WALDEN; OR, LIFE IN THE WOODS

QUESTIONS / ANSWERS

Questions by MR. VALDIS ABOLS, Latvian diplomat:
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RIGA LATVIA

1. MOREOVER, I, ON MY SIDE, REQUIRE OF EVERY WRITER, FIRST OR LAST, A SIMPLE AND SINCERE ACCOUNT.... — a literal translation of "first and last" would sound too obscure in Latvian, so I have translated it as "the best or worst." Is that what it really means?

   Well, it means either coming in or going out, either beginning or ending, as an introduction or as a conclusion, whatever. It means that even if one cannot come up with a simple and sincere account at the beginning of one's struggle to express oneself, one should not leave off, what one is writing is not a finished product, until whatever one has produced has through iteration and editing become simple and sincere.

2. ...WHETHER IT CANNOT BE IMPROVED AS WELL AS NOT. — How would you paraphrase this "as well as not"? I somehow can't grasp the meaning of it.

   It means "readily." Whether it can readily be improved, without an inordinate amount of trouble.

3. AND EVERYWHERE, IN SHOPS, AND OFFICES, AND FIELDS.... — What was the primary meaning of a "shop" in Thoreau's New England – 1. a place where you buy things, or 2. a place where you make or repair things?

   Primarily a shop was a small retail establishment for dealing with the general public. Think of a glove-shop. A shop had clerks and counters. However, it would be possible for small manufacture or repairs to be conducted in a shop, this would not be excluded.

4. FOR THEY (THE LABORS OF HERCULES) WERE ONLY TWELVE, AND HAD AN END.... — At first sight it seems that the noun "an end" here has the meaning of "a purpose". But Thoreau goes on to explain, as a contrast to this, that his townspeople "never... finished any labour", which leads me to suppose that the true meaning of the phrase in question is "they were only twelve, and none of them was left half-done". Do you think it's correct?

   Yes, Thoreau was contrasting the labors of Hercules, of which there were twelve and then they were complete, with the unrelenting life of labor from childhood to grave to which a New England farmer might well commit himself when he purchased a farm on a mortgage. For such a modern man there were not just twelve labors, not just any finite number.

5. ...THE LABOURING MAN HAS NO LEISURE FOR A TRUE INTEGRITY DAY BY DAY.... — It puzzles me why should a man need leisure to keep up his integrity (in the sense of "uprightness, moral excellence"). Or is the word "integrity" used in another sense here? Or maybe the word "leisure" has the meaning of "time" rather than "spare time"? This seems to be validated by the sentence that follows: He has no time to be any thing but a machine. Your comment?

   Yes, think of the term "integrity" as being based on the idea of wholeness, an integral human rather than a fractional human. One cannot be a whole human being without opening up for oneself in one's life the time which is necessary for study and reflection. The concept of "spare time" would not apply here since Thoreau, if pressed, would say that actually it is the time which one occupies in earning a living which is the time one has to "spare" for this sort of mundane activity, rather than vice versa. The thinking person simply has no time to spare for excess unneeded "productive" activity, as he or she is too busily engaged in self-improvement, thinking, reflecting, studying.

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6. ...AND RECRUIT HIM WITH OUR CORDIALS, BEFORE WE JUDGE HIM. — Do you see this phrase as a pun (1. something like: treat him to a glass of whisky, and 2. treat him tenderly, or treat him with cordiality)? Speaking of puns, in his notes to the Variorum "Walden" edition, Walter Harding mentions a catalog of the puns in "Walden" made up by David Skwire and published in the journal "American Literature", XXXI (1959). It would be a very valuable thing to have. Can you suggest me how I could get a copy of it?

   Well, technically this wouldn't classify as a pun, but rather as a conflation. You are correct that Thoreau has arrived at a literary form here, which enables him to speak at once both of offering someone a glass of cordial, which is a sweet thick alcoholic beverage served with conversation, and of the root of that word, which is in the cordiality which accompanies such a gesture.

   I'll see what I can do to get you that Squire work. Would you give me your mailing address please?

7. ...TO GET CUSTOM, BY HOW MANY MODES... — Does it mean "to secure customers, clients"?

   Yes. To get someone's customary business. A customer who habitually comes to you first, rather than to some other competing shop offering the same commodity.

8. ...CONTRACTING YOURSELVES INTO A NUTSHELL OF CIVILITY,... — Trying to visualize it, I see a shop-keeper leaning servilely towards his client and trying to talk him as politely as he can into buying some item in his store. Does this image more or less corresponds to what is meant by this phrase?

   Yes, this is an expression indicating utter focus. The shopkeeper who has contracted himself into a nutshell of civility is bending every effort to present in his or her demeanor no opportunity for distraction from the customer's purchase decision, at the moment of sale. He or she will venture nothing that might possibly be misunderstood or disagreed with, nothing that might conceivably delay or prevent the sale transaction. If the customers says "this is green," he or she will not say "No, it actually is blue." He or she will only smile supportively.

9. ...THAT IT IS WHICH DETERMINES, OR RATHER INDICATES, HIS FATE. — Could you explain me that of "indicates"?

   An indicator is a dial or meter which provides a reading. For instance, the pointer of the oil gauge on your auto dashboard might aimed at "0" indicating an absence of oil pressure, and the idiot warning light might come on glowing red, but that in itself does not determine that your pistons are going to seize inside your engine, and destroy your motor. The gauge may be simply disconnected. What determines that your pistons are going to seize is an absence of oil, which is sending engine temperatures skyrocketing.

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CAUSE =========================> EFFECT
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    \——————————————> (idiot warning light)
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   You cannot prevent your engine from overheating by disconnecting the idiot warning light. You need to add some oil.

10. ...IN A WAY TO KILL OLD PEOPLE, AS THE PHRASE IS. — I haven't been able to find this phrase in any dictionary. Is it more or less synonymous to the phrase "break-neck speed," or is there something else implied?

    That's it. This is merely an idiom indicating a bumpy ride, bad on one's arthritis. Those folks who rode around in horse carriages suspended on leather straps, without other springs, over corduroy roads made of logs, they **knew something** about bumpy rides. The road out to Walden Pond was such a road, made of a line of tree trunks laid parallel on the ground and covered only with sand:

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11. ...AS VARIOUS AS OUR SEVERAL CONSTITUTIONS. — What is meant here by "several constitutions"?

    Your bodily and mental constitution, my bodily and mental constitution, the other fellow's bodily and mental constitution, each somewhat different although there are similarities. Your constitution may be phlegmatic, mine choleric, the other fellow's melancholic.... We'll each see the world through our own lens.

12. WE MAY WAIVE JUST SO MUCH CARE OF OURSELVES AS WE HONESTLY BESTOW ELSEWHERE. — I am not sure whether I understand this sentence. Could you put it in other words?

    Sometimes we may accomplish more, actually, through caring for others, through paying attention to the needs of others, accomplish more even in fulfillment of our own personal needs, than we could accomplish by utterly disregarding the needs of others and focusing in narrowly on only our own needs and desires. Thoreau is saying here that ordinary philanthropy of the sort which he derogates, philanthropy in general at long distance, by committee and cash, does not amount to care honestly bestowed upon others but is instead a form of dishonest malingering by projection. We are actually serving ourselves, by offering ourselves an opportunity to condescend to the needy. But that doesn't exhaust the field. There is another kind of philanthropy, which is direct and caring, one on one, intimate, which is good not only for the giver but also for the receiver.

13. WHEN ONE MAN HAS REDUCED A FACT OF THE IMAGINATION TO BE A FACT OF HIS UNDERSTANDING...- What puzzles me here is the participle "has reduced". To reduce normally means "to bring something. from a higher state to a lower state". To me, just the opposite of to reduce, i.e. to elevate, would seem more appropriate. How do you understand it?

    Oops. That's not what the passage says. Replace the string "a fact of his understanding" with the string "a fact **to** his understanding." We're not transforming an image into a concept here. We're keeping that image, and adding to it, rather than transforming it into another thing. We're adding to the image, the "fact of the imagination," and what we are adding is understanding. The way I read this passage, it is a reference to the 19th Century doctrine of "sympathy." When we notice something, we notice it because there is something in us which resembles what it is that we are noticing. The external thing sets up a sympathetic vibration within us, or the vibration within us directs our gaze at something outside us which is vibrating in a similar manner. There is a correspondence between the internal and the external which creates an awareness. How familiar are you with this 19th-Century doctrine of "sympathy"? I can provide a fuller briefing if you like.

14. ...OR FOR WANT OF FUEL, OR FROM SOME DEFECT IN THE DRAUGHT, THE FIRE GOES OUT. — Now, I can't see here a logical connexion with the statement that directly precedes it. The only reading of the whole sentence which would make sense to me is the following: The animal heat is the result of a slow combustion, and disease and death take place when this is too rapid, or — quite on the contrary — when for want of fuel, or from some defect in the draught, the fire goes out. Do you agree?

    Yes, Thoreau is considering two discrete cases, the case of the person who eats too much or too richly and in consequence becomes ill, gouty, or phlegmatic, versus the case of the person who eats too little or has a systemic digestive illness, and in consequence become emaciated and feeble. It would be legitimate to use some language trope such as "quite on the contrary" to distinguish between the two discrete cases he is handling. In English, he tries to accomplish this distinction with a simple semicolon, but perhaps not altogether successfully.

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15. ...BUT SO MUCH FOR ANALOGY. — Does it mean 1. nevertheless, the analogy is valid, or 2. let's stop here with the analogies?

    He means to issue the very general caution that although one may make analogies all day and far into the night, such as this analogy between combustion and digestion, it frequently happens that we push our analogies too far and too hard. For instance, after a over-rich meal does any smoke come out of our nostrils as little curls of smoke might drift out of the chinks of an overstoked stove? No, that would be pushing the analogy between the external combustion and the internal combustion a bit too hard, for actual smoke is not produced by digestion, digestion produces only by-products analogous to smoke.

16. YET IT IS ADMIRABLE TO PROFESS BECAUSE IT WAS ONCE ADMIRABLE TO LIVE — My interpretation of this sentence is that it is admirable to profess because it was once admirable to live (practise) what one professed (preached). What is your interpretation?

    Throughout the chapter Thoreau plays with the name of the teacher in a college, "professor," contrasting it with the usage in which to "profess" is to put forward, to declare, to describe, which actually are things that professors do for a living, and with the usage in which "to profess" is short for "to profess to know," in which to "profess" is to pretend to have a capability which one lacks or to represent oneself as something or other. The distinction between the two professings is peculiarly acute in regard to the teaching of philosophy, for philosophy is etymologically at least the love of wisdom, and true wisdom is the knowing of how one goes about the task of leading a decent human existence. The professors of philosophy in our colleges represent to the students and to the general public and to the college administration that they are themselves philosophers, and yet many of them simply do not know how to lead a decent human existence, and many of them do not have a clue that philosophy is this sort of pursuit. But what kind of pretender is this, in our modern era, who is trying to teach philosophy but cannot instruct us by his personal example how it is that one goes about leading a decent human existence?

17. THEY MAKE SHIFT TO LIVE MERELY BY CONFORMITY... — could you put this phrase in other words?

    Actually Thoreau does provide an example of use of "to conform" later on in the chapter, when he says that "When formerly I was looking about to see what I could do for a living, some sad experience in **conforming** to the wishes of friends being fresh in my mind to tax my ingenuity, I thought often and seriously of picking huckleberries." Here the people whom he is critiquing try to keep up the good fight through mere imitation of the behaviors and mimicking of the words of their predecessors, without understanding what sort of thought it was that had produced those words and what sort of life context it was that had produced those behaviors. So, inevitably, they now produce words that have no spirit of intelligence animating them, and actions that are rather inappropriate to the changed circumstances of life.

18. ...IF, INDEED, THERE ARE ANY, AS HAS BEEN DREAMED. — Dreamed by whom? Or is it intentional vagueness on part of the author?

    It is the common consensus, a general assumption, that there are people who have never seriously reflected on the processes of life, who are nevertheless very competent to lead full and satisfactory lives, and who demonstrate this not by fine discourse but by going out and doing so and continuing to do so. Thoreau in fact does know, and admire, some farmer neighbors in Concord who are of this sort. I would suggest that Thoreau here has his tongue deep in his cheek. Actually he knows very well that it is no mere delusion, the idea that there actually exist such practical geniuses of life. He is not, however, going to intrude on their fine and direct lives by naming and analyzing them. He is going to allow them their obscurity.

19. ...IT WAS OF THE LAST IMPORTANCE ONLY TO BE PRESENT AT IT — the stumbling block here is of the last importance, which the Spanish translator has understood as of minimal importance, while the Russian translator has it as of extreme importance. Whom of the two should I trust?

    I tried to communicate with that Spanish translator, when he published recently, but could evoke no response either from him or from his publisher. The Russian is right.

20. OR WAITING AT EVENING ON THE HILL-TOPS FOR THE SKY TO FALL... — is the falling sky here some kind of a biblical allusion, or is it just a poetic way to say for the night to fall?

    Thoreau is referencing here some recent US history, in which the "Millerites" assembled on housetops and hilltops in white robes on a certain date to await the end of the world as we know it. Here is the chronology of events having to do with the Reverend William "The Reluctant Prophet" Miller, who during the War of 1812 had fallen off a wagon and landed on his head. The uncharitable might suspect that such an accident would cause delusions. The charitable would allow that his delusions would arise later, and out of a too-close familiarity with the 8th chapter of the Book of Daniel:

1816: **A follower of the deism of Thomas Jefferson, in this year Miller converted to a belief in the literal truth of the Bible as the word of God. Except, in some contexts, God had used one word in place of another, such as meaning "kingdoms" when he had said "beasts," meaning "governments" when he had said "mountains," meaning "people" when he had said "waters," and meaning "years" when he had said "days." Within two years in accordance with this coding scheme and what he knew of the Jewish calendar, Miller would have decoded the entire message and would find himself in the private knowledge that the Second Coming was but 25 years in the future.**

1818: **In accordance with the coding scheme he had worked out and what he knew of the Jewish calendar, William "The Reluctant Prophet" Miller had at this point decoded God's entire message and had obtained private knowledge that the Second Coming was but 25 years in the future. But, he didn't tell anyone.**

Fall 1836: William Miller delivered some 82 lectures.

1839: **William Miller at this point associated himself and his code scheme with the Reverend Joshua Himes of the Christian Connexion.**

1840: **Formation of the Signs of the Times newspaper.**

Early 1843: At this point there were more than 50,000 Millerite true believers.

February 28, 1843: A quite unexpected and quite bright and quite fast comet passed the face of the sun in but a little over two hours, its phenomenally long tail seeming like "a torch agitated by the wind." Harvard College's observatory staff in the cupola of the Dana house would watch for six nights as this comet receded and New England newspapers printed reports of worldwide panic. Even though the equipment was inadequate, William Cranch Bond was the first to detect the nucleus of the comet.

March 22, 1843: Benjamin Peirce, the Perkins Professor of Astronomy and Mathematics, lectured on the topical topic of superstition and comets before a crowd of 1,000 in the Odeon Theatre in Boston. He jested that to some of us, such as the Millerite followers of the Reverend Miller, such a comet could be seen as prophesying "the end of all things to all of us," at least to the enlightened persons of his audience, "the generous spirits of Boston," it might be seen as prophesying the purchase of a decent telescope for Harvard College and a decent observatory in which to house it.

