

Walden Skit – Group E1

Introduction

NARRATOR: Following a rather spectacular, public, existential crisis, our 30-year-old David Henry Thoreau was faced with a daunting decision: to be, or not to be . . . come a lawyer, doctor, teacher, or priest. Law, of course, was out of the question. Why should he busy himself with the personal matters of the people whom he would rather eavesdrop over? Medicine was a *huge* no-no. Would he who is regularly terrified of people seek out their innards? *Nope*. Both teaching and preaching were tempting – he had learned much from the woods and wanted nothing more than to yap endlessly to a group obligated to listen to him regardless of desire. In the end, the promise of a small, quiet box to sit in pushed priesthood above the life of an educator, and so our story begins as Father Thoreau opens his confessional box to the first sinner of this ill-fated Sunday.

The Adulterer

ADULTERER: Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned. My last confession was 3 months ago, right after my previous business trip.

THOREAU: The last one was about the ... situation ... regarding infidelity with your wife... what is this one about?

ADULTERER: Last night, I got back home from another ‘business trip’ to eat one of my wife’s awesome home cooked meals before visiting grandma Gertrude. When I got home, she hadn’t finished cooking yet. I had told her to get the food ready before I arrived, but the lack of respect for MY wishes infuriated me. I walked over to my secretary’s office when she was still working and did the unthinkable — I cheated on my wife. I entered the room and seduced her. I don’t

think I regretted it, and since then, I am fearful to face my wife and confess to her. This is all I can remember. I am sorry for these and all my sins.

THOREAU: The trappings of society and domesticity weigh heavily upon you. I have long espoused the virtues of a simpler existence, far from the clamorous demands of civilization. The woods, my dear sinner—yes, the woods! —are where one may escape not only the judgment of others, but the relentless whisperings of one's own conscience. In solitude, there is no shame, no fear. Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in. I drink at it; but while I drink, I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. Its thin current slides away, but eternity remains. Would you not find peace in such a place?

ADULTERER (*excited*): I mean, yeah, that sounds way better than confessing. I may not know how to cook without a wife, but I'll try.

THOREAU: Go in peace.

[Adulterer proceeds to go & live in the woods]

ADULTERER: *[Looks to the right]* Oh, is that a woodchuck? *[Tries cooking it.]* I can't figure out how to cook this woodchuck, how long do I leave it on the fire for?... I just wish I had my wife to cook for me...

ADULTERER: I guess a raw woodchuck will do!

NARRATOR: Lost on how to cook a woodchuck; he eats it raw. Unfortunately, he died of dysentery... *[someone holds up Oregon Trail style dysentery sign to Adulterer, then to audience]*

Gertrude

GERTRUDE:

[*walks in*]

[*grumbling*] Such an unpleasant commute, really an unpleasant commute, the mud from the rain last night got all over my boots

[*shuffles around in a stiff manner to try to get the mud off the boots then sits down, still fussing with her clothes*]

[*with a sigh begins*] Forgive me father for I have sinned, it has been a week, no, 6 days, since my last confession.

THOREAU: [*whispering*] Not again . . .

GERTRUDE: A few days ago I was waiting for my grandson to get back from a business trip. He was to come and visit after eating dinner with his family, and I decided to make a pie for him as a surprise. He told me he would arrive at 8, but by 8:01 I was hungry and getting frustrated with his delay. So I ate the *entire* pie. Even licked the plate, knowing that my grandson would arrive home hungry for some dessert and there would be nothing left for him. I immediately felt the embarrassment of my gluttony and hid the evidence of my offense by the time he finally arrived. To make things worse, when he got there, he expressed how he hadn't even had dinner because his wife wasn't done cooking. At that point I had to run to the bathroom because of how sick with guilt I was. Or perhaps this sickness was from eating the whole pie. Either way I'm not only a glutton but a rude hostess.

Anyway, the next day –

THOREAU: There's more???

GERTRUDE: *Anyway*, the next day I made not one but *twelve* pies for my grandson and his family, but he wasn't home, so I brought them to the Beans and Fishes food bank. I never told anyone the truth of my grave act of gluttony and selfishness and while I am no longer sick to my stomach with guilt, I still feel horrible. I am sorry for these and all my sins.

THOREAU: Turning to a vilely selfish act of philanthropy is almost worse than your gluttony in the first place. If anything, giving these impoverished people those sweet pies taught them to be gluttons like you. Would you really prefer to spread your disease to these people who already struggle? Philanthropy "is greatly overrated; and it is our selfishness which overrates it". Your best option to deal with your sin of gluttony is to rid yourself of the temptation of overindulgence. As I say, "simplify, simplify, simplify". Starve for a week and see how capable you are of surviving without the food you are so reliant on. Now, for your penance you must pray a rosary every time you are tempted to eat for the next week. You may make the Act of Contrition.

GERTRUDE: [*5 second moment of silence*]

THOREAU: Go in peace

GERTRUDE: [*shuffles out*]

NARRATOR: Gertrude took heed to Thoreau's advice and ate as little as possible. Despite her feebleness from lack of nutrition she still managed to get around to disturb her neighbors and took frequent walks to distract herself. On one of such walks in the forest, she stumbled upon Leila, who she saw eating some bread and cheese and pestered her for a bite. Her body is yet to be found.

The Murderer

Leila: (*Nervous, unsure of how to begin*) Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned. This is my first confession. These are my sins. I was basically going about my business, but things got out of hand. I was just running some errands when this old woman just would not stop annoying me. She kept going on and on and on about pies and food and the food bank... I just could not take it anymore. I... I killed a woman.

