


HENRY'S RELATIVES

MIN THOREAU



Although she was not the first Thoreau family cat (there had been Sam Black, for instance, in 1840 ) , a gray Maltese cat named "Min" (this was, perhaps, short for "Minott") lived with the Thoreau family during at least 1856-1859.¹ Each spring, Thoreau picked catnip in the woods for it.

1856

February 1, Friday: On the front page of his newspaper, Frederick Douglass featured an anonymous favorable review of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *THE MAY FLOWER AND MISCELLANEOUS WRITINGS*.



February 1: Our kitten, Min, two-thirds grown, was playing with Sophia's broom this morning, as she was sweeping the parlor, when she suddenly went into a fit, dashed around the room, and, the door being opened, rushed up two flights of stairs and leaped from the attic window to the ice and snow by the side of the doorstep, –a descent of a little more than twenty feet,– passed round the house and was lost. But she made her

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1. Seaburg, Alan. "Min Thoreau," *Thoreau Society Bulletin* 101 (1967):7-8

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appearance again about noon, at the window, quite well and sound in every joint, even playful and frisky.

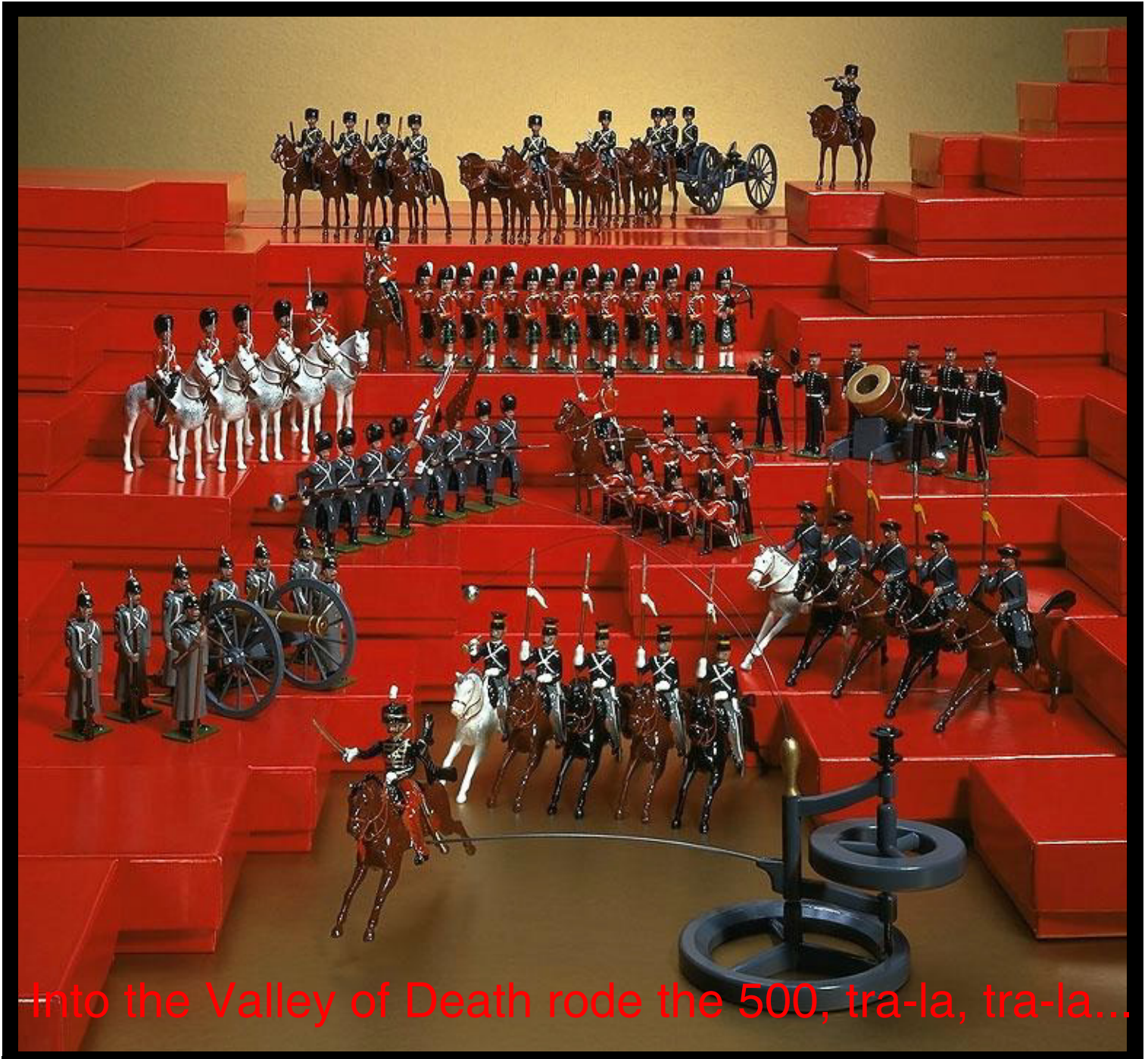
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The Crimean War between Russia and British-French forces came to an end when, in Vienna, Russia agreed to terms for peace. In London, returning War veterans were introducing the “cigarettes” they had discovered while in Russia.