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Early in the year 1844: The year 1843 had come and gone, and the Millerites had not been drawn up to Heaven. Such a quandary! Miller looked over his calculations and discovered that the year 1843 in question referred not to the calendar year but to what he described as "the Jewish year," which had begun on March 21, 1843 and would not be concluded until March 21, 1844.

March 21, 1844: The first "Great Disappointment." Perhaps a hundred thousand "adventists" were kept waiting in white nightshirts and bedsheets, on hills and on their rooftops and on specially constructed roofless church platforms, for the Second Coming of Christ that the Reverend Miller of Pittsfield had been predicting since 1831. The earth did not cease to exist, so their leader recalculated and reset the event to October 22. One disciple, according to Waldo Emerson, stated that although they expected the second advent of the Lord in 1843, "if there is any error in his computation, –he shall look for him until he comes."

March 22, 1844: The day of Disappointment. But those few who still remained faithful Millerites could congratulate one another that they had passed this test of their faithfulness, this "winnowing of the chaff." Samuel Snow did a recalculation based on the Jewish liturgical calendar, and established that the date had ought to have been announced as October 22, 1844.

October 22, 1844: The second "Great Disappointment" for the Reverend Miller of Pittsfield's "adventists": although they would be been kept waiting dressed in white robes all day and all night, on their rooftops and on specially constructed roofless church platforms — the earth would not cease to exist.

October 23, 1844, sunrise:The day of the Great Disappointment.

1849: Miller died a broken man.

I trust you've never encountered this sort of phenomenon in Latvia!

21. SURVEYOR, IF NOT OF HIGHWAYS, THEN OF FOREST PATHS... — I know that Thoreau practised surveying as a profession, but as far as I know the usual obligations of a surveyor do not include keeping forest paths open and ravines bridged. Does the surveyor in this case means inspector?

    Well, Thoreau actually surveyed quite a lot of woodlots around Concord, and he helped "walk the bounds" of the town, which was an annual task of the selectmen. But here I suspect he does indeed mean "surveyor" in the very general sense in which he frequently employs it, as "one who overlooks."

22. I HAVE LOOKED AFTER THE WILD STOCK OF THE TOWN — WHAT ABOUT THE WILD STOCK HERE? Should it be taken literally — as something like an unruly herd of cows, or is the author in fact speaking about his brute neighbours (woodchucks, foxes, and the like)?

    Definitely the latter, although there are some amusing (true) stories about Thoreau and Emerson's calf that got out of his lot, Thoreau and the great pig chase through downtown, etc.

23. MY ACCOUNTS, WHICH I CAN SWEAR TO HAVE KEPT FAITHFULLY, ETC. — is this another of Thoreau's allegories that seem to swarm this page, or is he speaking of a real book-keeper's experience?

    Allegory. His "account" might be his journal, for instance. At one point while he was out on a surveying job he was making an incidental note for his journal, perhaps of some plant that he had seen, and the fellow he had hired to help him survey that day presumed that what he was doing with tablet and pencil was calculating how much he was going to earn that day. Thoreau considered that that was a hilarious inference for the fellow to have made, and demonstrative of the man's frame of reference.

24. IT IS A GOOD POST (PORT) AND A GOOD FOUNDATION — what is meant by foundation? And is it actually post or port?

It's actually port.

Foundation is intended both in the most direct and material of senses, as in the foundation stones which Thoreau has himself laid just before coming to Walden Pond for the new family home of the Thoreaus in the "Texas" district of Concord, and the most abstract of senses, as when one founds a business enterprise on firm policies of accurate double-entry bookkeeping.

Donald Ross is sending an offprint of his paper on WALDEN tropes to your snailmail. He suggests that you would be able to obtain a copy of Joseph J. Moldenhauer's "The Rhetoric of WALDEN," his unpublished 1964 Columbia dissertation containing "Checklist of Wordplays in WALDEN," from University Microfilms — if Columbia University has made its dissertations available to those folks. In reviewing my prior response to:

"When one man has reduced a fact of the imagination to be a fact to his understanding..."

Donald wants to add to what I had offered an explanation of how Kantianism fits into all this. Kantianism, or, at least, what the Transcendentalists supposed Kantianism to be, has always been a bit over my own head, so I'm not able to evaluate this myself, but Donald is suggesting that Thoreau's lingo here amounts to Transcendentalist code for the Kantian distinction between Practical Reason and Pure Reason. (Practical Reason would be the same thing as "Understanding," it is Reason in the 18th-century sense, including in John Locke's sense), while Pure Reason would be the same thing as "Imagination" in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's version of Immanuel Kant and the same as the term "intuition" as we now use it in our 20th-Century English).

Also:

"...or for want of fuel, or from some defect in the draught, the fire goes out"

Donald wants to point up the fact that a fire requires oxygen, fuel (and heat) while animal heat, like rust, needs air as well as fuel. He points out also that Thoreau's image does not of course need to add the 3rd element.

>Valdis, please notice that in the Walden text here, the word "we" is an
>emphasized word. It is in the book, set in italic font: "...remarkable
>that **we** know so much of them as...." There is a very particular reason
>why Thoreau had underlined this word in his lecture text.

What is that very particular reason?

Thoreau is placing the emphasis on this word **we** in order to point up how surprising it is that although we're really not all that smart, or all that well-informed, and although we are the sort of distracted practical folk who really haven't been paying all that much attention to such matters of importance — nevertheless we do yet know a certain amount about them.

25. IT IS DESIRABLE THAT A MAN BE CLAD SO SIMPLY THAT HE CAN LAY HIS HANDS ON HIMSELF IN THE DARK — Could you explain the phrase "lay his hands on himself in the dark"?

Thoreau is making his little joke here, with an implicit mention of the unmentionable. We may lay our hands upon a burglar, even in the dark, and we may find our spouse under the covers in the dark, but to make the expression reflexive in that manner, by having us locate by our sense of touch not the body of some other person but our own bodies in the dark, suggests that we may be exposing our crotch in order to urinate or defecate, or we may be playing with ourselves. In such a situation, of course, the fewer the bedclothes the greater the convenience.

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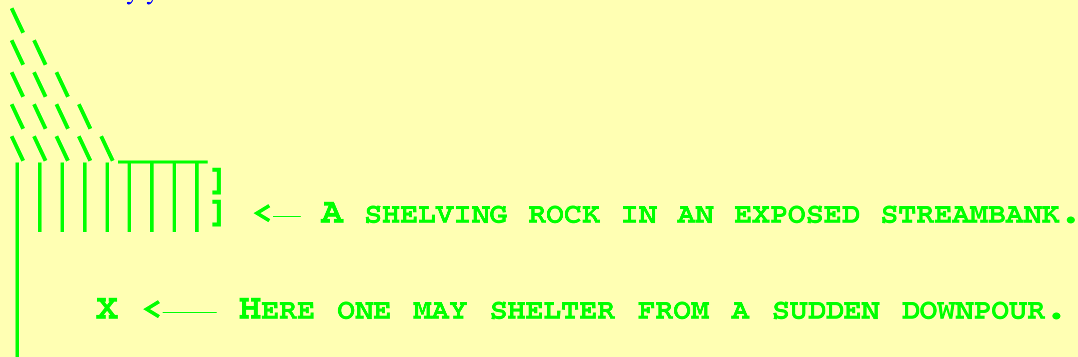
26. ADAM AND EVE... WORE THE BOWER BEFORE OTHER CLOTHES — the word "bower" doesn't seem to fit any of the meanings given by my Webster. It does not appear in the King James Version either. I have translated it tentatively as "an apron made of leaves". Is it O.K.?

No, a bower is a leafy arch under which one takes shelter, rather than something that is worn. Thoreau meant that Adam and Eve would have kept themselves warm and dry in a makeshift shelter in the Garden of Eden even before they acquired that sense of bodily shame that produced a need for clothing that would provide not only warmth but also modesty. Typically one constructs a bower by pulling over the tops of some young trees and tying the tops to each other, and then sheltering oneself under the arch. Notice a use of the term "bower" later on in WALDEN: "When I first paddled a boat on Walden, it was completely surrounded by thick and lofty pine and oak woods, and in some of its coves grape vines had run over the trees next the water and formed **bowers** under which a boat could pass." Here very clearly the bower is forming a leafy protective arch over the boat. Back in the days when I was fishing on little lakes in Vermont, when a rainstorm threatened I would seek temporary shelter for myself and my canoe under such a bower-tree along the shoreline.

27. WHO DOES NOT REMEMBER THE INTEREST WITH WHICH, WHEN YOUNG, HE LOOKED AT SHELVING ROCKS, OR ANY APPROACH TO A CAVE? — Could you explain what do shelving rocks look like (in Latvia we have neither rocks nor mountains) and how do they relate to the idea of "a shelter"?

In Latvia you would have streams with stream-banks, and if you have sedimentary rock layers then occasionally your stream-bank would look like this:



Once upon a time Thoreau was caught in a sudden severe summer thunderstorm and downpour while on the Concord River, and found shelter under such a shelving rock along the riverbank. While huddled in this shelter he sang, as loud as he could, one of his favorite songs, "Tom Bowline" — simply because he liked the acoustics.

28. HOWEVER, IF ONE DESIGNS TO CONSTRUCT A DWELLING-HOUSE, IT BEHOOVES HIM TO EXERCISE A LITTLE YANKEE SHREWDNESS — is the "Yankee shrewdness" an idiomatic cliche (of the same type as, for example "German discipline", or "Italian temperament")? If that's the case, could you give me some typical example to illustrate this quality?

Most definitely "Yankee shrewdness" is a cliche of the period. This had all begun with Nathanael Ward's satire "The Simple Cobbler of Agawam," in 1647, and continued:

1708: The rural wit tradition of New England continued with Ebenezer Cook's The Sotweed Factor.

1732: The rural wit tradition of New England continued, with annual publication of Franklin's Poor Richard's Almanack from this year to the year 1757.

1760s: **During the 1760s, John Adams created the persona of Humphrey Ploughjogger, the down-country farmer, in the rural wit tradition of New England which would eventually produce the American type known on stage and in cartoons and humorous tales as Brother Jonathan.**

1787: **With the staging of Royall Tyler's The Contrast," the "Yankee" began to make his appearance. Under cover of naivete, startling things could be suggested. This "Brother Jonathan" persona would become a stock part of amusements by Royall Tyler, William Biglow, and Thomas Green Fessenden. According to a report in the newspaper the day after the opening, this "Jonathan' character had been "very well drawn." Actually, a similar American character named "Jonathan" had already made his appearance in a less popular play in the previous year: Joseph Atkinson's Match for a Widow." At first the attire for a stage "Jonathan" would be what was used for the Brit northcountryman stock character known as "Hodge," but gradually during the 1820s-1840s the stage Jonathan would begin to be attired in the long Yankee coat, the striped trousers and vest, the long lank hair, and the top hat with which we are now familiar in "Uncle Sam" cartoons. But at this point he was simply a rural New Englander, a hick, a representative American bumpkin.**

1830s: **The stock "Yankee" persona began to acquire traits of shrewd social and political satire. This began in the humor productions of Seba Smith (1792-1868) and Charles A. Davis (1795-1867) and continued in those of Thomas Chandler Haliburton (1796-1865) and Joseph C. Neal (1807-1847).**

1833: **Seba Smith's Life and Writings of Major Jack Downing, in the rural wit tradition of New England.**

1840: **Before 1840, "Brother Jonathan" had been the media-sponsored stereotype of the American rural white male. He was self-confident and individualistic to an outrageous degree, an "I'll just go ahead and help myself here" Everyman. This "new man" had first appeared, so far as we now know, in a cartoon dating to the year 1776 and in 1787 made his transition to the American stage. In the 1850s references to him would decline, and evidently he died from shooting himself in the foot one last time, sometime during our Civil War years. He was a transition figure, a Yankee Doodle becoming an Uncle Sam. Refer to Winifred Morgan's An American Icon: Brother Jonathan and American Identity (Newark NJ: U of Delaware P, 1988).**

1845: **By this point the shrewd, canny Yankee oracle was a persona firmly ensconced in the imagination of America.**

29. AN ANNUAL RENT OF FROM TWENTY-FIVE TO A HUNDRED DOLLARS (THESE ARE THE COUNTRY RATES)... — do "the country rates" mean 1. the rates in the U.S., or 2. the rates in the countryside?

He means #2, the rates in the countryside. Of course the rent in the city would be somewhat higher, but one does not need to live in the city if one's life affairs are in order.

30. ...A GREAT PART OF THEIR FAILURES ARE NOT GENUINE PECUNIARY FAILURES, BUT MERELY FAILURES TO FULFIL THEIR ENGAGEMENTS, BECAUSE IT IS INCONVENIENT; THAT IS, IT IS THE MORAL CHARACTER THAT BREAKS DOWN — Could you explain this to me? Why is it inconvenient for a merchant to fulfil the contracts he signs?

The merchant may have incautiously overextended himself, and may be borrowing from Peter to pay Paul. In Concord during Thoreau's youth there was a merchant who took in deposits from people who had money to save, simply because there had been up to that point no banking facility at all available in that town. At the merchant's death it was found that he had not kept careful track of such deposits, and that he had been using the moneys as part of the store moneys. His partner was therefore forced to declare bankruptcy.

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31. ...AND THE BAD NEIGHBORHOOD TO BE AVOIDED IS OUR OWN SCURVY SELVES — I can't stop wondering at the things Thoreau says and the language he uses when speaking about his townspeople. Wasn't he afraid of becoming a local outcast, or at least of getting beaten up by his neighbours for all this? Well, this is more of an emotional comment than a question.

    Yes, but it is a good emotional comment. In fact it can be dangerous, living in a small town where there is no anonymity. For a period of his early life Thoreau had been an outcast in Concord, because he had incautiously started a fire in the woods which had caused some financial losses. People were shouting nasty things at him from behind doors.

32. OR WHAT IF I WERE TO ALLOW- WOULD IT NOT BE A SINGULAR ALLOWANCE?- THAT OUR FURNITURE SHOULD BE MORE COMPLEX THAN THE ARAB'S,... — I can't somehow grasp the stylistic overtones of Thoreau's intonation: 1. The grammatical form he uses to start the sentence is that of an interrogation but the sentence ends with an exclamation mark. 2. When Paul, for example, writes to the Romans: "For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?" (ROMANS 3:3, also in 9:22), it means, more or less: "try to imagine what would happen if some did not believe". But applying the same interpretation to Thoreau's "what if I were to allow" makes little sense to me. The Russian translator here uses a stylistically neutral phrase: "I am ready to allow that our furniture, etc." but I think it could be done better.

    Thoreau has said "Shall the respectable citizen thus gravely teach, by precept and example, the necessity of the young man's providing a certain number of superfluous glow-shoes, and umbrellas, and empty guest chambers for empty guests, before he dies? Why should not our furniture be as simple as the Arab's or the Indian's?" The Arab and the Indian of course have no need of chairs and sit on the floor quite comfortably. Here he goes on to say that he is willing to make an allowance, that we needn't sit on the floor merely because others do, and proposes that we adopt a principle, that we can add fine external furniture to ease our bodily lives to the proportion to which we also are able to add fine **internal** furniture to the benefit of our minds. He is saying "First things first, first the personal improvement, then the improvement in circumstances — but let's not be attempting this vice versa as at present."

