

Yisel Morales

12/17/19

ENGL 370B

Final Reflection Essay

Morales 1

## A Deliberation

This course and its content is amongst one of the most valuable courses I have ever taken in my two years at PLU. All the books and essays assigned in class were significant to me and I found value in each and every one of them. Yes, that includes Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* as well. Although, I would not place it amongst my top three I will admit it was challenging to engage with. Personally, I believed that all texts were provoking and stimulating to me and thus would count them all as valuable. To me, a marvelous piece of literature is counted as important if I can think about it once in a while and look at the world in the same critical way that those authors wrote in. Thus, if I must pick two out of the countless piles of knowledgeable literature read I would choose Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* and Harriet Jacobs *Incidents*. The content of these texts is something that will stick with me very well in my mind far beyond the classroom. It is difficult not to look around and acknowledge that their conceptual ideas are still very much relevant today in slightly different forms. Without further ado, let us examine why and how these texts are valuable and important to me. As well as why they should be read by the world at large.

Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*, specifically the chapter Economy, is the most honestly straight forward text I have ever read and I love it. For instance, in the chapter Economy, he states the following, "Practically, the old have no very important advice to give the young. Their own experience has been so partial, and their lives have been such miserable failures, for private reasons, as they must believe;" (9). This quote as I remember it, impacted me the most because it mortified me at first. I wanted to believe that wisdom was something I would accomplish over the years. However, now that Thoreau mentions it and puts it above as such. I now realize what Thoreau is hinting at. It is that wisdom is not about age but rather it is about experience. And that right there makes total and absolute sense. One could be as old as 37 and still behave as though they were 18 or even younger because of their own experiences. I've seen it in school with several peers. Many times and I am sure, plenty of others have also felt discouraged to write

Yisel Morales

12/17/19

ENGL 370B

Final Reflection Essay

Morales 2

boldly or passionately because of our age. Society and elders consistently point out that we are too young to know anything about life or true love. Yet, this could stem from their own insecurity, knowing themselves very well to know that they haven't learned the true values of love or life either. Thoreau also states the following, "The head monkey at Paris puts on a traveller's cap, and all the monkeys in America do the same" (21). This quote stood out to me the most because it practically summarizes pages 19-21 in the simplest form. Not only is it evident that Thoreau is quite annoyed at how fashionable clothing means nothing in the lateral grand scheme of life. But it is the most sharp-witted bomb drop the American society could swallow. On social media and the society here in America at large have always, since the dawn of the primitive age, regarded garments as the most important valuables you could display. I know of some people who would rather starve and save their money up for a \$35 t-shirt that they'll wear only once to stay 'on-trend'. It is truly baffling to think about. Especially now with social media who only reinforces your average 'outfit of the day' mirror selfies. Thoreau is probably cursing at us from up above even more so than ever. Thus, with this knowledge Thoreau puts out, I have begun to question why we care so much about the way we look if it means nothing. Is it just an illusion enforced by the government for state profit and capitalism? Furthermore, Thoreau also states the following, "At present our houses are cluttered and defiled with it, and a good housewife would sweep out the greater part into the dust hole" (28). This quote is quite humorous. After reading this section of *Walden* I looked around and realized Thoreau is completely right. As a capitalistic society we purchase a lot of home goods and make furnishing stores a number one priority. Yet, furniture alike clothing is meaningless. My poor mother purchased five chunky pillows a good two months ago because they were on 'sale'. With Thoreau's influential outlook on materialism I mentioned that that was extremely unnecessary and even proposed that no one would use them. Well dear reader, can you imagine what happened? Exactly that. No one uses them and since their purchase, they're sitting on top of each other collecting dust. Thoreau's philosophy on materialism stood out to me the most because let's face it, it's become a priority in the American society more now than ever. This, in my opinion, is because of social media enforcing it much more heavily. It is instant and completely

Yisel Morales

12/17/19

ENGL 370B

Final Reflection Essay

Morales 3

free to access. Khloe will be posting her new mug with a hashtag blessed on Facebook, while Kylie will post a picture of her outfit on Snapchat in hopes of widespread acceptance. None of them will ever learn how furniture or clothing is essentially pointless unless they have read Thoreau's *Walden*. And neither will late teens such as myself, recognize their thoughts as valuable as the next regardless of age unless they give *Walden* a try. Therefore, I believe that Thoreau's *Walden*, if not at least the Economy chapter, should be read because it gives crucial insight onto what it means to be truly living and thus what is the bare necessities.

