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Thoreau's Characteristic Yankee in Canada

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Thoreau's Characteristic Yankee in Canada
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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by

Sharon Roberts Curry
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APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

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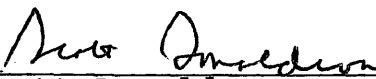


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ABSTRACT

Thoreau's A Yankee in Canada has been largely ignored by the critics, presumably because it has seemed out of character to some, and because Thoreau himself seemed to disparage it both in the book's opening and in a letter to H.B.O. Blake. However, Thoreau's remarks may be read another way, in which case they reveal his frustration at general conditions of the Canadian tour, but specifically, at being unable to make nature his theme in Canada as he did in his other travel writings.

Moreover, Canada's foreign differences conflicted strongly with his own self-subscribed beliefs about individual liberties. Thoreau discovers that his values are missing in Canada. Nowhere does her Church or State dominated culture allow for individualism, self-reliance, or personal independence.

Thoreau assumes at times in the book a Yankee mask through which he distances himself from foreign culture while at the same time proclaiming his strong New England affiliations to his readers. But whether speaking as a Yankee or as himself, Thoreau is basically defensive at being out of his element. The conflict he feels is Concord, or home, versus anything that is foreign. In this way, A Yankee in Canada is undeniably characteristic of Thoreau.

PREFACE

While any armchair reader can name the book inspired by Thoreau's pond-side experiment in living, only an ardent Thoreauvian knows the title of the book which details the one time Thoreau traveled out of the United States. Among Thoreau's books, A Yankee in Canada is most distinguished for being the least read. Currently, no paperback editions of Yankee are in print, as compared with eleven editions of Walden.¹ And whereas twenty-two hardbound editions of Walden are available, Yankee is found in only two editions, one whose selling price of \$69.95 must discourage all but the most devoted Thoreau readers.² The Canada book has clearly fallen into commercial oblivion. But then that is hardly surprising recompense for this five-part book whose history includes an interrupted and unresumed publication after its third part, a candid boo from a customarily admiring friend and disciple, H.B.O. Blake, and a rejoinder from Thoreau which largely dismisses the book. For these reasons and others, critics have seen Thoreau's Canada book as a "bad seed," his labors producing his most barren text. The reader's temptation, and the prevailing critical practice, is to ignore A Yankee in Canada. Only a devil's advocate like Thoreau himself would dare question the reliability of such popular indicators as current book sales and current book critics.

While "devil's advocate" is not a role I eagerly adopt, nevertheless I find myself in that position in this paper. For I

wish to offer evidence showing that because of a supposition more popular than analytical, the book is widely, though incorrectly, acknowledged as Thoreau's recognized failure. The assumption is that Thoreau admitted his own dislike for the Canada book both in the way he began the narrative and in the reply he made to H.B.O. Blake's criticism of the piece. This incomplete evaluation of Thoreau's feelings has had severe consequences, the worst being to consign Yankee to critical oblivion and the least being to treat it superficially in the course of a broader study of Thoreau.³ I must, however, emphasize that I raise the issue of Thoreau's Canada book not to argue that it is an unrecognized great book, but instead to suggest that it deserves greater attention. Whether subsequent appraisals of Yankee will alter its present reputation as last in his canon is beside the point I wish to make here. I believe that Yankee, unlike Thoreau's other travel books or Walden, reveals a facet of his personality commonly found in his personal writings, the correspondence and Journals. Whether we like the person he seems to be in Yankee is moot; we cannot ignore the self-portrait it affords. The characterization of Thoreau that I see in Yankee as one whose frustrations and anxieties have impelled him to become overly defensive is essentially different from the view others have given. Furthermore, I have tried to trace both the cause and the effects of his defensive attitude. His personal ties to Concord are by far the most significant cause of his failing to feel at home in Canada. But compounding his insecurities were the conditions of the tour itself, a fast-paced,

overcrowded public excursion through a foreign country. Amid the hordes of tourists in the cities, he was a fish out of Walden Pond, unable to adapt to the strange habitat. Even when he escaped the crowds to walk in the Canadian countryside, language difficulties and poor accommodations robbed him of creature comforts while wet, chilly days and uninspired findings jinxed his naturalist studies. His reactions in Yankee make it clear that he was not wild about civilized Canada. Had he journeyed to the wilderness beyond Canada East, he might have made nature the focus of his travels as he did in his other books. Still, Thoreau's discomfort in Canada had far more to do with that country's political and religious climate than the temperature of its weather. Where he traveled, there was for him only an unnatural attraction. Canada's institutions confronted him at every turn; in the cities the military were omnipresent and in rural areas symbols of Catholicism dominated the roadsides. Missing in Canada were values that were for Thoreau the major assumptions of home. With Concord as his standard, he reacts defensively to Church and State in Canada and finds personally threatening its lack of autonomy and revolutionary zeal, which made "a private man . . . not worth so much in Canada as in the United States." In a thinly veiled analogy he judges that "A New-Englander would naturally be a bad citizen, probably a rebel, there,--certainly if he were already a rebel at home" as Thoreau undoubtedly was.⁴

