9-2013

PHL 504.01: Topics in Environmental Philosophy

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Recommended Citation

Philosophy/Enst 504.

Fall 2013
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"To read well, that is, to read true books in a true spirit, is a noble exercise, and one that will task the reader more than any exercise which the customs of the day esteem. It requires training such as athletes underwent, the steady intention almost of the whole life to this object. Books must be read as deliberately and reservedly as they were written," says Thoreau, who spent nine years composing *Walden*.

We're simply going to read the *Walden* slowly, lovingly, intelligently over and over, twice. Among other things, *Walden* is a meditative prose poem, one that deliberately and continually undermines the reader's attempts to find simple answers or pat, enduring truths about any of the issues that Thoreau raises. We'll only read a few articles by other readers so that you can make your own discoveries, which is how Thoreau would want us to approach his book. Whatever Thoreau has to teach us, we'll find it in the minutiae and in the most unexpected places—in his sense of humor, word play, images, metaphors, in the very structure of the text, in the text's intellectual switchbacks, and most of all in his silences. To paraphrase, badly, Robert Frost, Thoreau has at heart our getting lost, in the hope we'll become lost enough to find ourselves. If nothing else there should be time enough in the next fifteen weeks to become very lost, and a lifetime to find ourselves.

Readings

8/26   Hello and Introduction

9/28   *Walden*, (Dover Thrift Edition---DTE), p.1-84, "Economy"-"Sounds"

9/2   Labor Day, No Class

9/4   finish *Walden,* DTE

9/9   Bickman, chapters 1-6; "What is an Environmental Text?" "*Walden's* Environmental Projects," Lawrence Buell, (x)

9/11   Bickman, chapters 7 & 8, Reread "The Bean-field" from *Walden*

9/16   "The Force of Things" & "The Agency of Assemblages and the North American Blackout," Jane Bennett (x)

9/18   Bennett, and Tom Birch "Wilderness as Prisons" (x)

9/23-25 *A Poetry Handbook*, Mary Oliver; various poems (x); review Bickman, chapter 6 and Buell on "relinquishment"

9/30 *Walden* (Cramer's edition from here on), "Where I Lived"

10/2 "Reading"

10/7 "Sounds"

10/9 No class (hopefully we'll hike this week)

10/14 "Solitude" and "Visitors"; revisit Bennett

10/16 "Bean-field" and "The Village"

10/21 "The Ponds"; revisit Bennett

10/23 "Baker Farm"

10/28 "Higher Laws"

10/31 "Brute Neighbors

11/4   "Housewarming"

11/6 "Former Inhabitants; and Winter Visitors

11/11 Vets' Day, No Class

11/13 "Winter Animals"

11/18 "The Pond in Winter"

11/20 "Spring"; revisit Bennett

11/25 "Spring"

11/27 Thanksgiving, No Class

12/2 "Conclusion"

12/4 Last day wrap up

<u>Grading</u>
Five 2 page papers consisting of close textual readings from the Cramer edition. Please keep very focused, preferably work with no more than 2 pages of text. 50%
One Presentation   15%
Final paper, 12-15 pages 35%

<u>Texts</u>
Walden, Dover Thrift Edition (DTE)
Walden, A Fully Annotated Edition, edited by Jeffrey S. Cramer
Walden: Volatile Truths, Martin Bickman
A Poetry Handbook, Mary Oliver
(x) Copies I'll distribute