

## Foreshadowing Life in the Woods: Archival Research of Thoreau's Letter and Corrective Notes to Ralph Waldo Emerson (1847)

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### Abstract

It is said that writers are uniquely capable of capturing impressions of human experience. Henry David Thoreau is certainly no exception. Thoreau's series of essays in *Life in the Woods* (1854) are emblematic of an intensely personal and thoughtful reflection and represent his imperative to figuratively turn inward in order to resist the appeal of secular interests. This presentation will discuss the outcomes of my archival research of the Henry David Thoreau Collection (1837-1917) in the The Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature (New York Public Library) as they relate to the author's views on what it means to live a principled life. Specifically, I will discuss the content analysis that examined the fourteen-line poem in Thoreau's original letter to Ralph Waldo Emerson as it was written in Concord, Massachusetts on December 29, 1847), including the invaluable insight into his convictions of goodness and wisdom that resonate in *Life in the Woods*, published seven years later. Last, the presentation will speak to the poetic expression and corrective notes in this archival file that allows us to trace how Thoreau discerns the concept of true character in the context of an individual's defiance against the polarizing social and political norms that undermine self-development.

### Keywords

Archival Research; Thoreau; Private Letter.