33. ...FOR NO DUST GATHERS ON THE GRASS, UNLESS WHERE MAN HAS BROKEN GROUND — does "breaking ground" usually mean digging or ploughing, or could be both of them?

    Both. Thoreau has seen a place on the Merrimack River where a small dustbowl had been created through over-exploitation in the wrong place, where the soil was thin over sand. The land had simply not recovered from this abuse, and there was dust all over the place, long term, where once there had been a pleasant riverside spot.

34. THE TRAVELLER WHO STOPS AT THE BEST HOUSES, SO CALLED, SOON DISCOVERS THIS... — what about the "best houses"?

    The best houses would be the ones which offered supposedly fine accommodations, at a premium price. Thoreau never stayed in such places when he lectured, if there was any way at all to avoid it. He was a low-rent kinda guy.

35. HE DWELT, AS IT WERE, IN A TENT IN THIS WORLD... — this seemed to me pretty simple before I looked at the Spanish translation: "He dwelt as if the whole world was a tent for him". I just want your confirmation that the Spanish translator is wrong again. Or isn't he?

    To dwell in a tent is to be ready at an instant's notice to pitch the tent and move on. To be ready, in effect, to die, to not have unfinished business. "This world is not my home, / I'm just a-passin' thru, / If Heaven's not my home, / then Lord what will I do...."

36. ...NOW, A TASTE FOR THE BEAUTIFUL IS MOST CULTIVATED OUT OF DOORS... — does it mean "a taste for the beautiful can be best cultivated out of doors"?

    Out of doors is the primary locus of beauty in Thoreau's world. Nothing created by the efforts of humankind can at all compare with the beauty of what remains as yet untouched by human hands.

37. ...THEY MAKE A SMOKY FIRE AGAINST THE EARTH, AT THE HIGHEST SIDE — could you explain this in other words?

    This refers to the actual construction of the earliest white homes in the Concord area, which had been, in hurried preparation for the first coming winter, dug into a bank. They were basically caves roofed over with branches. The settlers would build their hearth against the back wall of this cave, which of course was the highest point since such a cave dwelling would collect moisture and would of course need to drain out of its mouth. The fire would have been smoky due to lack of proper draft and chimney apparatus.

38. ...FLOOR THIS CELLAR WITH PLANK, AND WAINSCOT IT OVERHEAD FOR A CEILING — Could you describe what this wainscot possibly looked like?

    Wainscotting is thin wood, not intended to be structural or bear weight. It is the sort of wood that is found in the paneling, for instance, of carriages. When you wainscot a room, you place this thin wood along the walls, up to about waist high, in order to diminish wear and tear on the walls as you bump into them, as you hit the back of your chair against them, etc. Therefore, here, "wainscot" would refer to any sort of flimsy wood which he would have tacked into the logs which underlay his floor. Presumably the primary function of such an addition to his cellar would have been to trap air under the floor, and thus make the floor somewhat less cold on his feet during the winter.

39. ...THEY BUILT THEMSELVES HANDSOME HOUSES, SPENDING ON THEM SEVERAL THOUSANDS. — Several thousand dollars, or what?

    Yes, by this point the dollar would have been the standard measure of currency in the US, unless otherwise specified. Thomas Jefferson had suggested the use of this Spanish monetary term, and the US mint had gone into operation and the Massachusetts mint had more or less discontinued operation.

40. ...AND HE LAY ON THE BOTTOM, APPARENTLY WITHOUT INCONVENIENCE, AS LONG AS I STAYED THERE — Could you give me a synonym for the noun "inconvenience"?

    Apparently without feeling any discomfort at being unable to breathe, apparently without feeling the chill. Apparently **comfortably**.

41. ...BUT IF THEY SHOULD FEEL THE INFLUENCE OF THE SPRING OF SPRINGS AROUSING THEM... — Is the "spring of springs" a phrase invented by Thoreau, imitating the well-known "Song of Songs", or is it a quotation from some literary source?

    I am not aware that he copied it from anywhere. You will note that he also used it at the close of CAPE COD: "The time must come when this coast will be a place of resort for those New-Englanders who really wish to visit the sea-side. At present it is wholly unknown to the fashionable world, and probably it will never be agreeable to them. If it is merely a ten-pin alley, or a circular railway, or an ocean of mint-julep, that the visitor is in search of, –if he thinks more of the wine than the brine, as I suspect some do at Newport,– I trust that for a long time he will be disappointed here. But this shore will never be more attractive than it is now. Such beaches as are fashionable are here made and unmade in a day, I may almost say, by the sea shifting its sands. Lynn and Nantasket! this bare and bended arm it is that makes the bay in which they lie so snugly. What are springs and waterfalls? Here is the spring of springs, the waterfall of waterfalls. A storm in the fall or winter is the time to visit it; a light-house or a fisherman's hut the true hotel. A man may stand there and put all America behind him."

    Here is a more recent usage (1917), the political sentiments of which you may or may not feel inclined to appreciate:

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To Russia New and Free

Land of the Martyrs — of the martyred dead And martyred living — now of noble fame! Long wert thou saddest of the nations, wed To Sorrow as the fire to the flame. Not yet relentless History had writ of Teuton shame.

Thou knewest all the gloom of hope deferred. "Twixt God and Russia wrong had built such bar Each by the other could no more be heard. Seen through the cloud, the child's familiar star, That once made Heaven near, had made it seem more far.

Land of the Breaking Dawn! No more look back To that long night that nevermore can be: The sunless dungeon and the exile's track. To the world's dreams of terror let it flee, To gentle April cruel March is now antiquity.

Yet — of the Past, one sacred relic save: That boundary-post 'twixt Russia and Despair, — Set where the dead might look upon his grave, — Kissed by him with his last-breathed Russian air. Keep it to witness to the world what heroes still may dare.

Land of New Hope, no more the minor key, No more the songs of exile long and lone; Thy tears henceforth be tears of memory. Sing, with the joy the joyless would have known Who for this visioned happiness so gladly gave their own.

Land of the warm heart and the friendly hand, Strike the free chord; no more the muted strings! Forever let the equal record stand — A thousand winters for this Spring of Springs, That to a warring world, through thee, millennial longing brings.

On thy white tablets, cleansed of royal stain, What message to the future mayst thou write! — The People's Law, the bulwark of their reign, And vigilant Liberty, of ancient might, And Brotherhood, that can alone lead to the loftiest height.

Take, then, our hearts' rejoicing overflow, Thou new-born daughter of Democracy, Whose coming sets the expectant earth aglow. Soon the glad skies thy proud new flag shall see, And hear thy chanted hymns of hope for Russia new and free.

— Robert Underwood Johnson

42. ...I HEARD A STRAY GOOSE GROPING ABOUT OVER THE POND AND CACKLING AS IF LOST... — I assume, the phrase "as if lost" does not bear the meaning of "as if the goose had lost its way" because it is already implied by the adjective "stray". My inner feeling tells me that it could perhaps be interpreted as "as if the goose had lost its senses (gone cuckoo)" but I am not sure.

    I think he meant that the goose had gotten separated from its flock and was signaling in order to get back with its partner, with its offspring, or at the very least, with some fellow geese.

43. ...AND THE RAFTERS AND FLOOR TIMBERS ON ONE SIDE... — the floor timbers — are these the horizontal studs on which later the floor-boards where put on, or were they the actual floor covering, i.e. substitute for boards?

    Think of the actual flooring as being supported upon several tree trunk rafters, smoothed on one side only, rounded on the bottom and sides and with the bark left on. I owned a little old house in Vermont once, the floor of which had been constructed in this manner, with the logs that held up the main floor smoothed on one side only and with all the bark adhering elsewhere. I asked a neighboring farmer about this and he told me that when one leaves the bark on an underfloor beam, not only is this a whole lot less work than squaring the timber, but also, it will make the support beam be much more resistant to dryrot, will in fact cause it to last decades longer down in the damp of the cellar before it will need to be replaced.

44. DOOR-SILL THERE WAS NONE, BUT A PERENNIAL PASSAGE FOR THE HENS UNDER THE DOOR BOARD. — 1. What is the "doorboard"? Was the entrance to the shanty raised above the ground, with a couple of doorsteps leading to it?

    "Door-board" would indicate the simplest form of wooden door, made of a few vertical planks with one diagonal plank nailed across them on each side X-fashion, for structural integrity. It is unlikely that a temporary Irish shanty of the period at the side of the railroad tracks would have been raised above the ground. More than likely the ground itself, packed hard and kept swept smooth and clean, would have been the flooring inside this shanty. Since the door forms a path which has a lot of traffic, it is easy for the ground to become depressed at this point, so that there would be a U-shaped gap develop under the center of the door, through which the chickens might squeeze. Bear in mind that this family would have been keeping its chickens in the shanty with them at night, in order to protect them from foxes, etc.

45. PERENNIAL PASSAGE — this certainly sounds like irony. Does it allude to some concrete image?

    No, I don't think so. He merely means that the chickens were free-ranging, foraging for much of their food, rather than being caged town chickens feed by hand with grains — and thus they came and went as they desired.

46. I WAS INFORMED TREACHEROUSLY BY A YOUNG PATRICK... — Should "a young Patrick" be understood as "a young Irish boy", or was it the actual name of the guy?

    It should be understood as generic. A "John" is a "John Bull," or Englishman, a "Jonathan" is an American, etc. Patrick, being the name of St. Patrick, would be the most typical and recognizable name for an Irishman.

47. ...THERE BEING A DEARTH OF WORK, AS HE SAID. — What does the rascal mean? That he is idling around there just because there happens to be no work for him right now on his father's farm?

    No, this wouldn't be a farmer. These people were refugees of a recent ecological disaster, the great Irish potato famine. They were the dispossessed, who had been lucky enough to make it to America rather than starve at home, and typically they had lost everything, just everything. Typically, for instance, they had received no education whatever, and had no clothing other than what they wore. This fellow would have been hiring himself out as a day laborer, for somewhere between 70 cents a day and a dollar a day, for hard physical labor that would begin at first light, before sunrise, and continue until last light, after sunset. But the railroad contract, which represented the bulk of the unskilled work available in this area, had been completed, and the only such day jobs that would have been available would have been odds and ends of local farm labor, such as putting in fencing, shoveling manure, ditching a meadow, etc. Thoreau is here more than insensitive. His life circumstances are so totally different from this man's, that he cannot understand why this man does not proceed to live as Thoreau does — despite the fact that without connections and friends, without much family structure, without assets, a stranger in a strange land, this fellow simply **cannot** live as Thoreau does. He cannot, for instance, build himself a cabin on Emerson's woodlot, as Thoreau can, for Thoreau has permission to "squat" which would simply never ever be extended to the likes of him.