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February 28, Thursday: In West Derby, England, [Nathaniel Hawthorne](#), 51 years of age, father of three, visited the workhouse which he would write about in "Outside Glimpses of English Poverty" in OUR OLD HOME. While there he was sufficiently pestered by an insistent foundling of about the age of his own youngest child Rose, that he could not help but pick it up and hold it "a little while":

After this, we went to the ward where the children were kept, and, on entering this, we saw, in the first place, two or three unlovely and unwholesome little imps, who were lazily playing together. One of them (a child about six years old, but I know not whether girl or boy) immediately took the strangest fancy for me. It was a wretched, pale, half-torpid little thing, with a humor in its eyes which the Governor said was the scurvy. I never saw, till a few moments afterwards, a child that I should feel less inclined to fondle.

But this little, sickly, humor-eaten fright prowled around me, taking hold of my skirts, following at my heels, and at last held up its hands, smiled in my face, and, standing directly before me, insisted on my taking it up! Not that it said a word, for I rather think it was underwitted, and could not talk; but its face expressed such perfect confidence that it was going to be taken up and made much of, that it was impossible not to do it. It was as if God had promised the child this favor on my behalf, and that I must needs fulfil the contract. I held my undesirable burden a little while; and, after setting the child down, it still followed me, holding two of my fingers and playing with them, just as if it were a child of my own. It was a foundling, and out of all human kind it chose me to be its father! We went up stairs into another ward; and, on coming down again, there was this same child waiting for me, with a sickly smile round its defaced mouth, and in its dim red eyes.



February 28, 1856: Mother says that the cat lay on her bread one night and caused it to rise finely all

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around her....

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Our young maltese cat Min, which has been absent five cold nights, the ground covered deep with crusted snow, –her first absence,– and given up for dead, has at length returned at daylight, awakening the whole house with her mewing and afraid of the strange girl we have got in the meanwhile. She is a mere wrack of skin and bones, with a sharp nose and wiry tail. She is as one returned from the dead. There is as much rejoicing as at the return of the prodigal son, and if we had a fatted calf we should kill it. Various are the conjectures as to her adventures, — whether she has had a fit, been shut up somewhere, or lost, torn in pieces by a certain terrier or frozen to death. In the meanwhile she is fed with the best that the house affords, minced meats and saucers of warmed milk, and, with the aid of unstinted sleep in all laps in succession, is fast picking up her crumbs. She has already found her old place under the stove, and is preparing to make a stew of her brains there.

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November 30, Sunday: The Unitarian church in Washington DC repelled a motion to reinstate their preacher (who had stated baldly that if it came to a choice, he would prefer the horror of civil war over a continuation in America of human enslavement), the Reverend Moncure Daniel Conway, so he became free to accept a salary of \$2,000.⁰⁰ per year in Cincinnati, Ohio.²



November 30, Sunday, 1856: The very cat was full of spirits this morning, rushing about and frisking on the snow-crust, which bore her alone. When I came home from New Jersey the other day, was struck with the sudden growth and stateliness of our cat Min, –his cheeks puffed out like a regular grimalkin. I suspect it is a new coat of fur against the winter chiefly. The cat is a third bigger than a month ago, like a patriarch wrapped in furs, and a mouse a day, I hear, is nothing to him now.

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December 4, Thursday: The Daughters of Providence departed from San Francisco, California on their way to Fort Vancouver in the Washington Territory.



Dec. 4. Ceased raining and mizzling last evening, and cleared off, with a high northwest wind, which shook the house, coming in fitful gusts, but only they who slept on the west sides of houses knew of it. 7.30 A.M. — Take a run down the riverside. Scare up a few sparrows, which take shelter in Keyes’s arbor-vita row. The snow has now settled, owing to the rain, and presents no longer a level surface, but a succession of little hills and hollows, as if the whole earth had been a potato or corn field, and there is a slight crust to it. Dark waves are chasing each other across the river from northwest to southeast and breaking the edge of the snow ice which has formed for half a rod in width along the edge, and the fragments of broken ice, what arctic voyagers call “brash,” carry forward the undulation. I am pleased to see from afar the highest water-mark of a spring freshet on Cheney’s boat-house, a level light-colored mark about an inch wide running the whole length of the building, now several years old, where probably a thin ice chafed it. 2 P.M. — By Clamshell and back over Hubbard’s Bridge.