The other text that is really valuable to me is Harriet Jacobs *Incidents*. Jacobs taught me that women are just as powerful as men, if not even more so. I apologize to the men in the world, I do not mean to offend. Nevertheless, this to me is important because as a young woman myself, I had always thought that men would always be superior because of all the texts I have read. Women are always portrayed as inferior. However, Jacobs changed my personal outlook on my gender. For instance, in *Trials of Girlhood*, she states, "He tried his utmost to corrupt the pure principles my grandmother had instilled. He peopled my young mind with unclean images, such as only a vile monster could think of" (27). The fact that Jacobs took this in the sense that sexual harassment was wrong and didn't think of it as normal astounds me. One would think that because she and everyone else around her was surrounded by it she would eventually dismiss it as something normal that must happen. However, Jacobs did not let this man continue his harassment. She realized that this was immoral and impractical and fought through it. This shows that even from the times before social media, woman have always been silenced victims of some sort of sexual abuse or harassment. Jacobs was able to rise above this. Which reminds me of the rise of the hashtag #MeToo movement that erupted in 2017, when more than a million woman confessed online about the sexual abuses they underwent. Specifically, this also reminded me of the infamous Larry Nassar's case where he sexually assaulted fifteen year-old girls who were gymnasts. I cannot imagine what that must've felt like and the trauma inflicted on them that will last for the rest of their lives. Jacobs and these young girls exemplify beyond morality how strong we really are and how yet they still live on with such a horrendous psychological atrocity.

Yisel Morales

12/17/19

ENGL 370B

Final Reflection Essay

Morales 4

This leads me into a second episode which marks just how strong women are not just psychologically but physically as well. Jacobs states the following in *Preparations for Escape*, “Consequently my clothes and bedding were often drenched; a process by which the pains and aches in my cramped and stiffened limbs were greatly increased” (125). Yet, they say that a woman’s body is fragile. This shows that Jacobs didn’t need the physique of a man to survive living trapped in a garret for seven years. Through wind, dust, termites, and unbearable heat, Jacobs nevertheless survived. Perhaps the mere idea of this may have seemed at once an impossibility and death to many women, as it was to me. However, I say that if Jacobs in a woman’s body was able to go through this, then we all could too. Of course, I recognize that this was a completely different difficult time. However, Jacobs here is portraying everything she *shouldn’t* be in this scenario. Women according to society are supposed to stay fragile both mentally and psychically. How many times have I heard guys tell their other friends to stop acting or crying like a little girl? The answer is innumerable. That is the way it has been and how society wants it to stay. Yet, Jacobs is showing other women that they are strong not just mentally now but physically as well. Towards the end of the novel in *Free at Last*, Jacobs states the following, “Reader, my story ends with; not in the usual way with marriage” (167). In this instance, Jacobs acknowledges that she has overcome society’s picture of a happy ending with a wedding. Here, Jacobs is showing women that marriage isn’t the be-all. But rather what should be of relevance, is what is of importance to yourself. Not what everyone else pressures a woman to be. This is important to me because often one hears that if a woman doesn’t marry then she is deemed an old maid or a disgust as she didn’t fulfill her ‘duty’ as a woman. However, here, Jacobs has proved more than once that that is not the case but rather to pay attention to your own beliefs contrary to whether or not men approve. At the end of the day, one has herself and nobody else. Previous to reading Jacobs, to be frank, I had wished I was of the opposite sex. This because it seemed to be that they were in control of everything. Which admittedly, is still partially true but now you’ve got women who no longer stand for these engendered objectifications and stereotypes. For instance, Swift’s song *The Man*, Grande’s *God is a woman*, Ciara’s *Like A Boy*, and Beyoncé’s *If I Were A Boy*. They’re all feministic outcries for women’s

Yisel Morales

12/17/19

ENGL 370B

Final Reflection Essay

Morales 5

equality and empowerment. Jacobs as a woman writer taught me to love myself because I am just as strong, if not stronger, mentally and psychically as a man. Other young women who feel discouraged because of what they have witnessed at school or at work, should read *Incidents* as well so that they too can be convinced that they *can* do it better.

*Incidents* and *Walden* taught me core values of what it means to live purposely. I will cherish these books as long as my existence allows for. I have learned a great deal from them. Ranging from materialism and identity. I feel as though I have been educated well roundly. I would like to sincerely thank professor Albrecht for instructing such wisdoms into my life. There are not enough thank yous to him in the world to express my eternal gratitude and appreciation in taking this course with him.

### Works Cited

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