"Reason and Imagination armed that 'somewhat military in his nature' that Emerson properly noted," explains Sherman Paul; "'Not to be subdued, always manly and able,' Emerson

wrote of Henry, 'he did not feel himself except in opposition.'"⁵ Canada had offered more than a few challenges to Thoreau's militant nature: her customs and language were perplexing, her Church and State offensive, and her inhabitants' complacency repellent. In Yankee Thoreau attacks Canada's institutions with hopes that his battle cries will incite a home audience. To make himself identifiable to those readers, at times in his book he exploits characteristic Yankee qualities to assume a role that will enable him to carry Concord to Canada. Yankee confirms what Thoreau himself asserted in a college essay, "that a writer's 'nationality may be even more striking in treating of a foreign than a domestic subject,' so that the traveler himself 'will be the most conspicuous object.'"⁶ The defensive tone marking much of Yankee reflects Thoreau's vested interest in protecting his personal values, which were constantly championed in Concord, against all institutional encroachments.

Thoreau's Characteristic Yankee in Canada

Those readers who have struggled to understand more about Thoreau's part in Yankee, how he could and why he did write such a book know that it is impossible to overstate the critical neglect of this work. There have been too few attempts to account for A Yankee in Canada, a book simply labeled "out of character" by one prominent critic. But however few admirers the book has, it was as undeniably composed by Thoreau as, to chose its extreme, Walden. Compared to over a hundred books and well over a thousand articles written on Thoreau, many fewer have been written about Yankee since its posthumous publication in A Yankee in Canada With Anti-Slavery and Reform Papers (1866). Published treatments of its text amount o less than one hundred pages in thirteen books and articles.⁷ What is worse, there is little agreement among those who have written on Yankee about the book's purpose or tone.

Among the critics, Thoreau's purpose in Yankee is given various readings. Some find in it Thoreau's injunction, expressed best in Walden, to "brag as lustily as Chanticleer in the morning . . . if only to wake my neighbors."⁸ Sidney Poger, for one, believes that "the largely satiric picture of the Yankee" had as its purpose waking Thoreau's neighbors "up to themselves . . . [as] he portrays the Yankee in his virtues and shortcomings."⁹ Another critic who thinks that Yankee is about "sloughing off the crysalis" of man's lower awareness is Barrie Davies, who reads in that text another

of Thoreau's imperatives "to shake off sleep."¹⁰ Others portray Yankee as a book about individual freedom. Max Cosman, saying that Yankee contains a warning to stay in America for independence's sake, believes that Thoreau's purpose in the book was to share his revelation that "he could front the eternal natural forces without and within him. . . . best in his own country."¹¹ Joseph Basile, describing Thoreau's disappointment at failing to find in Canada "a simpler, better life" in which a man could truly be free, believes that the book Thoreau wrote is about "the loss of individualism in an increasingly civilized society."¹² Yet other critics believe quite different versions of Thoreau's design in Yankee. Stephen Adams says the book is "Thoreau's account of a failure of vision" since Thoreau did not see much in Canada; Adams stresses the rhetorical strategies through which Thoreau explores "the social forces behind that failure."¹³ Sherman Paul thinks Thoreau intended a parody in "the tradition of American travel books whose aim was to repay in kind the European travelers' ridicule of America."¹⁴ But Edmund Berry finds no special purpose to the book at all and terms Yankee simply the result of "some stray notes roughly put together in a brief diary of a journey."¹⁵

Nor do all critics agree on the effect of Yankee's tone. Some, like Walter Harding, do not distinguish between Thoreau and his Yankee persona in the narrative. Harding criticizes what he reads as Thoreau's "[open display of] his strong prejudices," and judges him "On the whole, . . . the superior Yankee looking down his long nose at an inferior race." By

and large, the book is, Harding writes, "out of character" for Thoreau.¹⁶ Other critics, like Sherman Paul, believe that Thoreau deliberately employed the Yankee persona. Paul calls Thoreau's conspicuous Yankee character . . . one of the charms of the book" through which Thoreau effects a parody " [by making] sport of the crude--that detached yet superior--curiosity of his compatriots."¹⁷ Barrie Davies agrees that Thoreau's Yankee narrator is deliberate but sees its effect as even broader. Davies finds that not only does Thoreau's role allow him to satirize the Yankee, but it also allows him "to present his criticisms [of Canada] in a manner acceptable and familiar to his readers," who, presumably, share his Yankee viewpoint.¹⁸