2. To get a sense of what that amounted to in today’s money, consult <http://www.measuringworth.com/exchange/>



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I notice that the swallow-holes in the bank behind Dennis's, which is partly washed away, are flat-elliptical, three times or more as wide horizontally as they are deep vertically, or about three inches by one.

Saw and heard *cheep* faintly one tree sparrow [**American Tree Sparrow**  *Spizella arborea*], the neat chestnut crowned and winged and white-barred bird, perched on a large and solitary white birch. So clean and tough, made to withstand the winter. This color reminds me of the upper side of the shrub oak leaf. I love the few homely colors of Nature at this season, —her strong wholesome browns, her sober and primeval grays, her celestial blue, her vivacious green, her pure, cold, snowy white. An *F. hyemalis* also.

In the sprout-land by the road, in the woods this side of C. Miles's, much gray goldenrod is mixed with the shrub oak. It reminds me of the color of the rabbits which run there. Thus Nature feeds her children chiefly with color. I have no doubt that it is an important relief to the eyes which have long rested on snow, to rest on brown oak leaves and the bark of trees. We want the greatest variety within the smallest compass, and yet without glaring diversity, and we have it in the colors of the withered oak leaves. The white, so curled and shrivelled and *pale*; the black (?), more flat and glossy and darker brown; the red, much like the black, but *perhaps* less dark, and less deeply cut. The scarlet still occasionally retains some blood in its veins.

Smooth white reaches of ice, as long as the river, on each side are threatening to bridge over its dark-blue artery any night. They remind me of a trap that is set for it, which the frost will spring. Each day at present, the wriggling river nibbles off the edges of the trap which have advanced in the night. It is a close contest between day and night, heat and cold.

Already you see the tracks of sleds leading by unusual routes, where will be seen no trace of them in summer, into far fields and woods, crowding aside and pressing down the snow to where some heavy log or stone has thought itself secure, and the spreading tracks also of the heavy, slow-paced oxen, of the well-shod farmer, who turns out his feet. Ere long, when the cold is stronger, these tracks will lead the walker deep into remote swamps impassable in summer. All the earth is a highway then.

I see where the pretty brown bird-like birch scales and winged seeds have been blown into the numerous hollows of the thin crusted snow. So bountiful a table is spread for the birds. For how many thousand miles this grain is scattered over the earth, under the feet of all walkers, in Boxboro and Cambridge alike! and rarely an eye distinguishes it.

Sophia says that just before I came home Min caught a mouse and was playing with it in the yard. It had got away from her once or twice, and she had caught it again; and now it was stealing off again, as she lay complacently watching it with her paws tucked under her, when her friend Riordan's stout but solitary cock stepped up inquisitively, looked down at it with one eye, turning his head, then picked it up by the tail and gave it two or three whacks on the ground, and giving it a dexterous toss into the air, caught it in its open mouth, and it went head foremost and alive down his capacious throat in the twinkling of an eye, never again to be seen in this world, Min, all the while, with paws comfortably tucked under her, looking on unconcerned. What matters it one mouse more or less to her? The cock walked off amid the currant bushes, stretched his neck up, and gulped once or twice, and the deed was accomplished, and then he crowed lustily in celebration of the exploit. It might be set down among the *gesta* (if not *digesta*) *Gallorum*. There were several human witnesses. It is a question whether Min ever understood where that mouse went to. Min sits composedly sentinel, with paws tucked under her, a good part of her days at present, by some ridiculous little hole, the possible entryway of a mouse. She has a habit of stretching or sharpening her claws on all smooth hair-bottomed chairs and sofas, greatly to my mother's vexation.

He who abstains from visiting another for magnanimous reasons enjoys better society alone.

I for one am not bound to flatter men. That is not exactly the value of me.

How many thousand acres are there now of pitched blue-curls and ragged wormwood rising above the shallow snow? The granary of the birds. They were not observed against the dark ground, but the first snow comes and reveals them. Then I come to fields in which the fragrant everlasting, straw-colored and almost odorless, and the dark taller St. John's-wort prevail.

