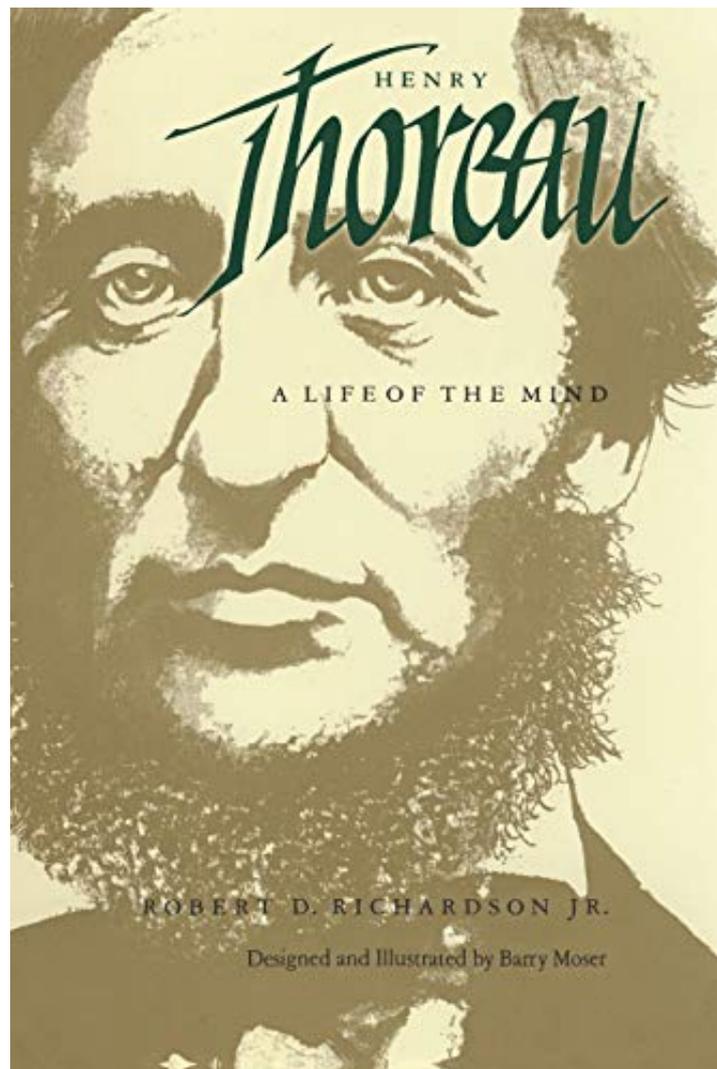


# Henry Thoreau: A Life of the Mind

*by*

Robert D. Richardson



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## **Synopsis**

The two years Thoreau spent at Walden Pond and the night he spent in the Concord jail are among the most familiar features of the American intellectual landscape. In this new biography, based on a reexamination of Thoreau's manuscripts and on a retracing of his trips, Robert Richardson offers a view of Thoreau's life and achievement in their full nineteenth century context.



































































## What people say about this book

Beausun, "Wonderful and a privilege. I've read a few books about Thoreau but always put this one back on the library shelf as being too long and detailed, considering the amount of time available to me for reading it. Now retired, and finding it as a Kindle option, I have read it. It is wonderfully written and a privilege to read, as it gives lucid and intimate access to the developing thoughts and feelings throughout his life of an independent and deeply human American philosopher, poet, scientist, adventurer, and friend to his community. Sadly, I went back to the library to enjoy the pleasure of reading passages on the printed page and found that this acknowledged classic of Thoreauvian scholarship has been culled from the library shelves."