THOREAU: (*Calm and composed, speaking with a measured, formal tone*) Murder, you say? The taking of a life is a grave matter indeed, one that reverberates not only in the temporal world but in the eternal as well. Tell me, who was this woman?

Laila: (*Hesitant*) Her name was Gertrude. I didn't mean for it to happen, but things got heated, and... well, I just had to bury the body after I killed her.

THOREAU: (*Pauses, recognizing the name, speaking with glee*) Gertrude... Yes, yes I think I recognize her now! God, she was truly insufferable. However, while you may have the correct justification, this act is still wrong at its base. In taking her life, you have done a terrible thing, even though it may have been needed. Hark, even *I* once had to confine myself to the woods to stop myself from murdering someone I found truly detestable. (Clears throat) But that is neither here nor there. Even in the face of such a grievous act, there is room for redemption, if you so seek it. You must immerse yourself in the solitude of nature, and learn from its stillness.

LAILA: So you're saying I should go live in the woods or something? Like, try to figure myself out? I mean, I don't really get all this deep stuff, but I know I really messed up.

THOREAU: (*Nods, encouraging yet firm*) Indeed, the woods offer not merely a retreat, but a means to confront your inner self, to wrestle with the demons that drove you to this act. But you must also seek to restore balance—give back to the world what you have taken, in whatever way you can. Only through such acts can you hope to find peace.

LAILA: Alright, I'll do it. I'll try to make things right. I don't know if I can fix what I've done, but maybe I'll plant some trees or something, try to do some good.

THOREAU: It is not for me to judge but only to guide. Go now with the resolve to change the course of your life, and may you find the answers you seek in the simplicity of nature..

NARRATOR: And so, our wayward sinner ventured into the woods, seeking redemption in the heart of nature. She was able to find some solace in the woods but did not seem to be able to absorb the depth of Thoreau's intended lessons. She went and lived in the city and pursued a career as an assassin. She killed many during her lifetime and earned a great fortune for her troubles. She even started a family of her own, who, unbeknownst to her career, loved her deeply. She ended up living a good life, although she had to move homes several times due to many who wished her harm, and her children lived in fear for some time.

Enter: CHURCH [Int.]

The Thief

The Thief walks into the confessional box, head hung slightly.

THIEF: Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned. It has been . . . 12 years since my last confession. Father, I'm afraid that I have violated the 8th commandment in an awful way. I have not told anyone; I have no one to tell.

THOREAU: *[intrigued]* Continue.

THIEF: Earlier today, there was this wonderful smell coming from the food pantry down the street, and I found out that some lady had baked a dozen pies and sent them to the charity.

THOREAU: *[to the audience, as though telling an inside joke]* Yes, I certainly know of her.

THIEF: Yeah. See, what you have to understand is that money is *tight*. I can barely afford to make rent, and I'm constantly worried about putting food on the table. So, I steal. That is, I stole. The pies. I feel so, so bad.

THOREAU: Oh! Yes, I have stolen before. I commend you for standing up to the corrupt institution that is the philanthropic complex.

THIEF: ... Thanks? Wait, what?

THOREAU: What seems to me like eons ago, when I was far younger and more vigorous than I am now, I regularly stole pies from a "charitable" group of individuals feeding the homeless children afflicted by disease. To this day, it is one of my greatest achievements towards furthering society.

THIEF: That's *awful!* What the hell?

THOREAU: Hey! Watch your language in the house of God! [*shaking his head*] The audacity of sin . . . you ordinary fools think you can just speak as you please . . .

THIEF: Sorry, Father. Please continue.

THOREAU: As I was saying. Philanthropy is a sorry excuse for sinners to reassure themselves of their own moral integrity. It is a shallow and selfish practice, only meant to benefit the alleged benefactor.

THIEF: *Dude, what?* I mean – Father. Sorry. Father. *What?* So, you're telling me that I was in the right?

THOREAU: Were it entirely at my discretion, yes – I would be commending you for your actions. Alas, I serve a higher power whose ideologies are less nuanced than mine.

THOREAU cont.: *[moving on swiftly]* Here is my advice. The most egregious crime you could possibly commit is the disservice to your own conscience. You must find peace within yourself – learn to be content with the composition of *your own* character. Your guilt and confusion are palpable; I can feel them through this divider, and they are unsettling my own contentment. You do not want to be a thief.

THIEF: No . . . I don't. But needs must, right?

THOREAU cont.: You should not be dependent upon stealing from another to survive. You should live by your own virtues and worth, not confine yourself to the limitations of dependency upon another person – to the limitations of a habit that does more harm to your wellbeing than good. Learn from my hard-earned experience that obeying the whims of your soul is the key to your happiness, and reform yourself, child.

THIEF: Ye-yeah, that makes sense. I think I'll try and find a job, first. Heh, maybe I'll even work at the food bank.

THOREAU: Have you learned *nothing*?

THEIF: My bad.

THOREAU: Now, make the Act of Contrition.

THEIF: **muttering**

THOREAU: You may go.

NARRATOR: The Thief {insert name?} left the church that day and headed straight for the food bank, despite Father Thoreau's reservations. She never confessed to his crime, but hey, nobody's perfect. It was hard work, but The Thief slowly worked his way through the ranks, eventually becoming manager of the Beans & Fishes Pantry. He is the only character in our cautionary tale whose story has a happily-ever-after. Do with that information what you will.

Outro

NARRATOR: Was Thoreau a good priest? That's debatable, but we'll let you make up your own mind. To say the least, he did drastically change a lot of lives.

THOREAU: And I hope reading *Walden* changed all of yours.

[*exit stage*]