

Secession & Succession

**Portfolio III**

December 2nd, 2010

Due Thursday, December 9th, 2010

**Directions:** As you are preparing to write your responses to each of these journal prompts, please make use of the discussion threads on the “Chair III” page of the wiki. I have started discussion threads there corresponding to all three prompts of your portfolio.

Entry I

*“The Great Spirit makes indifferent all times and places. The place where he is seen is always the same, and indescribably pleasant to all our senses. We had allowed only neighboring and transient circumstances to make our occasions. They were, in fact, the causes of our distractions. But nearest to all things is that power which fashions their being. Next to us the grandest laws are being enacted and administered. Next to us is not the workman whom we have hired, but ever the workman whose work we are. He is at work, not in my backyard, but inconceivably nearer than that. We are the subjects of an experiment how singular! Can we not dispense with the society of our gossips a little while under these circumstances?”*

*Journal – July 7, 1845*

*“Any prospect of awakening or coming to life to a dead man makes indifferent all times and places. The place where that may occur is always the same, and indescribably pleasant to all our senses. For the most part we allow only outlying and transient circumstances to make our occasions. They are, in fact, the cause of our distraction. Nearest to all things is that power which fashions their being. Next to us the grandest laws are continually being executed. Next to us is not the workman whom we have hired, with whom we love so well to talk, but the workman whose work we are....We are the subjects of an experiment which is not a little interesting to me. Can we not do without the society of our gossips a little while under these circumstances — have our own thoughts to cheer us?”*

*Walden 1854*

**Writing Preparation:** Throughout this semester, we have closely followed the three stage composition process as practiced by H.D. Thoreau. Above are two quotes that illustrate the importance of this method to Henry as he reworked his original journal entries into his published works. Please look at the original journal entry from 1845, and then note the revised expression of his ideas as they appear in the “Sounds” chapter of *Walden*. Using your recently acquired skills of summary and paraphrase, please note the ways that the revised wording actually conveys different ideas than those found in the original entry. As mentioned above, please share what you find collaboratively in the wiki discussion thread dedicated to this entry.

**Journal:** After you have finished your writing preparation, please write at least one page explaining what you have found. Here you may include an account of your process of analysis and discovery, as well as an evaluation of what you have found in Henry’s ideas. Please be imaginative, concise, and confident in your writing, and pay special attention to your choice of transitional language and ideas.

## Entry II

*“Why do precisely these objects which we behold make a world?”*

*Walden* -- Henry David Thoreau

**Self-Mediation and Intermediation:** The quotation above is a question posed by Henry David Thoreau at the conclusion of a highly unusual discussion, which opens the chapter of *Walden* titled “Brute Neighbors.” It is not so much the content of the discussion that is so novel, but rather the voices that contribute to this discussion themselves that are unusual, as each is an aspect of Thoreau himself. The conversation is held between a “hermit” and a “poet,” who appear to represent two aspects of Thoreau’s perspective which he is attempting to reconcile as he chooses how best to interact with the natural world. While you may not engage in this exact type of inner conversation, your journal writing and portfolio work this semester has provided you with an opportunity for similar forms of self-exploration throughout our time together. However, while I welcome any and all forms of engagement of inner “hermits” in my classroom, for this entry, you will again be required to engage in sophisticated forms of dialogue with your classmates and with me as well! Please see the discussion thread dedicated to this entry to prepare for your journal entry.

**Journal:** Do you ever wonder why the “objects” that you behold demand your attention precisely as they do? Do you ever wonder why you feel tugged in different directions, or conflicted in your evaluation of the things you encounter in life, or hesitant in the choices that you make? Like Thoreau, do you struggle to reconcile all of your various opinions and perspectives into one way of perceiving the world? Here is your chance to “work things out” a bit. Choose two or three aspects of yourself, personify these as accurately as possible, and create a dialogue such as Thoreau’s in *Walden*. In other words, allow your inner “poet” to express his or her desires to your inner “economist,” or give your secret “romantic” permission to say a word or two to your inner “pragmatist.” Think about the nature of the dialogue found throughout the film *Mindwalk*, and look at Thoreau’s discussion at the beginning of “Brute Neighbors” for inspiration. Be fair to conflicting claims as you express your different “selves,” and allow each voice the space and generosity to speak openly. Again, use your imagination, and write at least two pages for this entry. Please use proper judgment without being inappropriately judgmental.



### Entry III

*“When in the Course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.”*

*“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”*

#### *The Declaration of Independence “Introduction”*

*“I learned this, at least, by my experiment: that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. He will put some things behind, will pass an invisible boundary; new, universal, and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within him; or the old laws be expanded, and interpreted in his favor in a more liberal sense, and he will live with the license of a higher order of beings. In proportion as he simplifies his life, the laws of the universe will appear less complex, and solitude will not be solitude, nor poverty poverty, nor weakness weakness. If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.”*

#### *Walden – “Conclusion”*

**Introductions & Conclusions:** The introduction and first sentence of the preamble of *The Declaration of Independence* and the Conclusion of *Walden* both focus our attention on the living interrelationship of nature, law, and how we choose to live our lives. However, they do so in different ways and as the result of different types of “findings.” While they both attempt to publish these findings to the world, the *Declaration* mainly seems to begin from a point of long settled truth, while *Walden* appears to conclude from a point of recently experienced truth. Please again visit the discussion thread for this entry, and express which of these two “declarations” rings most “true” to you, and whether or not you think that these two claims are able to coexist in your own experience, understanding, and judgment.

**Journal:** Please write two pages explaining what each of these statements is trying to convey about nature, law, and human action, and explain why as a young American living in 2010 the words of these two selections still have relevance in your life. In your response, discuss which words ring most true to you, and explain why this is so. Finally, please consider the earnest nature of the contexts and texts of each of these pronouncements as you think about the proper tone and rhythm to adopt in your writing.

Have fun!  
Tom