When I bought my boots yesterday, Hastings ran over his usual rigmarole. Had he any stout old-fashioned cowhide boots? Yes, he thought he could suit me. "There's something that'll turn water about as well as anything. Billings had a pair just like them the other [day], and he said they kept his feet as dry as a bone. But what's more than that, they were made above a year ago upon honor. They are just the thing, you may depend on it. I had an eye to you when I was making them." "But they are too soft and thin for me. I want them to be thick and stand out from my foot." "Well, there is another pair, maybe a little thicker. I'll tell you what it is, these were made of dry hide."

Both were warranted single leather and not split. I took the last. But after wearing there round this cold day I found that the little snow which rested on them and melted wet the upper leather through like paper and wet my feet, and I told him of it, that he might have an offset to Billings's experience. "Well, you can't expect a new pair of boots to turn water at first. I tell the farmers that the time to buy boots is at midsummer, or when they are hoeing their potatoes, and the pores have a chance to get filled with dirt."

It is remarkably good sleighing to-day, considering the little snow mid the rain of yesterday, but it is slippery and hobbly for walkers.

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BIGELOW

My first botany, as I remember, was Bigelow's "Plants of Boston and Vicinity," which I began to use about twenty years ago, looking chiefly for the popular names and the short references to the localities of plants, even without any regard to the plant. I also learned the names of many, but without using any system, and forgot them soon. I was not inclined to pluck flowers; preferred to leave them where they were, liked them best there. I was never in the least interested in plants in the house. But from year to year we look at Nature with new eyes. About half a dozen years ago I found myself again attending to plants with more method, looking out the name of each one and remembering it. I began to bring them home in my hat, a straw one with a scaffold listing to it, which I called my botany-box. I never used any other, and when some whom I visited were evidently surprised at its dilapidated look, as I deposited it on their front entry table, I assured them it was not so much my hat as my botany-box. I remember gazing with interest at the swamps about those days and wondering if I could ever attain to such familiarity with plants that I should know the species of every twig and leaf in them, that I should be acquainted with every plant (excepting grasses and cryptogamous ones), summer and winter, that I saw. Though I knew most of the flowers, and there were not in any particular swamp more than half a dozen shrubs that I did not know, yet these made it seem like a maze to me, of a thousand strange species, and I even thought of commencing at one end and looking it faithfully and laboriously through till I knew it all. I little thought that in a year or two I should have attained to that knowledge without all that labor. Still I never studied botany, and do not to-day systematically, the most natural system is still so artificial. I wanted to know my neighbors, if possible, — to get a little nearer to them. I soon found myself observing when plants first blossomed and leafed, and I followed it up early and late, far and near, several years in succession, running to different sides of the town and into the neighboring towns, often between twenty and thirty miles in a day. I often visited a particular plant four or five miles distant, half a dozen times within a fortnight, that I might know exactly when it opened, beside attending to a great many others in different directions and some of them equally distant, at the same time. At the same time I had an eye for birds and whatever else might offer.

1859

September 12, Monday: [Min Thoreau](#) achieved a last mention in [Henry Thoreau](#)'s journal on this day.



September 12: P.M. To Moore's Swamp and Great Fields.

Elder-berries are apparently in prime, generally black, though many have been plucked by birds. The four kinds of bidens (frondosa, connata, cernua, and chrysanthemoides) abound now, but much of the Beckii was drowned by the rise of the river. Omitting this, the first two are inconspicuous flowers, cheap and ineffectual, commonly without petals, like the erechthites, but the third and fourth are conspicuous and interesting, expressing by their brilliant yellow the ripeness of the low grounds. Most of the late flowers are already associated in my mind with cooler and clearer, flashing weather, as the witch-hazel, the gentians, the Bidens cernua, Spiranthes cernua, Polygonum amphibium and hydropiperoides in its prime, and the Polygala sanguinea, still prevalent. I stand in Moore's Swamp and look at Garfield's dry bank, now before the woods generally are changed at all. How ruddy ripe that dry hillside by the swamp, covered with goldenrods and clumps of hazel bushes here and there, now more or less scarlet. The golden-rods on the top and the slope of the hill are the Solidago nemoralis at the base the taller S. altissima. The whole hillside is perfectly dry and ripe. Many a dry field now, like that of Sted Buttrick's on the Great Fields, is one dense mass of the bright-golden recurved wands of the Solidago nemoralis (a little past prime), waving in the wind and turning upward to the light hundreds, if not a thousand, flowerets each. It is the greatest mass of conspicuous flowers in the year, and uniformly from one to two feet high, just rising above the withered grass all over the largest fields, now when pumpkins and other yellow fruits begin to gleam, now before the woods are noticeably changed. Some field where the grass was too thin and wiry to pay for cutting, with great purplish tufts of Andropogon furcatus, going to seed, interspersed. Such a mass of yellow for this field's last crop! Who that had botanized here in the previous month could have foretold this more profuse and teeming crop? All ringing, as do the low grounds, with the shrilling of crickets and locusts and frequented by honey-bees (i.e. the goldenrod nemoralis). The whole field turns to yellow, as the cuticle of a ripe fruit. This is the season when the prevalence of the goldenrods gives such a ripe and teeming look to the dry fields and to the swamps. They are now (the arguta being about done) the nemoralis and altissima, both a little past prime. The S. nemoralis spreads its legions over the dry plains now, as soldiers muster in the fall. It is a muster of all its forces, which I review, eclipsing all other similar shows of the year. Fruit of August and September, sprung from the sun-dust. The fields and hills appear in their yellow uniform. There are certain fields so full of them that they might give their name to the town or region,

