NYRB Classics.

**John R. Stilgoe** is the author of many books and the Robert and Lois Orchard Professor in the History of Landscape at Harvard University.

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