48. THE SIDES WERE LEFT SHELVING, AND NOT STONED. — Was it like this?:

```
I                    I
III                 III
IIIII              IIIII
IIIIII            IIIIII
IIIIIIIII___________IIIIIIIII
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    You got it. My little house in Vermont had a cellar like that. No matter how wet the ground outside, these stones would never fall in, because for one thing they were not vertical, and for another thing they would never trap water behind them and so no pressure would ever build up.

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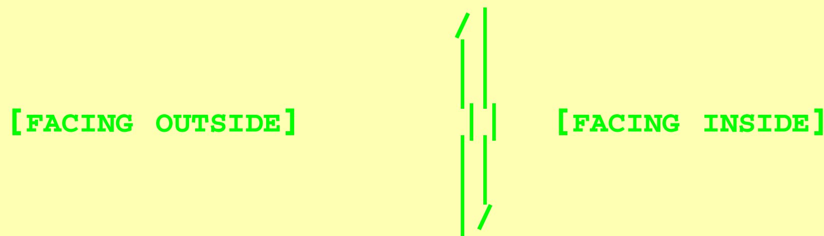
49. ...THE BOARDS WERE CAREFULLY FEATHER-EDGED AND LAPPED — I am a bit confused by the drawing that goes together with your commentary on this very phrase in the Kouroo data base. In the drawing, there are free spaces between the boards which makes me doubt whether this kind of wall could really be impermeable. My understanding of this phrase is that Thoreau planed the upper edges of the boards which were, let‘s say, an inch thick, making them wedge-like, and then feathered the wall so as to make each upper board overlap the lower board. Could you please clear this up for me.

This sort of structure does not create **impermeability**; instead what it creates is **corrigibility**. It does not prevent moisture, but rather, it leads any moisture that happens to be present toward the outside. The boards look like this, in cross-section:



Thus, as water ran down the board, whether the moisture initially was dripping down the inside of the board or the outside of the board, at the bottom it would be led by the “feathering” toward the outside, and would continue to drip down on the **outside only**. Just imagine how moist a wall would get, if the boards should be installed backwards! (I hired a high school student to work for me for a day, once, and he put up a series of feathered boards backwards, and I only found out about it after I had paid him his day’s wages. I had to go back and tear out everything that he had done that day. On the plus side, he hadn’t done very much so not much had to be undone — and anyway I hadn’t paid him very much per hour, just minimum wage.:-)

50. WHEN IT STORMED BEFORE MY BREAD WAS BAKED, I FIXED A FEW BOARDS OVER THE FIRE, AND SAT UNDER THEM TO WATCH MY LOAF... — Well, this sounds rather incredible to me, unless he did the baking in some improvised oven-like structure, otherwise the boards would certainly catch fire. Besides, the “few boards over the fire” actually would need to be a pretty stable construction in order not to be tumbled down by the storm. Is there a more detailed description of his technique of doing it in any part of Thoreau‘s journals?

He would not have placed these boards **on** the fire, but instead he would simply have been making himself a little lean-to which temporarily would shelter both him and his fire. If he had been baking bread, he would have had a hollow under his fire, formed between stones, with a stone over the top of it, and his fire would have heated these stones and then he would have lifted the top stone and set the loaf of bread down in the hollow, perhaps on a board, to bake down there in the radiating heat from these hot rocks. This isn’t a particularly difficult way to bake bread — I’ve done it myself countless times.

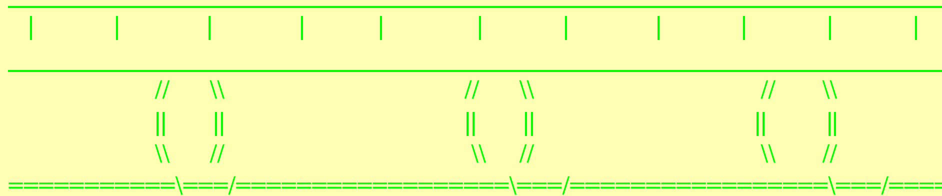
51. ...BUT THE LEAST SCRAPS OF PAPER WHICH LAY ON THE GROUND, MY HOLDER, OR TABLECLOTH... — what is the meaning of “holder” in this case?

Whatever he was laying his food and utensils on, so he wouldn’t be laying them directly on the grass. Old newspapers would do fine, especially in that era before wood pulp in which all paper was being made from beaten cotton fibers.

> Therefore, here, "wainscot" would refer to any sort of flimsy wood which he would have tacked
> into the logs which underlay his floor. Presumably the primary function of such an addition to his
> cellar would have been to trap air under the floor, and thus make the floor somewhat less cold
> on his feet during the winter.

Wait a minute. But isn't the Secretary saying that they used this flimsy wood for the ceiling, and not for the floor?

Notice, the ceiling of Thoreau's cellar would be simultaneously the floor of the shanty, just as the ceiling of the shanty would be simultaneously the floor of its loft space, where he kept the sail of his boat which he sometimes used as a tent.



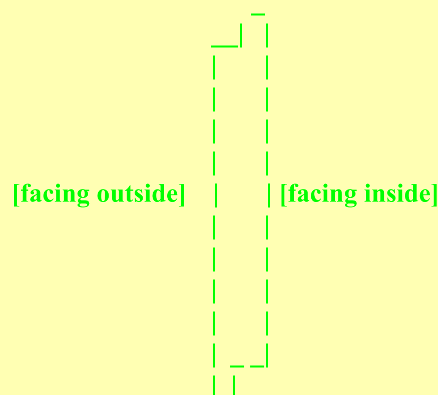
In Latvia, leaving the bark on for the timber used in construction would be considered almost a crime, because of the little insects that I believed are called wood-bores in English. Even before you get the house ready, they would certainly be there, with no delay — right below the bark and eating away all the framework of your house.

Hmm. Perhaps this is local, or perhaps this is species-specific. I don't recall that Thoreau specifies the species of tree which he utilized for his under-floor timbers, but during the 19th Century in New England it would more than likely have been a deciduous tree's trunk rather than any pine. That's very different from today, for today a builder would use white pine or yellow pine for all structural members of a house. In Latvia now, do you also use pine for such timbers?

Oh, I thought it was some sort of a rudimentary porch under which the hens would pass.

No, I've seen early Daguerreotypes of some of these Irish shanties built in the eastern part of the US, and none of them have had any sort of porch, even rudimentary.

boards look like this, in cross-section:



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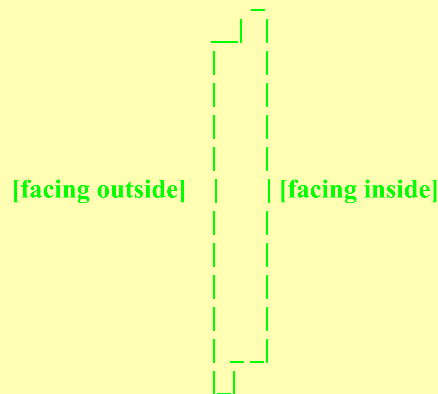
Thus, as water ran down the board, whether the moisture initially was dripping down the inside of the board or the outside of the board, at the bottom it would be led by the "feathering" toward the outside, and would continue to drip down on the **outside only**. Just imagine how moist a wall would get, if the boards should be installed backwards! (I hired a high school student to work for me for a day, once, and he put up a series of feathered boards backwards, and I only found out about it after I had paid him his day's wages. I had to go back and tear out everything that he had done that day. On the plus side, he hadn't done very much so not much had to be undone — and anyway I hadn't paid him very much per hour, just minimum wage.:-)   I'm sorry, Austin, but I still don't get it. What would the profile of a feathered board look like? I imagine it being roughly like this:

> _ > I I > _I I > I I > I I > GARBAGE I I > I __ > I I > I_I

Please correct me if I'm wrong.

Well, it's a little hard to figure out what you mean by your drawing, but are you sure you haven't confused a feathered board with a **lapped** board? A lapped board would look like this in cross-section:



Where Thoreau speaks of lapping his feathered boards, "to lap" is merely shorthand for "to overlap." He was lapping his boards but he definitely was using feathered boards to do this rather than what we would today term "lapped boards" as illustrated above. To have used actual "lapped boards" would have required a special kind of planing tool he simply doesn't mention. Besides, lapped boards are not customarily utilized under shingles, as they are more expensive and it would be pointless, and Thoreau's little home was to be a shingled one. It is merely that during the spring/summer time period about which he is now talking, it wasn't cold and he hadn't yet gotten around to putting up his shingles, doing his interior plastering, or completing his fireplace.

Yes, in Latvia all the frame of a wooden house, plus walls, flooring, ceiling, is made almost exclusively from pine or from fir-tree. And these are the two kinds of wood that the wood-bores have a special appetite for. As you say, Thoreau does not specify which kind of tree he used for this under-floor timbers. Nevertheless all through this passage he makes reference only to the pine-tree which for its quality and straightness would, to my mind, be the perfect material also for the under-floor beams.

In my little house in Vermont, which was locally referred to as “a plank house,” the construction was standard and everything was yellow pine with the exception of the floor beams. The roofing was all uniformly 1X8 plank, the rafters and studs were all uniformly 4X4, the wall boarding was all uniformly 1X6 plank, the flooring was all uniformly 2X4, and all this was yellow pine straight from the local sawmill. The only thing in the house that was not this way, were the under-floor beams which one could inspect from the cellar, which were deciduous treetrunks prepared locally, which had been flattened on the top only, with the bark left on the rest of their circumference.

There’s more than insect and rot resistance involved here. Pine doesn’t have nearly as much lateral resistance to bending as, say, live oak. A floor supported on pine trunks would tend to sag in the middle after a few centuries.:-)

There is one more interesting thing. The Latvian folk wisdom says that the conifers intended to be used for timber should be cut when the moon is waxing, and the leaf-bearing trees — when the moon is waning (besides, the best months to cut them are January and February). The rationale for this being that the lunar cycles affect the circulation of sap/pitch in the trees. Conifer timber which is full of pitch will be stronger and last longer, while it will be the other way round with the leaf-bearing trees.

I wonder if that is a good rationale, or if it is merely a rationalization of a pre-existing folk tradition. The reason for my suggesting this is, my grandmother would never plant the vegetables in the garden until the sign was right. She would plant root vegetables when the sign was in the legs, and cabbages and such when the sign was in the head, etc. She had a page torn from the almanac on the inside of the door of her pantry, showing the signs and how they corresponded to the body, and she always consulted this chart before planting.

Now, Thoreau says that he went to the woods by Walden Pond to cut down some pines near the end of March of 1845. Out of sheer curiosity, I consulted the lunar calendar of 1845 (I have it as a programe in my PC), and found out that there was a full moon on the 23rd of March, and then it was waning till the 5th of April. Thus, from the Latvian housebuilders’ point of view, the dates between March 23 and April 5 would not have been recommendable for cutting down pines.

That’s really interesting. I wonder, is there any way I could get this lunar calendar for my own machine? I would like to specify, in Thoreau’s journal entries, consistently, which nights were the nights of full moons.

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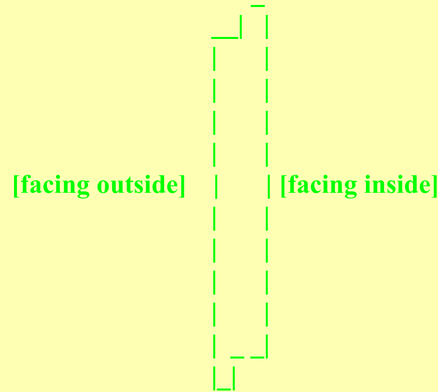
Yes, I think that‘s the case. One of the definitions that my Webster contains for the verb “to feather” is — “to join by a tongue and groove”.

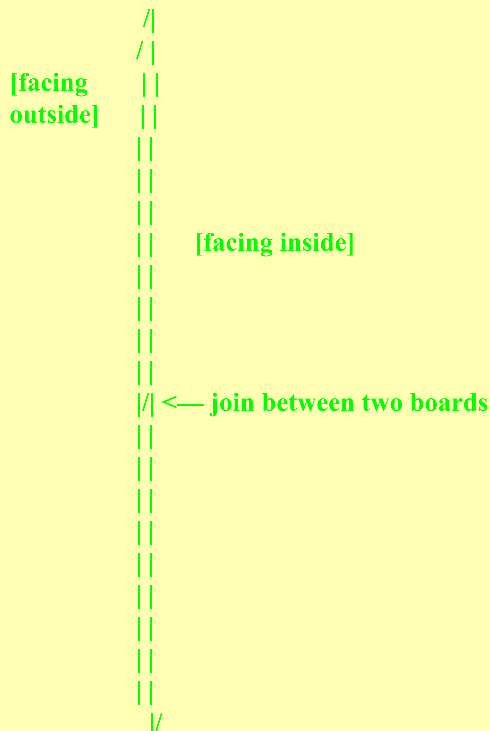
Well, that’s wrong I think. Overlap would be a better term. Even Webster was human.

A lapped board would look like this in cross-section:



Now, if this is called “lapped board”, then what is a “feathered board”? What would it look like in cross-section?

Feathered boards would look like this in cross-section:



But if I have understood it correctly, Thoreau did not have a cellar underneath the cabin but at some distance away from it (just like my country-house, by the way).

No-one has ever previously made such an inference. Everyone here always presumes that the cellar was directly underneath the shanty. There was the shanty, there was a little attached shed-like contraption for firewood, and perhaps there was or perhaps there was not some sort of detached privy. There was the trodden path down to the lake. There wasn't anything else, such as a separate location for a cellar.

When the shanty was in later years dragged to the top of the hill and an attempt made to enlarge it, this time it was placed over too large a hole and the hole slumped in on one side and the structure tilted. I would infer from that fact that the structure had been designed to be placed directly above its cellar.

What is the reading that suggests to you that the cellar was not underneath, and accessed by means of a trap door in the floor, but elsewhere, and at some distance?

"I have thus a tight shingled and plastered house, ten feet wide by fifteen long, and eight-feet posts, with a garret and a closet, a large window on each side, two trap-doors, one door at the end, and a brick fireplace opposite" — not a word about the cellar as being an integral part of the house. True, there are two trap-doors, one of which was certainly in the ceiling for the garret, and the other must have been in the floor. Or maybe what he calls "a closet" was in fact the cellar?

Yes, I think that must be the misunderstanding. The reconstructed cabin model that stands in the Walden Woods State Park parking lot, when equipped with a model of Thoreau's homemade bed and a model of his desk and chair, leaves no room at all for any partitioned space which might have functioned as what we would **nowadays** refer to as a closet. Nor does it leave room for some nondescribed piece of furniture holding clothes, which in that era would have been referred to as a closet. The only entity which could satisfy this WALDEN description would be what we would now refer to as a cellar, accessed by a trap door in the floor. Notice that his floor had two holes, one larger one for the trap door and the other, comparatively small, next to the door, for sweeping dust and floor litter into. (Thus I am not certain that you are correct, in identifying that second trap door as being in the ceiling. The second trap door may likewise have been in the floor.)

The second thing is a reference made at the end of the chapter "Brute Neighbours": "The hares (Lepus Americanus) were very familiar. One had her form under my house all winter, separated from me only by the flooring..." This clearly suggests that the house had some open space below the floor which would not be the case if there were a cellar. Evidently the hut stood on four cornerstones, and (very likely) some more stones along the perimeter for better support. As far as I can judge from the photos I have seen of the replica of Thoreau's house (which as I understand is not located on the original site), there is no such open space.

Yes, this indicates some irregularity in construction, so that a hare could keep a home underneath, without being in the cellar proper. Notice however that no mortar has been used in laying a foundation. The foundation is merely rocks, with spaces in between. Perhaps the home of the hare was in one of these spaces. Perhaps the home of the hare is partly under the woodpile and partly within the foundation rocks.

By the way, how steep is the hillside where Thoreau built his cabin?

Not particularly steep, but decidedly too steep to build upon. The shanty was on approximately flat ground at the base of the slope, rather than on the slope. It is a sort of wide irregular ledge between the slope and the incline down to the pond.

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52. THERE IS SOME OF THE SAME FITNESS IN A MAN'S BUILDING HIS OWN HOUSE THAT THERE IS IN A BIRD'S BUILDING ITS OWN NEST. — What is the meaning of "fitness" in this sentence?

Appropriateness. It is seen as quite as inappropriate, for one human to rely on some other human to build his or her home, as it would be for one bird to rely on some other bird to do all its singing for it. No sane bird, no matter how rich, would pay another bird to do all its singing. Or build it a nest.

53. WE BELONG TO THE COMMUNITY —
Does Thoreau mean the community of Concord, or the society at large?

Thoreau means that one person makes shoes all day, not just for his or her own family but for any number of families, while another person teaches school all day, not just for his or her own children but for any number of children in the neighborhood. None of them lead what you would call a whole life, obtain the whole of life experience, except insofar as they are integral parts of the general community which performs all the tasks that go to enabling life, such as manufacture shoes, teach children, etc.

54. ...AS IF IT WERE A REVELATION TO HIM. —
Does it mean: "as if he were the first (architect) to whom this idea had occurred"?

He means like duh, this is so obvious, and yet there is just this one architect he knows of, who has had this obvious idea, and because he's the only one who has it, solitary, he must think of it as a novel and startling idea, a revelation — rather than as the obvious duh thing which it is.

55. ALL VERY WELL PERHAPS FROM HIS POINT OF VIEW, BUT ONLY A LITTLE BETTER THAN THE COMMON DILETTANTISM — Could you put in other words the first part of the sentence? And is there anything specific implied by the phrase "the common dilettantism"?

The common dilettantism in architecture designs a building beginning with its external appearance. The drawing of the building has a whole lot of adornments to make the building look pretty. These adornments are not structural, they are not integral, they only function to make some sort of pretty and hopefully distinctive external impression. Thoreau is a 19th-Century Geary. He will let the internal spaces and the construction materials and the needs of the occupant determine the architecture of the building.

56. BY SUCH A CONTRACT AS THE INHABITANTS OF BROADWAY THEIR TRINITY CHURCH?—
Is the contract here the business contract between the town hall and the building company?

Thoreau is referring to a famously upscale church in New-York city. Perhaps the underlying geist can be made explicit if I tell a joke. There are these two preachers, and one is showing the other the new cross on the steeple of his church, and bragging that they got it for only $10,000. The other preacher goes "Time was when you could get one of those things for free." I suppose the question would be more or less "What does your religion amount to, if you can only worship your God properly in an expensive building?"