taylor storey, "A little long...but well-written. Great book for someone interested in Thoreau. It starts with his college years, so unfortunately nothing of his childhood is included. It is pretty long, took me a few months to get through it all. It does have the benefit of short chapters. However, if you aren't fully committed to the time needed to devour this one, I would recommend "Henry Thoreau As Remembered By A Young Friend" By Edward Waldo Emerson. Much shorter (maybe 50 pages total?), it gives a little bit of an overview of Thoreau's life and the significance it had/has. Ralph Waldo Emerson also wrote a 12 page essay about Thoreau that could be valuable. There is a lot in this book about what he read and what he was interested in throughout the book. It's good because Thoreau was a big time reader. After reading this book I really want to follow up and read Goethe's "Italian Journey", The Laws of Manu, Thomas Carlyle's "On Heroes and Hero Worship", Edwin Arnold's "The Light of Asia", Melville's "Typee" and find out what about Kant influenced the transcendentalist movement. Thoreau was certainly an intentional individual if there was one, another biographer gave the subtitle to his biography "the man who did what he wanted" and this was the case. He spent a good part of his life walking 4 hours a day, turned down a successful pencil making business, read in multiple languages. Of course he also lived almost self-sufficiently in the woods for two years. Because of his intentionality and disdain for the common society of his day he became quite the interesting self-developed individual. I think this book redefined the idea of wildness for me. I have always wondered what about the ocean, or fire compels us to look at it. I think Thoreau would say it is the wildness of it. I think I have also seen this in my own travels, the further out, more natural a place is, the more I feel the mystery of it, the more I am compelled by it. I think it is that those places have stayed wild. It is not tamed. Thoreau and most of the other transcendentalists also lived his life a bit in response to the Puritanical Calvinism of his day. Reading that and comparing it with my own experience gave me a lot of thoughts about the common trends throughout history. There was an openness to truth and to human nature that was pretty different from the people of his time. They were primarily interested in production, and choosing "repose" over "truth" as Emerson said. Thoreau wanted truth. He wanted to confront the essential facts of life so that when it came time for him to die he would not discover that he had not lived. Me

too. Thank you Robert Richardson for a well-written (and Barry Moser for the design!!) book. Thank you Thoreau for a life well-lived."

Thomas Lapins, "A biography and biographer equal to this man and his life. As a young man my Holy Trinity was: Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman. Emerson's essays are pure poetry; Thoreau's "Walden" and "Civil Disobedience" became a blueprint on how to live and why to write; and Whitman's life and "Leaves Of Grass" taught me about myself. "A Life Of The Mind" filled each page with the authenticity and richness of a life well lived. Thoreau, the humanness, the naturalist, the friend and son; the poet of the unraveling, entangled soul beating within the humdrum of everyday and ordinary life, leaps from every page. I have read other biographies on Thoreau which never captured the mind and writer of "Walden". Here the man and life equalled and qualified the literature. Richardson is more than a biographer of Thoreau; he's made from the same stock. He didn't simply tell of a man and his life, he savored, and shared in the same poetics and struggles as the man he researched. The theme of Thoreau's life was an opportunity to express his own convictions and struggles. It was while reading an anthology of Thoreau's work that I first understood why some poets and writers must write. I came to understand how every sentence could be layered with meaning and timelessness. After reading this biography I must reread my annotated "Walden". I must sit in my backyard amongst the leaves and flowers and shapes and densities I've not paid attention to in some time."

George A. Matteson, "Brilliant. I've read a great deal of material on Thoreau including the entirety of his Journal (twice). This book is a masterpiece of understanding of the origins, the sources and the spirit of Thoreau. It provides a way to interpret Thoreau's thought and writing which provides essential context to everything that he wrote and to everything that's been written about him. Superb."

Bluesdoc1952, "Essential!. Richardson's style is superb, now devoted to Henry David Thoreau. We meet Thoreau as he enters Harvard and the text follows him through his productive years. This book belongs alongside of the Emerson biography by the same author. Excellent writing."

Robert 'Bob' Macespera, "Magnificent, essential for any Thoreau lover. This not a biography of Henry Thoreau, but his intellectual journey (David S Reynolds has just published a similar book on Abraham Lincoln). It starts with Thoreau at Harvard and carries through a life of study and reading. What did the famous Walden author read, what did he like more, where he did base his books and essays. This book replies to these questions, and superbly so. A must for any Thoreau fan; important to any XIX cultural scholar. A great book."



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