

Thoreau's Reading
A Study in Intellectual History

WITH BIBLIOGRAPHICAL CATALOGUE

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Preface

THIS VOLUME consists of an analytical overview of the principal developments in Thoreau's reading during the course of his career from 1833, when he matriculated at Harvard, to his death in 1862, and a bibliographical catalogue of his reading during the same years. The catalogue is organized conventionally by author and title, and contains standard bibliographical data as well as information about Thoreau's source for particular items, when known, and citations of the references to each work in his writings. It is followed by an index of short titles. I have included not only works quoted or referred to in Thoreau's writings for publication and in his Journal, but also works cited in his unpublished notebooks and commonplace books and in his correspondence, his library charging records, his required texts at Harvard, and of course the catalogue of his personal library. At the same time that I have tried to be comprehensive, however, I have also been fairly restrictive in defining what constitutes "reading." I have excluded works alluded to without sufficient particularity to indicate direct acquaintance, and works proposed by scholars as "possible sources" for passages in his writings—unless, again, there is corroborating evidence of his having actually read them. Similarly, titles Thoreau listed for future reference or study are not included.¹ Books, articles in periodicals or collections, pamphlets, and, wherever traceable, articles in newspapers and other ephemeral publications are all included.

Both sections of this book are intended to serve as primary tools for the study of Thoreau's thought and art, but the expository section is

1. The most extensive of these lists of works he planned to consult may be found in the endpapers of the various Indian books (see abbreviations for Bibliographical Catalogue, pp. 114-115); see also Kenneth Walter Cameron, "Ungathered Thoreau Reading Lists," in *The Transcendentalists and Minerva*, 3 vols. (Hartford: Transcendental Books, 1958), 2:359-388.

less neutral an instrument than the catalogue. Obviously, principles of selection came into play, and the essay as a whole reflects my judgment about major developments and shifts in Thoreau's interests during his life. I was especially concerned to trace the course of his reading in disciplines—history and natural history, for example—that were of increasing importance to him as he grew older but that have received relatively scant attention from scholars previously. Concomitantly, I felt that I could afford to devote less attention proportionately to other of his interests that have already received extensive treatment: Oriental scriptures and philosophy, the subject of Arthur Christy's *The Orient in American Transcendentalism* (1932) and a host of subsequent studies; travel literature, treated by John Aldridge Christie's *Thoreau as World Traveler* (1965); and his classical studies, the topic of Ethel Seybold's *Thoreau: The Quest and the Classics* (1951). None of these works pretended to have treated its subject exhaustively and much remains to be done in all three areas, but I have written my introduction to Thoreau's reading on the assumption that the reader will be familiar with or will want to consult these standard works.

Otherwise, I have tried in the introductory essay to assemble the bits of evidence furnished by his reading of particular texts as though they were the pieces to a puzzle in intellectual history, the putting together of which would provide a picture not only of Thoreau's shifting interests over the years but also of his participation in the life of his times, of his engagement with some of the most pressing and controversial issues of mid-nineteenth-century American literature and culture: the tension between conventional, classical literary culture and the new views of literary nationalists and Transcendentalists; the nature and destiny of America itself (in the context of a period of unbridled expansionism); the rights and responsibilities of government, society, and individuals, and the points at which they collided with one another, especially over the issue of slavery and governmental authority; the history, nature, and destiny of native Americans (in the cultural context of dispossession and genocide); and the escalating scientific controversies of the age that pitted apologists for special creation and design against the gathering forces of materialist and positivist interpretations of nature. Despite his reputation as an iconoclast who withdrew from or was harshly critical of his age (a pose reinforced by his modern reputation as a detached and meticulous craftsman), Thoreau was a writer who participated fully if idiosyncratically in his age, and there is less a contradiction here than may at first appear. It took someone widely familiar with newspapers and the level of current events described in them to compose the marvelous critique of the popular press in *Walden*, and the same holds true for many of his other targets,

from the railroads to politics to the gold rush. The satirist and social critic is of necessity profoundly affected by and implicated in his age, whatever his rhetorical stance toward it may be. And if we look past the monumental preeminence of *Walden*, it is apparent that Thoreau was a man of letters whose writing treats a wide variety of subjects, each more or less reflecting major preoccupations of his times: politics, reform, government, literature, travel, the Indian, wilderness, history, natural history, even sexuality.