That grand Trinity Church on Broadway on Manhattan Island to which Thoreau refers in WALDEN had been torn down and reconstructed between 1839 and 1846. Walter Harding opinioned that the older church had burned down but I think that to be inaccurate.

57. ...NOR NEED THE SOLDIER BE SO IDLE AS TO TRY TO PAINT THE PRECISE COLOR OF HIS VIRTUE ON HIS STANDARD. — Do you know if there exists any symbology of colors as associated with the virtues of the soldier?

No, there are standard colors and associations, such as red with blood, white with purity or with bandages, blue or brownish-red with royalty, etc. But Thoreau's point is that there is simply no color equivalent, or symbolism, for a soldier's virtue, so it would be idle for a soldier to attempt to depict it. It is something which the soldier needs to perform, to display, rather than to attempt to depict.

58. AND EQUALLY INTERESTING WILL BE THE CITIZEN'S SUBURBAN BOX... —
Is there any special reason why Thoreau is referring to the citizen's (which I take to mean "townspeople") suburban rather than urban houses? Was it already a custom in those days that the rich people chose to live in the suburbs rather than in the downtown?

I think in that era any side street not filled with businesses would be suburban, even if the side street were directly off a major thoroughfare lined with shops. The railroad to Concord had **just** been put in place, and the new convention commuting morning and evening from a home in a "bedroom community" to downtown and back again, had not yet had an opportunity to fully develop. I don't know of anybody in the Boston area who was doing that sort of daily commuting, although I suspect that the Lorings who owned the factory in Concord did not live in Concord.

59. THEY CAN DO WITHOUT ARCHITECTURE WHO HAVE NO OLIVES NOR WINES IN THE CELLAR. —
What do you think is Thoreau's reason for putting "architecture" in italics?

He is using the term as a synonym for artificial external ornament. The italics indicate that the term is not being used in its primary signification, according to which any building which lacked an architecture would lack a structure and would simply collapse, but instead in such a secondary signification. The inhabitant of a log cabin, for instance, who has no fancy temperature-controlled room in his cellar for his bottles of aging wines, and who has no shelves of bottles of fancy olives ready for delectation, but who lives out of his garden and field and from the results of his hunting and fishing, simply, has no reason to put in cornices and suchlike on his log cabin in order to impress others. In the sense of architectural adornment, he has no need for architecture.

60. ONE MAN SAYS, IN HIS DESPAIR OR INDIFFERENCE TO LIFE, TAKE UP A HANDFUL OF THE EARTH AT YOUR FEET, AND PAINT YOUR HOUSE THAT COLOR. IS HE THINKING OF HIS LAST AND NARROW HOUSE? TOSS UP A COPPER FOR IT AS WELL. WHAT AN ABUNDANCE OF LEISURE HE MUST HAVE! WHY DO YOU TAKE UP A HANDFUL OF DIRT? BETTER PAINT YOUR HOUSE YOUR OWN COMPLEXION; LET IT TURN PALE OR BLUSH FOR YOU. AN ENTERPRISE TO IMPROVE THE STYLE OF COTTAGE ARCHITECTURE! WHEN YOU HAVE GOT MY ORNAMENTS READY, I WILL WEAR THEM. —
I would appreciate any comment that you might estimate it worth while to make on this passage, especially on the last sentence.

My reading, of which I am not sure, is that Thoreau is saying that one can make as good decisions as these randomly, by simply flipping a coin, as by trying to reason in this way about them. Then, however, that flipped coin, a copper, comes back later in the paragraph as the "ornament," which is the penny put on the eye of a dead man. He is saying that when he is dead, you may place copper coins on his eyes as is the custom, that's fine, he will wear them then, but he is not yet dead you see, he is not yet ready for such ornamentation.

61. ...WITH IMPERFECT AND SAPPY SHINGLES MADE OF THE FIRST SLICE OF THE LOG — what is the "first slice" of a log?

I watched an old guy make shingles once for me, out of a pine log. This was while I was building my cabin in the Sierra Nevada in which I lived for two years, two months, and two days. First he stripped off the bark of course. Then he started working inward, chipping off shingle after shingle. The first shingles, since they are right under the bark, are full of sap, and split off the log irregularly. They are almost useless. It is only when you get down into the dry part of the log that the shingles split away from the log regularly, and are dry and prime shingles of the sort that are easily tacked onto a roof.

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Finally, what would you suggest as the best method for working with the Kouroo database? What I do now is go straight to Kouroo/Walden/01Economy, and click on every paragraph looking for and exploring the links.

Well, that's fine, that's the way it is supposed to work and that is the way it will work eventually, but as you can see, my work as yet is quite incomplete. Damn, I wish I had a dozen assistants sitting in a row at a dozen workstations, that I could assign tasks to! This work is proceeding so slowly! I can only work like twelve hours a day seven days a week. Lots of stuff simply gets postponed.

You know, when I applied for a Library of America grant out of the Library of Congress, one of the anonymous stooge reviewers had the nerve to write on his or her checksheet that WALDEN was not an important part of American literature!

As we discussed WALDEN, we had occasion to refer to the structure of the caves of the first white intrusives along the banks of the Musketaquid. Here is some material from an early history of Philadelphia, which may help us understand the construction and living quality of these initial temporary cave dwellings along an American river margin:

> **Most Philadelphians have had some vague conceptions of the caves and cabins in which the primitive settlers made their temporary residence. The caves were generally formed by digging into the ground, near the verge of the river-front bank, about three feet in depth thus making half their chamber under ground; and the remaining half above ground was formed of sods of earth, or earth and brush combined. The roofs were formed of layers of limbs, or split pieces of trees, over-laid with sod or bark, river rushes, &c. The chimneys were of stones and river pebbles, mortared together with clay and grass, or river reeds. The following facts may illustrate this subject, to wit: An original paper is in John Johnson's family, of the year 1683, which is an instrument concerning a division of certain lands, and "executed and witnessed in the cave of Francis Daniel Pastorius, Esq." On the 17th of 9 mo. 1685, it was ordered by the provincial executive Council, that all families living in caves should appear before the council. What a group they must have made! This order was occasioned by the representations of the magistrates of Philadelphia, and enforced by a letter they had received from Governor Penn, in England. No one, however, thought proper to obey the order. The Council gave "further notice" that the Governor's orders relating to the caves will be put in execution in one month's time. In 1685, the Grand Jury present Joseph Knight, for suffering drunkenness and evil orders in his cave; and several drinking houses to debauch persons are also presented. They also present all the empty caves that do stand in the Front Street, "which is to be sixty feet wide," wherefore, the court orders that they forthwith "be pulled down" by the constables, and "demolished" [terms intimating they were in part above ground] and upon request of John Barnes and Patrick Robinson, [the Clerk of Council] who asked one month to pull down their respective caves, it was granted, on condition that they fill up the hole in the street. On another occasion, they are called Caves, or "Cabins" on the king's highway. The interesting story concerning the cave at the Crooked Billet, at which the ancestors of Deborah Morris dwelt, has been told under the article "Primitive Settlement." Mrs. Hannah Speakerman, when aged 75, told me that she well remembered having seen and often played at an original cave, called "Owen's Cave."**

It was in “Townsend’s Court,” on the south side of Spruce Street, west of Second Street, on a shelving bank. It was dug into the hill — had grass growing upon the roof part, which was itself formed of close-laid timber. The same man who had once inhabited it was still alive, and dwelt in a small frame house near it. Near the cave stood a large apple tree, and close by, on “Barclay’s place,” so called, she often gathered filberts and hickory nuts. The whole was an unimproved place only 80 years ago; it being from some cause, suffered to lay waste by the Barclay heirs. John Brown, and others, told me that the original cave of the Coates’ Family, in the Northern Liberties, was preserved in some form in the cellar of the family mansion, which remained till 1830, at the southwest corner of Green and Front Streets.

> My reading, of which I am not sure, is that Thoreau is saying that one can
> make as good decisions as these randomly, by simply flipping a coin, as by
> trying to reason in this way about them. Then, however, that flipped coin,
> a copper, comes back later in the paragraph as the “ornament,” which is the
> penny put on the eye of a dead man. He is saying that when he is dead, you
> may place copper coins on his eyes as is the custom, that’s fine, he will
> wear them then, but he is not yet dead you see, he is not yet ready for such ornamentation.

Uh, that was quite an unexpected explanation. Do you think the way Thoreau has put it would cause no problem for an average American reader to understand it?

Actually, no, I do recognize that it is quite a problematic passage. You notice that Donald Ross and I read this passage different ways. I am not at all sure that my own way of reading it is correct. In this particular passage Thoreau sounds almost as mysterious as that great crowd-pleaser, Emerson. I get a little disappointed in him at this point in the text.

62. What is the “MANTLE-TREE IRON”, mentioned in the list of Thoreau‘s expenses on the house?

One might presume that that 15-cent expense was the andiron apparatus that held the chunks of wood in the fireplace, which in that era would also have had a “tree” apparatus from which one might suspend a kettle of soup at the side of the fire, or to which one might add a spit for the rotating of a piece of meat being roasted, except that such an apparatus would have cost considerably more than 15 cents. (He did not install his stove until the second winter.) I notice that later on he says that:

“My furniture, part of which I made myself, and the rest cost me nothing of which I have not rendered an account, consisted of a bed, a table, a desk, three chairs, a looking-glass three inches in diameter, a pair of tongs, and andirons, a kettle, a skillet, and a frying-pan, a dipper, a wash-bowl, two knives and forks, three plates, one cup, one spoon, a jug for oil, a jug for molasses, and a japanned lamp” from which we can infer that he did have such andirons for his fireplace, but from which we are unable to infer whether he had already owned these, or whether he had had to pay 15 cents for them, or whether their cost was included in that $2.00 expense item he mentions on page 60 as “oil and some household utensils.”

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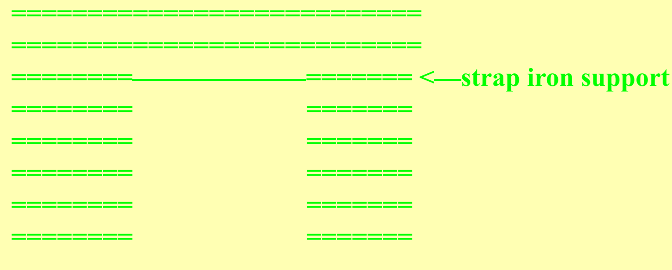
However, here's my contribution. On the basis of the price paid, 15 cents, I would opinion that this was the flat piece of strap iron that one installs over the top or mantle of a brick fireplace, to hold up the unsupported first layer of bricks:



It seems to me, although I do not know for sure, that although this price of 15 cents would be quite low for a brand new piece of iron bought from a blacksmithing shop, 15 cents would have been about the right price to pay in that era for such a three-foot length of scrap strap iron about 3/8ths to 1/2-inch thick and about 4 to 6 inches wide, if it were a used piece bought from some local somebody in a 19th-century version of a "yard sale," something that they had had lying around back in their barn.

Note that such a piece of iron is absolutely indispensable. You can build a fireplace without a damper, but you cannot build any sort of brick fireplace without supporting that first layer of bricks (unless you build some sort of arch, which would not only make the fireplace smoke but also would very much interfere with its throwing heat into the room).

63. AND MY SHORTCOMINGS AND INCONSISTENCIES DO NOT AFFECT THE TRUTH OF MY STATEMENT — Does he refer to the shortcomings of his style, or his character?

    Character. Not style.

64. I WILL BREATHE FREELY AND STRETCH MYSELF IN THIS RESPECT, IT IS SUCH A RELIEF TO BOTH THE MORAL AND PHYSICAL SYSTEM; — I smell a word-play here ("stretch myself — relief"), though Prof. Donald Ross does not mention it in his check list. Is the idiom "stretch myself" used here with the meaning of "I will do my utmost"?

    I didn't suppose so. I suppose it to mean "relax," be permissive with myself rather than seemingly reticent.

65. THE MODE OF FOUNDING A COLLEGE IS, COMMONLY, TO GET UP A SUBSCRIPTION OF DOLLARS AND CENTS... — does it mean "raising the funds", "collecting donations"?

    Yes, raising the money, collecting the donations, or, more commonly, collecting together the **pledges** of future contributions. Actually, I think, few people handed over any cash until the point at which a sufficient amount of donation had been **pledged** for contribution, so "get up a subscription" would ordinarily involve promises of future cash rather than actual cash on the barrelhead.

66. TO CALL IN A CONTRACTOR WHO MAKES THIS A SUBJECT OF SPECULATION,... — what is meant by "subject of speculation"?

    A contractor, being a pragmatic prudent person who works for reward rather than as a labor of love, needs to estimate the material and labor costs and then tack on a percentage of profit for himself. This is, of course, all speculative, but on this speculation rests the outcome, whether he will make money on the contract or instead lose money. The contractor is not in the game for the process, but for the product. The contractor does not care whether the students in the college he has built actually learn anything, or not.

67. WHILE THE STUDENTS THAT ARE TO BE ARE SAID TO BE FITTING THEMSELVES FOR IT — meaning "preparing themselves for the studies"?

Yes. The most common such preparation was intensive study of Latin and Greek. Since college was the gateway to social standing, the very last thing that any student would ever have done in that era would have been to do any actual labor, such as laying brick, since that would forever have confirmed him in a very low standing in society. (Let us allow exceptions here for adventurous labor, such as that performed by college student Richard Henry Dana, Jr. during his "two years before the mast.")

68. AN END WHICH IT WAS ALREADY BUT TOO EASY TO ARRIVE AT; AS RAILROADS LEAD TO BOSTON OR NEW YORK. — Could you explain this?

Well, it was a foregone conclusion in those early years, that if you got on a train somewhere in the interior, eventually you were going to wind up either in the port of Boston or in the port of New-York. The inland empire had not yet been much developed, so in general the only direction in which one might head would be east, and those were the **only** rail destinations on the eastern seaboard that had any significant links to the inland of the continent (New-York's links to the interior, up the Hudson River valley, were infinitely superior to Boston's links, which were very much confined within New England because the railroad tunnel through the mountains at the western edge of Massachusetts had not yet been dug). Thoreau might as well have said "All roads lead to Rome," because the situation in regard to railroads in his day was much the same as the situation in regard to the Roman Roads of antiquity. If you stayed on the Roman Road eventually you would wind up in Rome, where all the Roman Roads actually originated. If you stayed on the train, eventually you would arrive either at the port of Boston or the port of New-York.

69. I HAVE TRAVELLED AT THAT RATE BY THE WEEK TOGETHER — What is the meaning of "by the week together"?

Without stopping off anywhere for any en-route visiting, except of course for the waits between scheduled trains such as at a stopover in the engine shed in Worcester.

70. A MELANCHOLY ACCIDENT. — Walter Harding says this was a typical newspaper headline of the time. Was it just a normal way in those days of saying "a sad accident"?

Yes, it was an intensifier, as in "a bad accident." Yet also it had these already noticeable overtones of cynical insincerity, because everyone already understood that the worse the accident was or could be made to appear, the better the newshounds liked it — everybody already grasped the fact that the more sensationalistic they could make their copy the more newspapers they would be able to sell.

WELL, I START NOW ON FOOT, AND GET THERE BEFORE NIGHT; I HAVE TRAVELLED AT THAT RATE BY THE WEEK TOGETHER, so that "travelling" here means walking long distances. The Spanish translator has omitted the second part of the sentence altogether, the equivalent of the Russian translation would be: "I have made such distances on foot for several weeks running".