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as one place in England is called Saffron Walden. Perhaps the general prevalence of yellow is greater now when many individual plants are past prime.



If the name was not derived from that of some English locality, [^]Saffron Walden [^]for instance [^]perhaps I have ~~conjectured that~~ [^]who knows but it was called, originally, Walled-in Pond.



I notice in Moore's Swamp that though the potato vines were killed long since, few if any weeds are. They survive to perpetuate their race, until severer frosts come. The beach plums are about ripe; the black cherries nearly gone. I start a flock of five turtle doves from the dry Great Fields, near buckwheat. They go off with a whistling note. A profusion of wild fruits, agreeable to the eye if not palate; is seen along some walls and hedges now. Take this dry wall-side by Sted Buttrick's field now, though probably not remarkably rich. Here I find elder-berries, panicked cornel, acorns of various kinds, black cherry (nearly gone), green-briar berries, grapes, hazelnuts (the pale-brown nuts now peeping between the husks), alternate cornel (which is about done), sumach, chokeberry, and haws; and earlier there were shad-berries, thimble-berries, and various kinds of huckle- and black-berries, etc. Some shrub oak acorn cups are empty, but they have not many fallen. Large yellowish caterpillars, heaped on the leaves, have so stripped some shrub oaks as to expose and reveal the acorns. The other day a tender-hearted man came to the depot and informed Neighbor Wild that there was a Maltese cat caught in a steel trap near the depot, which perhaps was his. Wild thought it must be his or "Min Thoreau." She had tried to jump over a fence with the trap on her leg, but had lodged one side while the trap hung the other. The man could not stand to open the trap, the cat scratched so, but at length he threw the trap over, and so the cat went home, dragging it to Wild's (for it was his cat), and the man advised him to keep the trap to pay the one who set it for his inhumanity. I suspect, however, that the cat had wandered off to Swamp Bridge Brook and there trod in a trap set for mink or the like. It is a wonder it does not happen oftener.

CAT

I saw a star-nosed mole dead in the path on Conantum yesterday, with no obvious wound.



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contact the project at <Kouroo@kouroo.info>.

"It's all now you see. Yesterday won't be over until tomorrow and tomorrow began ten thousand years ago."

- Remark by character "Garin Stevens"
in William Faulkner's INTRUDER IN THE DUST



Prepared: October 24, 2013

ARRGH AUTOMATED RESEARCH REPORT
GENERATION HOTLINE



This stuff presumably looks to you as if it were generated by a human. Such is not the case. Instead, upon someone's request we have pulled it out of the hat of a pirate that has grown out of the shoulder of our pet parrot "Laura" (depicted above). What these chronological lists are: they are research reports compiled by ARRGH algorithms out of a database of data modules which we term the Kouroo Contexture. This is data mining. To respond to such a request for information, we merely push a button.



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Commonly, the first output of the program has obvious deficiencies and so we need to go back into the data modules stored in the contexture and do a minor amount of tweaking, and then we need to punch that button again and do a recompile of the chronology – but there is nothing here that remotely resembles the ordinary “writerly” process which you know and love. As the contents of this originating contexture improve, and as the programming improves, and as funding becomes available (to date no funding whatever has been needed in the creation of this facility, the entire operation being run out of pocket change) we expect a diminished need to do such tweaking and recompiling, and we fully expect to achieve a simulation of a generous and untiring robotic research librarian. Onward and upward in this brave new world.

First come first serve. There is no charge.
Place your requests with <Kouroo@kouroo.info>.
Arrgh.