Even more fundamental to my purpose, however, is the fact that Thoreau was a writer, and as such the primary tools of his trade were the works of other writers. As a thoroughgoing Transcendentalist, he could echo Emerson's scorn for the book when it was held up as a sacred object and the truly sacred inspiring force behind the book—the act of creation itself—was lost sight of. And he was careful, likewise, to avoid disclosure of many of his own most important sources, in order to preserve the bloom of originality in his works. But in other moods, especially in the privacy of his Journal, he could express an almost Jamesian sense of the enormous richness of accumulated history and tradition out of which the serious writer works. After going through the shelves of the Harvard Library in 1852 in search of the essential books on the early exploration of Canada, he mused: "Those old books suggested a certain fertility, an Ohio soil, as if they were making a humus for new literature to spring in. I heard the bellowing of bullfrogs and the hum of mosquitoes reverberating through the thick embossed covers when I had closed the book. Decayed literature makes the richest of all soils" (JL 3.353).

Of an innately scholarly cast of mind, Thoreau read widely, deeply, and eclectically; and as he grew older he kept more and more extensive notes on his reading, although he had begun the practice of systematic note taking in college. As any careful reader of *Walden* knows, his writings reflect this bookish side no less than his love of outdoor life. One of the principal obstacles for students reading the book today, in fact, is what appears to be a bewildering thicket of allusions to everything from relatively obscure classical mythology to contemporary pseudo-science (the "Symmes Hole" of the conclusion). Virtually all the Transcendentalists were energetic readers, in spite of their proclamations of disdain for convention and tradition, and Thoreau, if he lacked the deep knowledge of the German literature and philosophy that was so seminal to the movement—the kind of familiarity that Margaret Fuller or Theodore Parker possessed, for example—was more deeply read in other subjects (notably classical and early English literature, American history, and natural science) than any of his circle. He drew upon this reading in all the obvious and not-so-obvious ways

that reading affects writing, and in the introductory essay I have speculated both upon the influence of particular works on his own writing and upon his basic orientation to the various contemporary disciplines according to which his interests may be classified. I have attempted to place him, as much as possible, in his times and to assess his studies in the contexts provided by the disciplines as they then existed rather than by what we now know about them or by current theory or methodology.²

Ralph Cudworth, whose *True Intellectual System of the Universe* was one of the eclectic philosophical works Thoreau read with Emerson in the early 1840s, expressed a sentiment in his preface that I can only repeat in mine: "Though, I confess, I have seldom taken any great pleasure in reading other men's apologies, yet must I at this time make some myself." First and foremost, I am sensible that this work is by its nature as well as my own shortcomings incomplete. I have been unable to identify some references, and I have doubtless missed many others. Anyone who has attempted to annotate or identify all the works quoted by a writer as widely read and allusive as Thoreau can testify to the impossibility of achieving completeness. New sources and new evidence of his reading will doubtless continue to come to light, especially as the definitive edition of his writings currently in progress at Princeton University Press and the University of California—Santa Barbara moves toward completion, and I have already benefited greatly by the work completed by its staff. But a project such as this is necessarily a draft of a draft, and as I have so obviously built upon the labors of others I trust that it will at least prove useful and serve those who will build upon and improve it. I should be grateful to learn of omissions and errors, particularly regarding specific editions of works that Thoreau used. I have not been able to examine all the relevant editions of every work he quotes from, and as the headnote to the catalogue indicates, I have frequently cited the most recent contemporary edition when his source for a given work (e.g., Emerson's library) was not evident. I have, of course, wherever possible cited the editions he used.

It may also be well to call attention to the obvious and state that if a work is listed in the catalogue Thoreau read it—or at least owned it—but if it is not listed the reverse does not hold. Even if I were confident that I had been able to trace to its source and proper edition every reference and quotation in all of Thoreau's writing, there would doubtless be hundreds of works missing from the catalogue. As is the

2. I also follow, for the sake of consistency and clarity, contemporary usage in referring to native Americans as "Indians," despite the cultural biases historically associated with the term.

case for virtually any reader, Thoreau did not leave a record of everything he read: He did not always read with pen in hand, especially during his earlier years; many notes that he did take were surely lost or discarded when their purpose was served; some of his own books have probably disappeared and left no trace (despite the fact that he kept a catalogue of his own library); and many works that he read simply did not register in such a way as to cause him to quote or refer to them in his writings, despite the fact that they may have exerted a considerable influence. We are not always eager to reveal to the world the forces that have most shaped us, and Thoreau, whose trade had more secrets than most, as he said, was especially guarded. He was understandably touchy about the insinuations of his contemporaries that he was merely an imitator of Emerson, and the nature of Transcendental aesthetic theory would tend to inhibit the acknowledgment of profound debt. One did not study religion or philosophy or history to learn systems or to distinguish and discriminate so much as to detect likeness and the uniformity of truth in all ages. Hence, one did not go to school to earlier writers so much as search them for evidence of like-mindedness, and the nature and extent of influence, always a difficult issue to do justice to, is especially nebulous given such an orientation. In any event, this study and its accompanying catalogue can only be a starting point for anyone interested in exploring the myriad sources for and influences upon Thoreau's writing, and I trust that none will stretch the seams when putting on the coat, for it may be of service to those who use it judiciously.