Yes, Thoreau had hiked extensively in the Adirondack Mountains so he is here describing actual experience. In the context of hiking, "by the week together" would indicate walking all day every day for at least one week, seven days, without stopping off anywhere for anything more than the usual overnight sleep. In that era it was not at all out of the ordinary for hikers to cover some thirty miles per day, the distance from Concord to Fitchburg, day after day, perhaps slightly more, if they were not impeded (as the people who took the overland route to the West Coast were impeded) by accompanying Conestoga wagons pulled by oxen, which would have cut down the daily travel possibility to something between 20 and 25 miles. (Thoreau's right big toe had been chopped off when he was tiny, so he had a special impediment, and still he could do the normal thirty miles per day without interruption!)

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71. THE WHOLE LOT CONTAINS ELEVEN ACRES, MOSTLY GROWING UP TO PINES AND HICKORIES, AND WAS SOLD THE PRECEDING SEASON FOR EIGHT DOLLARS AND EIGHT CENTS AN ACRE. — my difficulty is the verbal phrase "growing up to pines and hickories". Does it mean "covered with pines and hickories"?

    Well, it means that the pine and hickory trees had established themselves, but were still young trees, not mature. That portion of his acreage could no longer be plowed, but it was not yet of any use as a woodlot.

72. THE AMOUNT ON HAND MUCH MORE THAN BALANCING A LITTLE GRASS WHICH I DID NOT RAISE — What is the "grass" he did not raise? Not the lawn-grass, I guess.

    He is referring to hay, which was in that era mowed with a hand reaper into windrows, then collected into piles and allowed to cure a bit, then pitchforked into a wagon and taken into the loft of a barn. Typically this amounted to some six weeks of the summer season, before the harvest of other (row) crops began. This hay was the overwinter food for farm animals confined to the barn by the snow. It was a standard and necessary bulk farm commodity, worth so much per wagon load and always available locally for sale and purchase. The hay he would have gotten off of such an upland meadow, had he not plowed and planted, would have been of low quality, and would have sold for a low price, for the hay from the water meadows in the vicinity of Concord was of a decidedly superior grade for the feeding of livestock.

73. ...BUT COULD FOLLOW THE BENT OF MY GENIUS, WHICH IS A VERY CROOKED ONE, EVERY MOMENT. — This is the first time in "Walden" that we come across the word "genius" which seems to be one of the transcendentalists' pet words. Is there any special meaning that the transcendentalists ascribe to this word, different in any way from the common usage? A little bit further on it appears again: "Genius is not a retainer to any emperor...", evidently with a different meaning. Secondly, could you put in other words the second part of the quoted sentence?

    I believe it was Immanuel Kant who spoke of "the crooked timber which is humankind." No? Thoreau was intent on following his bent, even if it was crooked. If he followed his nose and his nose was bent to the left, he would of course be walking in a circle — but at least it would be **his** circle. Sometimes we speak of "following your bliss" or "doing what comes naturally" or "seeking one's own inspiration."

    Here is Thoreau later on in this chapter of WALDEN, where he equates one's genius with one's particular calling which one is able to do with one's whole heart and soul and life:

    > **"You must have a genius for charity as well as for any thing else.... Probably I should not consciously and deliberately forsake my particular calling to do the good which society demands of me, to save the universe from annihilation; and I believe that a like but infinitely greater steadfastness elsewhere is all that now preserves it. But I would not stand between any man and his genius; and to him who does this work, which I decline, with his whole heart and soul and life, I would say, Persevere, even if the world call it doing evil, as it is most likely they will."**

    Here is Thoreau in "Friday" of A WEEK:

"We talk of genius as if it were a mere knack, and the poet could only express what other men conceived. But in comparison with his task, the poet is the least talented of any; the writer of prose has more skill. See what talent the smith has. His material is pliant in his hands. When the poet is most inspired, is stimulated by an aura which never even colors the afternoons of common men, then his talent is all gone, and he is no longer a poet. The gods do not grant him any skill more than another. They never put their gifts into his hands, but they encompass and sustain him with their breath. To say that God has given a man many and great talents, frequently means that he has brought his heavens down within reach of his hands. When the poetic frenzy seizes us, we run and scratch with our pen, intent only on worms, calling our mates around us, like the cock, and delighting in the dust we make, but do not detect where the jewel lies, which, perhaps, we have in the mean time cast to a distance, or quite covered up again. The poet's body even is not fed like other men's, but he sometimes tastes the genuine nectar and ambrosia of the gods, and lives a divine life. By the healthful and invigorating thrills of inspiration his life is preserved to a serene old age."

Emma Lazarus used a Thoreau quote as the epigraph for her May 1869 poem "Reality," and then completed the poem with a reference to this "genius":

**"Hold fast to your most indefinite waking dream.
Dreams are the solidest facts that we know."
Celestial hopes and dreams,
And lofty purposes, and long rich days,
With fragrance filled of blameless deeds and ways,
And visionary gleams, —
These things alone endure;
"They are the solid facts," that we may grasp,
Leading us on and upward if we clasp
And hold them firm and sure.
In a wise fable old,
A hero sought a god who could at will
Assume all figures, and the hero still
Loosed not his steadfast hold,
For image foul or fair,
For soft-eyed nymph, who wept with pain and shame,
For threatening fiend or loathesome beast or flame,
For menace or for prayer.
Until the god, outbraved,
Took his own shape divine; not wrathfully,
But wondering, to the hero gave reply,
The knowledge that he craved.
We seize the god in youth;
All forms conspire to make us loose our grasp, —
Ambition, folly, gain, — till we unclasp
From the embrace of truth.
We grow more wise, we say,
And work for worldly ends and mock our dream,
Alas! while all life's glory and its gleam,
With that have fled away.
If thereto we had clung
Through change and peril, fire and night and storm,
till it assume its proper, godlike form,
We might as last have wrung
An answer to our cries, —
A brave response to our most valiant hope.**

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Unto the light of day this word might ope
A million mysteries.
O'er each man's brow I see
The bright star of his genius shining clear; <===== GENIUS
It seeks to guide him to a nobler sphere,
Above earth's vanity.
Up to pure height of snow,
Its beckoning ray still leads him on and on;
To those who follow, lo, itself comes down
And crowns at length their brow.
The nimbus still doth gleam
On these the heroes, sages of the earth,
The few who found, in life of any worth,
Only their loftiest dream.

Bear in mind that Thoreau and his contemporaries were more of less fluent in Latin and Greek. The following is from Bulfinch's MYTHOLOGY:

> **"The Penates were the gods who were supposed to attend to the welfare and prosperity of the family. Their name is derived from Penus, the pantry, which was sacred to them. Every master of a family was the priest of the Penates of his own house. The Lares, or Lars, were also household gods, but differed from the Penates in being regarded as the deified spirits of mortals. The family Lars were held to be the souls of the ancestors, who watched over and protected their descendants. The words Lemur and Larva more nearly correspond to our word Ghost. The Romans believed that every man had his Genius, and every woman her Juno: that is, a spirit who had given them being, and was regarded as their protector through life. On their birthdays men made offerings to their Genius, women to their Juno...."**

> **"... Simonides was one of the most prolific of the early poets of Greece, but only a few fragments of his compositions have descended to us. He wrote hymns, triumphal odes, and elegies. In the last species of composition he particularly excelled. His genius was inclined to the pathetic, and none could touch with truer effect the chords of human sympathy."**

74. I SHOULD NEVER HAVE BROKEN A HORSE OR BULL — What is the meaning of "to break a horse/bull"?

Back in those days, and even in our own era to some extent, it was considered that a horse or bull could not be rendered tractable for domestic service until "its spirit was broken." It needed to become terrified of the pain of being punished. One "broke" a horse's spirit of resistance and independence by strapping a weight on its back and leading it around with a halter, and then by riding on it until it stopped bucking. One "broke" a bull's spirit of resistance and independence by putting a strong metal ring into the cartilage of its nose, and tying a rope to this ring, and then yanking on the ring until its nose bled. This was intensely painful of course for the bull, and the bull eventually learned that discretion was the better part of valor. This sort of breaking or humbling was also applied, in areas of the deep South, to human slaves, primarily by flogging.

75. GENIUS IS NOT A RETAINER TO ANY EMPEROR, NOR IS ITS MATERIAL SILVER, OR GOLD, OR MARBLE, EXCEPT TO A TRIFLING EXTENT — Does the possessive pronoun "its" refer to the word "genius"? Is this reading of mine correct: "The genius works with other materials than silver, gold or marble"?

Yes, the possessive pronoun refers to the word "genius," but no, there is **no** applicability here for our current concept of "a genius" meaning "a person of much greater than average intellect." Even the stupidest or most challenged person may have his or her genius, for this genius is simply their "bent," or their "natural inclination," or "the direction in which their personal inclinations will enable them to travel the farthest and fastest." What Thoreau means by "Genius is not a retainer to any emperor" is that one may obey a ruler, but one does so only reluctantly, dispiritedly. It was a maxim of the era that the slave typically can produce no more than 3/5ths of the labor which a free man can produce, even under the best of circumstances, so if you wanted your house built for you, and it was a three-man job, and you wanted the work performed for you by slaves instead of by free contractors, you'd need to put five slaves to work on it. What Thoreau means by the idea that the material of genius is not silver, or gold, or marble, is that the primary ingredient in art is inspiration. Yo-yo Ma can get better music out of a dime store fiddle than I could get out of an authentic Stradivarius violin.

76. THE RELIGION AND CIVILIZATION WHICH ARE BARBARIC AND HEATHENISH BUILD SPLENDID TEMPLES; BUT WHAT YOU MIGHT CALL CHRISTIANITY DOES NOT. — Do you have any idea why does Thoreau precedes the word "Christianity" with the phrase "what you might call..."? And why does he claim that Christianity does not build splendid temples? All the Catholic countries are full with splendid temples. My intuitive translation is: "but the true Christianity does not", but I would appreciate your comment on this.

I agree with your intuition. I have the same problem as a Quaker that Thoreau has here when speaking of Christianity. People ask me whether Quakers are Christians or not, and I don't know how to respond to them. Sometimes, if the person who is asking is a relative of mine from back home in Indiana, and if I feel like being nasty, I say something like "In the sense in which you are a Christian, I am not." Thoreau is well aware that an institution which claims the name "Christian" for itself does build splendid temples, but he does not consider that claim to be at all accurate. This creates a problem of communication for him, which he attempts to solve here by indicating that real Christians would be abuilding splendid temples of the spirit, not splendid temples of material substance.

77. NOTHING WAS GIVEN ME OF WHICH I HAVE NOT RENDERED SOME ACCOUNT. — Am I right in assuming that the word "account" here does not refer to all the statistics given above, but rather to the text of "Walden" in general (e.g., the axe he borrowed, the help of the house-raisers, etc.)?

Yes, it refers not only to the specific tabulations he includes, but also to the general context in which he speaks of the ax he borrowed, the fact that his mom and sisters and the maids at the Thoreau boardinghouse are doing his laundry for him, the fact that he is eating occasionally with the Emersons and occasionally with his family, etc. From time to time indignant accusations are made, that Thoreau left this or that out of account, but such accusations are usually made by poor readers (and inveterate cavillers) who suppose that Thoreau was trying to be some sort of isolate or was fulfilling some sort of agenda of self-sufficiency (more or less like a guy named Hippias in ancient Athens, who once made a stir by attending the Olympic Games attired in a costume which he had fabricated entirely by himself out of raw materials, the wool from sheep he himself had herded and sheered, the cloth from thread that he himself had drawn, etc., all the way down to and including the metal ring he was wearing on his finger).

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78. BUT THE DINING OUT, BEING, AS I HAVE STATED, A CONSTANT ELEMENT, DOES NOT IN THE LEAST AFFECT A COMPARATIVE STATEMENT LIKE THIS. — I don't quite see what he means by "a comparative statement" (where is the comparison?). Does he perchance refer to his statistics?

No, he is comparing living at the Thoreau boardinghouse or with the Emersons with living in the shanty at the pond. A comparative statement would of course disregard the similarities between these modes of life, in order to properly focus on the differences between them. Since he is breathing air whether he is in the Thoreau boardinghouse, at the Emersons, or at the pond, he need make no mention of his need to breathe air. Since, whether he was living at home, or living with the Emersons, or living at the pond, he would as a matter of politeness and as a matter of convenience be eating away from his place of domicile whenever offered food while out socializing, and this would be happening with a certain amount of regularity regardless of where his home base or crash pad happened to be located at the moment, this would classify as a similarity rather than a difference and should therefore be disregarded.

The exact words of Kant are: "Out of timber so crooked as that from which man is made nothing entirely straight can be built", but in English it is usually quoted as "Out of the crooked timber of humanity no straight thing was ever made". These words were employed by Sir Isaiah Berlin to give the title to one of his most well-known books of essays. I just mention this because it might be interesting for you to know that Sir Isaiah Berlin was born in Riga.

And being born in Riga means he was a Latvian. That's something to be proud of.

79. BREAD I AT FIRST MADE OF PURE INDIAN MEAL AND SALT, GENUINE HOE-CAKES, WHICH I BAKED BEFORE MY FIRE OUT OF DOORS ON A SHINGLE OR THE END OF A STICK OF TIMBER SAWED OFF IN BUILDING MY HOUSE; — how do you bake bread "before the fire"? You already explained the process of baking bread before but I guess what Thoreau describes here is different. Wouldn't it be more reasonable to put these "hoe-cakes" on some metal support and cook them "on the fire"?

Yes, what Thoreau is describing here is kid stuff, his first experiments. There are definitely better ways which he would have learned by experience.

80. TILL I CAME TO "GOOD, SWEET, WHOLESOME BREAD," THE STAFF OF LIFE — Do you know the origin of the metaphor "staff of life"? Is it biblical?

The ILIAD of Homer has:

> **Then Telemachus went all alone by the sea side, washed his hands in the grey waves, and prayed to Minerva. "Hear me," he cried, "you god who visited me yesterday, and bade me sail the seas in search of my father who has so long been missing. I would obey you, but the Achaeans, and more particularly the wicked suitors, are hindering me that I cannot do so." As he thus prayed, Minerva came close up to him in the likeness and with the voice of Mentor. "Telemachus," said she, "if you are made of the same stuff as your father you will be neither fool nor coward henceforward, for Ulysses never broke his word nor left his work half done. If, then, you take after him, your voyage will not be fruitless, but unless you have the blood of Ulysses and of Penelope in your veins I see no likelihood of your succeeding. Sons are seldom as good men as their fathers; they are generally worse, not better; still, as you are not going to be either fool or coward henceforward, and are not entirely without some share of your father's wise discernment, I look with hope upon your undertaking. But mind you never make common cause with any of those foolish suitors, for they have neither sense nor virtue, and give no thought to death and to the doom that will shortly fall on one and all of them, so that they shall perish on the same day.**

> **As for your voyage, it shall not be long delayed; your father was such an old friend of mine that I will find you a ship, and will come with you myself. Now, however, return home, and go about among the suitors; begin getting provisions ready for your voyage; see everything well stowed, the wine in jars, and the barley meal, which is the staff of life, in leathern bags, while I go round the town and beat up volunteers at once. There are many ships in Ithaca both old and new; I will run my eye over them for you and will choose the best; we will get her ready and will put out to sea without delay."**

Also:

> **At the same time within the house, a miller-woman from hard by in the mill room lifted up her voice and gave him another sign. There were twelve miller-women whose business it was to grind wheat and barley which are the staff of life. The others had ground their task and had gone to take their rest, but this one had not yet finished, for she was not so strong as they were, and when she heard the thunder she stopped grinding and gave the sign to her master. "Father Jove," said she, "you who rule over heaven and earth, you have thundered from a clear sky without so much as a cloud in it, and this means something for somebody; grant the prayer, then, of me your poor servant who calls upon you, and let this be the very last day that the suitors dine in the house of Ulysses. They have worn me out with the labour of grinding meal for them, and I hope they may never have another dinner anywhere at all."**

81. EVERY NEW ENGLANDER MIGHT EASILY RAISE ALL HIS OWN BREADSTUFFS IN THIS LAND OF RYE AND INDIAN CORN — Does "of rye and Indian corn" go together with "land" or with "raise his breadstuffs"?

    Land

82. AND IN A NEW COUNTRY, FUEL IS AN ENCUMBRANCE — If "encumbrance" is to be understood as "scarcity" this affirmation sounds pretty surprising to me. I would expect that precisely the opposite is true — that in a new country where the forests have not yet been cleared there should be an overabundance of fuel (i.e. fuel-wood).

    Yes, and that overabundance is precisely Thoreau's point. In a new country where the forests have not yet been cleared there is an overabundance of forest that must be cleared, and thus that material, which in other times would become valuable as fuel, is for the time being because of its very plenitude something of an encumbrance.

83. MY FURNITURE...CONSISTED OF...A KETTLE, A SKILLET, AND A FRYING-PAN... — what is the difference between a skillet and a frying-pan (my Webster defines "skillet" as "a frying-pan")?

    A skillet is somewhat deeper than a frying-pan but not so deep as a kettle. If you were going to cook something by immersing it in oil, such as pieces of chicken coated in bread crumbs. you'd use a skillet. If you were going to fry something like strips of bacon in their own oil, you could use a shallower frying-pan.

84. AND HE COULD NOT MOVE OVER THE ROUGH COUNTRY WHERE OUR LINES ARE CAST WITHOUT DRAGGING THEM — what is meant by "where our lines are cast"?

    A trapper and market fisher would cast lines baited with odds and ends on hooks out into various streams and ponds as he passed them, to catch turtles and catfish and muskrats and suchlike. Walking along, he would have a bundle of traps strung around his waist, and would peg one of these traps onto a game path at a shoreline from time to time. This is hard work especially in rough country.

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85. I CANNOT BUT FEEL COMPASSION WHEN I HEAR SOME TRIG, COMPACT-LOOKING MAN,... SPEAK OF HIS "FURNITURE" — how would you define the adjective "compact-looking"?

Fit. The opposite would be "Heavy Haines," the Concord character who was a figure of fun because when he sat in the back of his rowboat to fish, this would cause the bow to go way up in the air. This is the Thoreau who opinioned that a fat man would not properly be able to philosophize.

skil·let

Etymology: Middle English skelet Date: 15th century chiefly British: a small kettle or pot usually having three or four often long feet and used for cooking on the hearth

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frying pan

Date: 14th century a metal pan with a handle that is used for frying foods — called also fry pan

===

Online dictionary collection:

http://www.facstaff.bucknell.edu/rbeard/diction.html

800 online dictionaries including Uyghur, Manx, Klingon, and Latvian:

http://ai1.mii.lu.lv/pamatv/pamatv1.htm

I tried their machine translation of "skillet and frying pan" from English into Russian, and this is what I got back:

http://www.tranexp.com/InterTran.cgi?url=http%3A%2F%2F&type=text&text=skillet+and+frying+pan&lang=engrus

===

frying pan

Date: 14th century

a metal pan with a handle that is used for frying foods — called also fry pan

Bartlett's QUOTATIONS cites Matthew Henry (1662-1714), COMMENTARY, PSALM CIV (1708-1710) with bread as the "staff of life." Footnotes point to ISAIAH III, 1, which, in the given translation, does not give the phrase exactly that way. Other footnotes are Swift's TALE OF A TUB, 1704, with bread as the staff of life, and Edward Winslow, GOOD NEWS FROM NEW ENGLAND, 1624, with corn as the staff of life. I'd conclude that it's a commonplace phrase from the 17th and 18th century, based on the passage from ISAIAH.

Bread of course gets a mention in PSALM 104 as "strengthening man's heart," but since neither a staff nor life get cited in connection with bread there, this mention of bread in the psalm as "strengthening man's heart" has no greater connection with the stock phrase "staff of life" than, say, the recent comment in the newspaper by a McDonalds nutritionist that all McDonalds products are nutritional products simply because anything that has calories is nutritional.:-)

The passage from Isaiah is at /kouroo/sources/KJV_Bible/Isaiah.frame: Chap3_1:

3 For, behold, the Lord, the LORD of hosts, doth take away from Jerusalem and from Judah the stay and the staff, the whole stay of bread, and the whole stay of water.

I did not cite this passage in ISAIAH because it was simply beyond me, how one is supposed to get from "the whole stay of bread" all the way to "the staff of life." What's the intermediate connection there? What does this word "stay" mean in this context?

Somewhat more apropos would be LEVITICUS 26:26 which does mention the staff mysteriously in the context of bread: "And when I have broken the staff of your bread, ten women shall bake your bread in one oven, and they shall deliver you your bread again by weight; and ye shall eat, and not be satisfied." Also EZEKIEL 5:16 "I will increase the famine upon you, and will break your staff of bread." Also EZEKIEL 14:13 "Son of man, when the land sinneth against me by trespassing grievously, then will I stretch out mine hand upon it, and will break the staff of the bread thereof, and will send famine upon it, and will cut off man and beast from it." Evidently the connection between the staff and bread is that the staff is something on which one leans, to prevent one from falling, and bread is something on which one depends, to prevent one from starving.

I note that when I was in Iran during the revolution, the price of bread was being rigidly controlled at ten rials the half-kilo loaf by constant government monitoring and regulation of the price of the wheaten flour sold to the bakers. The reasoning was that the poorest of the Iranian society depended upon this bread as their basic source of daily calories. To allow the price of bread to rise, even briefly, even slightly, would be to cause the triumph of Imam Khomeini!

By the way, I read in one of issues of the Thoreau Society Bulletin available on their web-site, that some Mr. Bradley P. Dean is about to start what he calls the Thoreau Database Project under the roof of the Thoreau Institute Media Center. The whole thing sounded to me very much like your Kouroo database. Are you familiar with or maybe even involved in this project?

When I originally pitched my project, there was a great deal of enthusiasm, and I was considerably misled. I supposed that as agenda was replaced by accomplishment, enthusiasm would be succeeded by even greater enthusiasm! Well, not so. As I began to replace my agenda with real accomplishment, what replaced their enthusiasm was sheer terror and panic. They and their information and their skills were being replaced!

The Thoreau Society people have now been resisting me for over a decade, and telling their rank and file nothing whatever about the existence of this project, and yet finally they did decide that they would have to get to modernizing their resources and their technology. But Valdis, you of all people know how the world works: such scholars would never be capable of admitting that I was right in pushing for this and they wrong in stonewalling it — so they are proceeding to throw millions of dollars at the problem. They are ignoring the prior existence of this huge database I have created and setting out to re-invent the wheel, without informing their funding source (Don Henley of the Eagles rock group) that this wheel already exists and that his money therefore is being merely squandered.

Of course, what they create for these millions of dollars eventually will be being compared with what I have already created out of lunch money, and they will be publicly humiliated. —But it doesn't seem I have it within my power to forestall that.

I am doing my best to take a constructive approach under the circumstances. I am a Quaker you know. I do gladly help a number of these Thoreau Society people, but of necessity this goes on behind the scenes. For instance, I am in constant private contact with Brad Dean and do help him and advise him wherever possible, although the politics of the thing are that he has been more or less unable, for fear of job insecurity, to admit to the others that this is what is happening behind the scenes. He started out a few years ago knowing just nothing about computers, and I am very pleased with the rate at which he is learning.

The situation's not terrible, merely suboptimal and distressing and somewhat wasteful. Thankfully, I'm not the one who's going to have egg on his face.:-)

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86. FOR I WAS OBLIGED TO DRESS AND TRAIN, NOT TO SAY THINK AND BELIEVE, ACCORDINGLY... — is the verb “train” here synonymous for “teach”?

To “dress” is to line up in rows in a military formation. For instance, the command DRESS LEFT causes all the heads of a platoon to snap sharply to the left, and causes all the left arms to spring out horizontally and brush the shoulder of the soldier to the left, and causes each soldier in the row to line up precisely in parallel and at arm’s length with the soldier to his left. To “train,” on the other hand is to do the manual of arms with one’s shoulder weapon. I’m sure that, as a diplomat, you’ve seen formations of soldiers do the manual of arms maneuvers, such as PRESENT ARMS and RETURN ARMS. Thoreau, as an able-bodied young white man, was as such automatically a member of the local militia and required by law under significant penalty to fall into formation one day (or one weekend?) per year for such ridiculous dressing and training.

Back in the days of the muzzle-loader, training involved going through a routine of removal of the ramrod, pouring of the powder, insertion of the wad, insertion of the ball, ramming, shouldering, etc. (By the numbers, with no-one falling behind for the volley firing.)

87. ...AS I COULD FARE HARD AND YET SUCCEED WELL... — what is the meaning of “fare hard”?

Encounter difficulty, live under hardship. One might “fare hard” while out camping and canoeing in the Maine wilderness.

88. BUT HIS EMPLOYER, WHO SPECULATES FROM MONTH TO MONTH, HAS NO RESPITE FROM ONE END OF THE YEAR TO THE OTHER. — is the verb “speculate” used here in the sense of “make the monthly calculations of gains and losses”?

Yes. A modern euphemism would be “to sharp pencil.” This employer is constantly fine-tuning the probabilities of gain against the probabilities of loss, and making close economic decisions, and hopefully obtains some little reward for all this effort — but the prospect of making money in this manner calls for diligent attention and constant preoccupation. Such a man becomes a slavedriver of himself.

89. IT IS BY A MATHEMATICAL POINT ONLY THAT WE ARE WISE, AS THE SAILOR OR THE FUGITIVE SLAVE KEEPS THE POLESTAR IN HIS EYE; — could you explain me the first part of this sentence?

This is the distinction between a guide and a goal. When we use the North Star as out guide out of the woods, we aren’t hoping to actually **get to** that star. It is a mere mathematical point in the sky, not a real destination. Wisdom lies in our understanding that we are using certain of our longings as guides rather than as goals, and would not be fulfilled —but rather, we would be considerably disenchanted— were we ever actually to come to possess the putative objects of these longings.

90. I CONFESS THAT I HAVE HITHERTO INDULGED VERY LITTLE IN PHILANTHROPIC ENTERPRISES. I HAVE MADE SOME SACRIFICES TO A SENSE OF DUTY, AND AMONG OTHERS HAVE SACRIFICED THIS PLEASURE ALSO. — I see two possible readings of the second sentence, and I wonder which of the two is correct: 1. I have indulged in some philanthropic enterprises out of my sense of duty towards the poor but I soon realized that it‘s useless and gave it up, 2. I have renounced some things in my life out of sheer sense of duty, and when I realized that philanthropy is just “hacking at the branches of evil” I decided to renounce it too.

Definitely not #1. Thoreau was not contemptuous or condescending. Yes, definitely #2. You know the Sufi maxim: to renounce **everything** it is necessary in the end to renounce renunciation itself, otherwise the process remaining incomplete.:-) Notice that the “pleasure” of the philanthropic enterprise comes in the feeling of superiority one achieves over those who need one’s assistance! — Thoreau is renouncing this cheaply acquired sense of superiority over the unfortunate.

91. AS FOR DOING-GOOD, THAT IS ONE OF THE PROFESSIONS WHICH ARE FULL — Does it mean "one of the professions in which there are no vacancies"?

Remember when your mom told that whatever you did, you needed to behave yourself, and you thought "Well, **that's** not going to be a whole lot of fun"? There's never any shortage of Do-Gooders in this world because people would much, much rather **do** good than **be** good. Behaving oneself is **such** an arduous and limiting and unfulfilled activity! But if one sets out to right the world's wrongs, all sorts of wicked and exciting things become instantly not only permissible but even obligatory. For instance, we are doing good to Bosnia right now, and man is it fun! Boom!! We're going to bomb those mother-fuckers right back to the Stone Age — and then the situation over there in the Balkans is going to be ever so much improved because they would have been taught a lesson and would know to be nicer to one another.:-)

92. AT DOING SOMETHING- I WILL NOT ENGAGE THAT MY NEIGHBORS SHALL PRONOUNCE IT GOOD- I DO NOT HESITATE TO SAY THAT I SHOULD BE A CAPITAL FELLOW TO HIRE; BUT WHAT THAT IS, IT IS FOR MY EMPLOYER TO FIND OUT. — I can't see how this sentence fits into the context, because the author seems to be speaking of something else here than philanthropy. Could you give me a clue?

Yes, a clue. A "capital" fellow, etymologically, is a fellow with a head, a fellow who can think for himself and make his own decisions. When you hire such a person, you don't micromanage him, you just explain what your objectives and needs are and then he (or she) goes out and sees what can be done about that. The wise employer of such a person allows lots of leeway for initiative and surprises. A Thoreau employee is likely to come up with something you didn't even know, until he hands it to you, that you needed.

93. OFTEN THE POOR MAN IS NOT SO COLD AND HUNGRY AS HE IS DIRTY AND RAGGED AND GROSS — The adjective "gross" is commonly used to describe the moral character of a man (coarse, vulgar, rough), while all the other adjectives describe the physical condition. Could "gross" in this case have another meaning?

A gross person is offensive. It may be the dirt or the raggedness, or it may be an odor or a coarse manner of acting, but when one encounters this person one feels repulsed. (There was during Thoreau's lifetime a guy who lived at the Concord poorfarm and spent his days on the Milldam, begging for pennies. This distressing person was not so much cold or hungry, he was sheltered and got his meals at the poorfarm, as he was distressed at his condition in life. Rather than pennies what this man needed was some human consideration. When he died, Henry wrote young Ellen Emerson at Staten Island to inform her of his death simply because he knew how she had been concerned for him as a fellow human being.)

94. AND THUS, BY A FEW YEARS OF PHILANTHROPIC ACTIVITY, THE POWERS IN THE MEANWHILE USING HIM FOR THEIR OWN ENDS, NO DOUBT, HE CURES HIMSELF OF HIS DYSPEPSIA... — what is meant by the "powers"? Governments?

Yes, governments, and movements, and organizations, which all have their own self-serving agendas and their own legitimation stories, and indulge in their little manipulative lies. A good example is that of the money one contributes to a US charity, ordinarily, the statistic is that 94 cents on the dollar gets consumed within the organization itself, in paying for hotel rooms and per diems for caregiving employees and stuff like that, in paying for the fundraising effort itself, postage, advertising, etc., and only maybe 6 cents on the dollar (if you're lucky!) ever gets applied to reduce the misery which you supposed you were alleviating with your contribution. Thoreau's attitude was that helpful activity has to be **direct** activity. One has to be **personally** involved. There must be that **attentive** touch.

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95. I NEVER DREAMED OF ANY ENORMITY GREATER THAN I HAVE COMMITTED. I NEVER KNEW, AND NEVER SHALL KNOW, A WORSE MAN THAN MYSELF. — What do you think is the reason of this sudden self-abasement?

We know only ourselves. When we conceive of someone else as a wrongdoer, with bad attitudes, how is it that we can have knowledge of such attitudes, and of such wrongdoing? It would never ever even come to our attention, unless there were some "hook" in our own soul which enabled us to understand this sort of attitude and this sort of activity. To the innocent all things are pure. Thoreau is here refusing to engage in the sort of normal-mode "projection" in which all good things are incorporated into the personal self while all bad things are assigned to the personal selves of other individuals. He is observing that "Were I not capable of wrong, I would not be capable of recognizing wrong."

Yes indeed, I would like to have the program for the lunar cycles. And I do speak Spanish, so that part of it is OK too.

96. AT A CERTAIN SEASON OF OUR LIFE WE ARE ACCUSTOMED TO CONSIDER EVERY SPOT AS THE POSSIBLE SITE OF A HOUSE. — I discovered a couple of weeks ago that the web site of the Virginia Commonwealth University contains an on-line annotated text of "Walden" (www.vcu.edu/engweb/eng385/walden). In the commentary to the first paragraph of Chapter II, the annotator enlists 7 puns, 5 of which do not figure in the list of Mr. Donald Ross, Jr. The first pun, according to the annotator, is the word "site" in the first sentence ("site" is also "sight"), the other 4 are "surveyed", "husbandry", "deed" and "dearly". This has made me wonder if sometimes the literary critics are not too zealous in their search for puns, but I would like to have your opinion and, if possible, Mr. Ross's opinion, too.

Thank you for bringing Ann's annotated text to my attention. Ann and I have had extended discussions from time to time but frankly I was unaware that she had created anything this sophisticated.

I agree with your assessment, that the academic impulse has been to be far too diligent in its search for "puns." There is a purpose to this careful exegesis of texts, but it should limit itself to exegesis which may potentially serve the reader. One should have one's audience in mind. One is not filling a granary with the maximum possible amount of grain.

Professor Donald, what say you?

97. ... TOOK HIS WORD FOR HIS DEED... — This has been identified as a phrase with double meaning both by the aforementioned annotator and Mr. Ross. The first meaning, I would guess, is "instead of the sales contract, what I got from the farmer was a nice chat", right? What is the second meaning?

Well, it seems to me that Thoreau is seeking here to intercept the ordinary dichotomy between "mere" words, on the one hand, and real work in the world, actions that change things, etc., on the other hand, by offering that words are not mere words, they are performances, they are actions, the uttering of words, the staging of conversations, the establishment of human relationships, these are things that we **do**. They are not less important. Sometimes it would be more serious activity, to have a conversation in a wood, than to merely chop it down in the usual mundane manner and sell the timber and put the money in the bank.

98. ...CULTIVATED IT, AND HIM TOO TO SOME EXTENT... — Does "it" refer to the conversation?

Primarily, to the farm. Cultivated it, in his imagination.

99. WHEREVER I SAT, THERE I MIGHT LIVE, AND THE LANDSCAPE RADIATED FROM ME ACCORDINGLY.

This section happens to be the earliest of the materials that would find their way into the manuscript. This is Draft A stuff. Thoreau extrapolated this while reading a long didactic poem by William Cooper, titled "The Sofa," in a multi-volume edition of British poetry.

— I wonder if you are acquainted with the book “Thoreau‘s Redemptive Imagination” by Frederick Garber. A friend of mine brought it from the USA some years ago, and it is the only piece of academic literary criticism on Thoreau that I have had a chance to read. In the first chapter of the book the author develops a whole theory of the principle of Centrality in Thoreau’s thinking. In case you have read the book, I would appreciate your judgement on it.

Well, you know, THOREAU’S REDEMPTIVE IMAGINATION was issued more than a couple of decades ago, and Garber’s THOREAU’S FABLE OF INSCRIBING has now been issued, as of 1991. Here is something I once wrote on Garber’s early work, for what it is worth. I think you will appreciate, as you read this, that at the time I was being influenced not only by Garber’s earlier work, but also Donald Ross’s more recent book:

> **In the two manuscripts on Thoreau’s table at the same time (the first an attempt to condense a trip into a mythological week cycle, the second an attempt to condense a habitation into a mythological year cycle) Thoreau was of course for artistic purposes of unity “falsifying” the processes of time. He was not reporting what actually had occurred. Instead of recording the eternally presented instant as it changed, he was “mispresenting” thoughts he had thought in the past, and written down in his journals, and experiences he had had in the past, and written down in his journals, and memories of thoughts he had had, and memories of experiences he had had, as being present, when actually what was present was a journal with scribbling on its sheets, and a brain in which various memories were racing around. How can a writer/ philosopher valorize the present by reworking such matters of the past? Frederick Garber thinks he can account for this through the concepts “ritual” and “redemption”:**
>
> **“Ritual performances, and those allied to them, are refutations of temporal distance. As a ritualist who redeems the time, Thoreau absorbs and uses the past to give a fuller dimension of meaning to the present. When he repeats these old actions, he is not only performing his own acts but those of others as well. In doing so, he is working in one of redemption’s most traditional modes.**
>
> **“In one way or another the man at the edge is always refuting time because his position necessarily involves him in pure presentness. Ritual, of course, puts its participants into touch with the eternally present; that is, with timelessness. Yet even when Thoreau is not concerned with echoing the past but with facing the new and the wild he can find himself in a state of absolute immediacy. In “Walking” Thoreau pushed the meaning of his perambulations in various directions, one of which, a version of the “fronting” he encouraged in all of his books, kept him in a place that was forever new: “One who pressed forward incessantly … would always find himself in a new country or wilderness, and surrounded by the raw material of life” (“Walking”). Compulsive walking, with its energetic exploratory drive into the wild, is a perpetual refashioning of perimeters, an activity in which one is neither in the future, which one is always just breaking into, nor in the past, which one is always just putting behind oneself. There is no question of bringing the past into the present, as Thoreau does with his ritualistic gestures, but of staying between the past and the future.**
>
> **“In a more static version of this positioning of self Thoreau talks, in WALDEN, of being anxious “to stand on the meeting of two eternities, the past and future, which is precisely the present moment; to toe that line.” The line is the edge where the developed or redeemed ends and the “raw material of life,” the wild, begins.”**

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100. I DISCOVERED MANY A SITE FOR A HOUSE NOT LIKELY TO BE SOON IMPROVED, WHICH SOME MIGHT HAVE THOUGHT TOO FAR FROM THE VILLAGE, BUT TO MY EYES THE VILLAGE WAS TOO FAR FROM IT — Well, this sounds to me like "2x3 equals 3x2" but Thoreau clearly wants to maintain that 2x3 is just the opposite of 3x2. What is it that makes this mathematics of mine wrong?

What Thoreau is saying is that the site has valuable attributes which the village unfortunately lacks. The village should be "closer" to that site not in actual map distance, but rather in terms of **similarity** of spirit. Perhaps the site is tranquil whereas Concord is unnecessarily bustling. Concord should be closer to the site, in tranquility of spirit. Perhaps the site is clean whereas downtown Concord is somewhat soiled. Concord should be closer to that site, in terms of cleanliness.

101. MY IMAGINATION CARRIED ME SO FAR THAT I EVEN HAD THE REFUSAL OF SEVERAL FARMS — what should by understood by "refusal" — a "no" after an initial "yes" (like the case with the Hollowell farm), or a straightforward "no" to the question: "Would you sell your farm to me"?

This is a technical real estate term. The "refusal" of a piece of real estate is an owned piece of property, consisting of the right to back out of a deal. You know how it is for capitalism, everything that can be for sale is for sale. This is a constructed entity, a term of art like "residuals" or "usufruct," and one can even pay money to obtain such a right. There are several varieties. There is for instance "first refusal," which is the right to have the **first say** of whether to complete or to back out of a deal, before any other interested party has any opportunity to jump in. 2. "The nearest that I came to actual possession was when I bought the Hollowell place" — When I did the first translation, without your database comfortably at hand, I was pretty much confused about the peculiar style of buying a farm that Thoreau is describing here. Now, with the help of Kouroo, I found out that "I bought" actually means "I made a deposit of 10 bucks". As a translator, I often wish Thoreau were more precise in telling his stories.

As a skilled writer, Thoreau knew how to sketch the outlines and leave stuff to be filled in, in your imagination. He is not writing a book of instructions for potential real estate dealers, so he can safely let you connect the dots.... 3. "...and be buried in it first, that it may please me the more at last". — What about the words "first" and "at last"? Do you think they are important? In Latvian the sentence would sound better without them.

He means that one may suspend such judgments until the entire affair is complete, but since he is speaking of life, and since one actually cannot make such judgments after life is over, this involves a complete suspension of judgment forever. (Also, who can be said to possess a piece of real estate, more than the person who is buried in it? —We say of such a person, that they "bought the farm.":-)

Colleagues,

I agree with Austin's raising the idea of excessive finding of synonyms (in his mailing of June 19th). For example, in principle, "eye" and "I" are always possible word plays, but to flag each possible instance would be pointlessly overwhelming. Of course, the pun is exploited rarely.

However, in the context of a translation, it might be useful to err on the side of pointing to such possibilities (in footnotes), since the echoes in English will likely become lost unless an underlying etymology (through Greek or Latin) might show through.

I also have a comment on the first passage here — see below.

In message <19990620210734.RTRD24324.mail.rdc2.occa.home.com@CX518637 Austin Meredith writes:
> 1. "My imagination carried me so far that I even had the refusal of several farms" — what should by understood by "refusal" — a "no" after an initial "yes" (like the case with the Hollowell farm), or a straightforward "no" to the question: "Would you sell your farm to me"?

> This is a technical real estate term. The "refusal" of a piece of real estate is an owned piece of property, consisting of the right to back out of a deal.

I think this also plays with the general idea of imaginative land deals, where one can buy, sell, offer, etc., without any material loss or gain. I can pretend to sell every house on my block, and get a series of refusals on the grounds that I'm not offering enough of my money.

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102. THE PRESENT WAS MY NEXT EXPERIMENT OF THIS KIND, WHICH I PURPOSE TO DESCRIBE MORE AT LENGTH... — It seems obvious that "present" here means "my present life in the woods". It is a bit funny that Thoreau is contradicting what he says at the very beginning: "At present I am a sojourner in civilized life again".

    Thoreau is distinguishing between two experiments, the former abortive and the latter the sojourn in Walden Woods. The abortive experiment was his having made a deposit of earnest money on the Hollowell farm, abortive because the Hollowell family had backed out of the deal. There are two distinct usages of the word "present" here. In the case of "The present was my next experiment," the word "present" is an adjective modifier of the noun "experiment," and thus **only obliquely** refer to temporality. It simply refers to "this experiment rather than the other prior abortive one." In the case of "At present I am a sojourner," the word "present" modified a suppressed noun "time," as in the full phrase "at the present (adj.) time (n.)." Clear as mud?:-)

103. OLYMPUS IS BUT THE OUTSIDE OF THE EARTH EVERYWHERE — How would you paraphrase or interpret this sentence?

    All places are equally sacred.

104. ...BUT I WAS SO LOW IN THE WOODS... — does it mean "deep in the woods", or does it refer to the geographic relief?

    The latter. He is saying that the surrounding hills with their tall trees formed a complete horizon, so that he had no distant vistas at all such as of Mount Monadnock or a village church steeple or anything of that nature.

105. ...WHENEVER I LOOKED OUT ON THE POND IT IMPRESSED ME LIKE A TARN HIGH UP ON THE SIDE OF A MOUNTAIN — How can a lake be situated on a side of a mountain which has to be slopy by definition?

    Actually, this sort of mountain tarn is quite common. Imagine a sloping ravine that has a little valley floor in it for a ways, a level spot before another dropoff, with a deep little lake there in that little valley floor. Such landscapes frequently form when there has been some sort of landslide hundreds of years before, which has blocked what was once a straight-shot ravine down the side of a mountain. And when you are in the bowl of a tarn, you have no real way to know that you are halfway up the side of a mountain.

106. ...THE WATER, FULL OF LIGHT AND REFLECTIONS, BECOMES A LOWER HEAVEN ITSELF SO MUCH THE MORE IMPORTANT — I wonder if "lower heaven" is just one of Thoreau's metaphors, or does it also have an independent meaning outside this context? In any case, is this lower heaven so much more important because it's closer to the human beings?

    Thoreau is saying the lake and the sky were mirroring one another, so that there was an image of the sky on the still surface of the waters. Yes, the lower image is more important, because it is more substantial, it contains for instance fish, waterbirds and boats coast across its surface, etc.

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107. IT WAS HOMER'S REQUIEM — Does Thoreau mean "a requiem to Homer", or "a requiem written by Homer"? The Russian translator has chosen the first, the Spanish translator — the second option.

That's an interesting piece of info, about the Russian and the Spanish translations! In Thoreau's text, of course, it is ambiguous whether this is "a requiem to Homer" or "a requiem by Homer," and I wonder whether there is any way in Latvian for you to avoid clarifying this ambiguity present in the text. Sometimes ambiguities should be left alone, because of the possibility that this is not an "either this meaning or that meaning" choice, but a "both this meaning **and** that meaning" choice.

108. ...THE SOUL OF MAN, OR ITS ORGANS RATHER, ARE REINVIGORATED EACH DAY... — it's the first time I hear somebody speaking about the organs of the soul of man. How do you understand this?

You've heard of the body being spoken of as the "house" of the soul. This merely takes that image one step further, by realizing that just as a house is divisible into rooms, the body is divisible into various part, organs. When you sweep out a house, what you are doing is sweeping out a series of rooms. Likewise, as refreshing the body refreshes the soul, so also refreshing the organs of the body refreshes the soul.

109. ...BUT IT IS FAR MORE GLORIOUS TO CARVE AND PAINT THE VERY ATMOSPHERE AND MEDIUM THROUGH WHICH WE LOOK, WHICH MORALLY WE CAN DO — Could you give me a synonym for "morally"?

By a conscious endeavor of the spirit and imagination, rather than by looking through a telescope or kaleidoscope.

110. IF WE REFUSED, OR RATHER USED UP, SUCH PALTRY INFORMATION AS WE GET, THE ORACLES WOULD DISTINCTLY INFORM US HOW THIS MIGHT BE DONE — Thoreau turns enigmatic here again, at least it seems so to me. Do you think he uses the word "oracles" in the same sense as in the next chapter when he says: "For what are the classics but the noblest recorded thoughts of man? They are the only oracles which are not decayed..."? I am not sure also if I understand the first part of the sentence. Do you have it clear what kind of information does he have in mind — information coming from where? Thoreau would agree that a man may potentially receive information directly from higher/divine sources, or from contemplating the nature, but evidently these are not the sources that he is speaking about in this concrete phrase. On the other hand, he would surely disagree that the mundane/secular information sources could also channel some valuable information that could be used by man to elevate his life. If these two information sources are excluded, what else remains?

I have presumed here that Thoreau is to be understood in terms of the 19th-Century doctrine of the sympathies. The paltry information we get is through looking around us, and noting what it is that we note. Our eye lites on something and we notice it. Why was it that particular thing to which our eye was attracted? There must be some sort of sympathy, some sort of resonance, between some internal condition of our being, and that external phenomenon, or we would not have been attracted in such a manner, and would have noticed some other thing rather than what we did in fact notice. I think Thoreau's reference to the "oracles" here is threatening. The Greek oracles were rather bloody things, issuing dire pronouncements with little regard for the impact on people's lives. Receiving an oracle from the pythoness could destroy one's life. One indulged in that sort of risky prognostication only under dire necessity.

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