Apologies aside, it is a far pleasanter task to thank the many people and institutions that have helped me over the decade during which this book has been in preparation. I am most grateful to the National-Endowment for the Humanities for a Summer Research Stipend, the Henry E. Huntington Library for a Research Fellowship, and the Graduate School and Office of Research of the University of Missouri-Columbia for a Summer Research Fellowship—each of which was of great help to me at a different stage of writing the introductory monograph and assembling the bibliography.

I also wish to thank the staff members of the following libraries, without whose cooperation my task would simply have been impossible: the Abernethy Library of Middlebury College, the American Antiquarian Society, the Boston Athenaeum, the Boston Public Library, Brown University Library, the Concord Free Public Library (with special thanks to Marcia Moss), the Houghton Library of Harvard University, the Henry E. Huntington Library, the New York Public Library, the Pierpont Morgan Library, Princeton University Library, and

the University of Virginia Library. I also appreciate the faithful efforts of Jeanice Brewer of the Ellis Library of the University of Missouri—Columbia to fill my never-ending requests for interlibrary loan materials.

I have had the benefit of kind and critical readings of earlier versions of my study by Robert A. Gross, Walter Harding, Joseph J. Moldenhauer, Tom Quirk, Robert D. Richardson, Jr., William J. Rossi, Robert F. Sayre, and Elizabeth Hall Witherell. Each had loftier structures of his or her own to raise, but took the time to make corrections and offer suggestions, for which I am very grateful. Although my references will make clear the extent of my debt to him, I wish to acknowledge the invaluable and pioneering work in the collection and publication of primary documents relating to my subject by Kenneth Walter Cameron.

Rebecca Arnold, Rick Boland, Paul Taylor, and Heather Thomas ably assisted with various phases of the research for the book, and Sandy Camargo gave it the benefit of her editorial skills. Paul Taylor performed magical and I fear all too time-consuming feats of computer programming that helped me prepare the bibliography. His contributions have been invaluable. I also wish to thank Julie Apple, Marilynn Keil, Laurinda Jett, and Kathie McCoy of the English Department of the University of Missouri—Columbia for their assistance in typing the manuscript.

Over the years my colleagues and fellow editors at the Thoreau Edition have played a special part in this project, sharing with me their own research into the sources of Thoreau's reading and making available their files and hand lists. I wish to thank especially Carolyn Kappes, Linck C. Johnson, William L. Howarth, Mark Patterson, Steve Quevedo, Nancy Simmons, Kevin Van Anglen, and Elizabeth Hall Witherell.

Special thanks are due Joel Myerson for his support and encouragement of the project in its early stages, and to Henry and Beverly Shames and Lorna and John Mack for putting me up and putting up with me while I was working far from home. Finally, and most importantly, I thank my wife, Sue, to whom this is dedicated, and my children, Sarah and Daniel, without whose expressions of interest this probably would have been done in far less time but far less happily.

Abbreviations

of Thoreau's Writings Used in Parenthetical Documentation

- CC *Cape Cod*,
ed. Joseph J. Moldenhauer
(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988)
- COR *The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau*,
ed. Walter Harding and Carl Bode
(New York: New York University Press, 1958)
- EEM *Early Essays and Miscellanies*,
ed. Joseph J. Moldenhauer and Edwin Moser,
with Alexander Kern
(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975)
- JL *The Journal of Henry David Thoreau*,
ed. Bradford Torrey and Francis H. Allen, 14 vols.
(Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1906)
- MW *The Maine Woods*,
ed. Joseph J. Moldenhauer
(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972)
- PJ *Journal*,
John C. Broderick, general editor,
in *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau*
(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981-);
2 vols. to date:
Journal 1: 1837-1844,
ed. Elizabeth H. Witherell et al. (1981)
and *Journal 2: 1842-1848*, ed. Robert Sattelmeyer (1984)
- RP *Reform Papers*,
ed. Wendell Glick
(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973)
- WA *Walden*,
ed. J. Lyndon Shanley
(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971)
- WE *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*,
ed. Carl Hovde et al.
(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980)