It is fair to say, judging from these critical opinions on purpose and tone in A Yankee in Canada, that the last word on this book has not been written. In fact, the critical neglect of the book overall is amazing; it has been discussed in print scarcely twice a decade since the 1940s. Especially puzzling is the fact that the book has attracted so little attention from American critics. Of seven articles written about Yankee, only three appear in U.S. journals whereas four are found in Canadian publications. The most probable explanation for this lack of interest among U.S. critics is that since the publication of Walter Harding's influential view of A Yankee in Canada, first in A Thoreau Handbook (1959), then in The Days of Henry Thoreau (1965), and most recently in The New Thoreau Handbook (1980), most critics have simply agreed with Harding's negative appraisal of the book as Thoreau's

failure, owing to what Harding regards as his prejudiced and chauvinistic tone. That subsequent critics of Yankee are familiar with Harding's assessment is seen in their allusions to his views. For example, in his own critique of Yankee, Sidney Poger credits Harding as the originator of certain assumptions readers may have about the book.¹⁹ Barrie Davies too acknowledges the prevalence of Harding's views when he cites them first and last in his critique, which argues against these assumptions.²⁰

The fact that Walter Harding's opinion of A Yankee in Canada is acknowledged the most significant follows from Harding's reputation as a leading authority on Thoreau's life and writings. Harding's negative appraisal is read most appreciatively, I expect, by those who find that their preconceptions about Thoreau's writing do not match what they read in the Canada book. But within the necessarily limited scope of Harding's capsulized overview, there is no attempt to account for Yankee's seemingly uncharacteristic tone. Rather, Harding's judgment that the book is out of character rests on the presumption that the text can be read no other way. He cites two others for support, Edmund Berry, from a 1940's article in a Canadian journal, and, interestingly, Thoreau himself, whose self-appraisal Harding gathers from two sources, the opening sentence of Yankee and an 1853 letter to H.B.O. Blake. Yet, for quite different reasons, both Berry and Thoreau fail to be reliable arbiters of how readers should perceive Yankee. As a consequence, Harding's assessment lacks a convincing argument that Yankee is out of character.

First, Harding cites Berry to support his view that in the Canada book Thoreau sounds like a "superior Yankee." Berry, a Canadian, calls Thoreau "an extremely naive American tourist, with the self-righteousness, too, of the less attractive American tourists."²¹ But while Thoreau's narrative is unquestionably biased, its critical examination is not best served by a reviewer who is personally sensitive to its issues. It seems evident that Edmund Berry's criticism of Yankee must be construed in the context of his Canadian affiliations. Harding, besides using Berry to back up his negative view of Yankee's tone, calls on its author to do the same. In response to Thoreau's pronouncement in the book's opening sentence that ". . . what I got by going to Canada was a cold" (YC, p. 3), Harding suggests that "The objective reader will have to agree that Thoreau found little else."²² Harding concludes by citing Thoreau to validate those claims, saying, "Even Thoreau himself cared little for it [the essay], for on February 27, 1853, he wrote Blake, 'I do not wonder that you do not like my Canada story. It concerns me but little, and probably is not worth the time it took to tell it.'"²³ Consequently, Yankee becomes an easy book for modern reviewers to ignore.

There is evidence other critics have found Harding's connections persuasive. Although no journal articles written before Harding first published his opinion in A Thoreau Handbook (1959) point up Thoreau's remarks as proof of the author's own dissatisfaction with his book, most critics writing after Harding do see their pertinence. As one example, Sidney Poger makes the same use of Thoreau that Harding did, when Poger

writes that ". . . Thoreau did not think too highly of the resulting book. His first sentence is a bad joke, pointing up his failure . . . His strongest indictment of the book appears in a letter to H.B.O. Blake.²⁴ Much has been made of Thoreau's reply to Blake and of his opening sentence in Yankee. The implication arising from such proof of failure is that when the writer does not recommend his own work, all who share in that opinion travel in safe company. But still not fully explained by the critics is Yankee's enigma, or how to account for Thoreau's misfire in the canon.

The charge that the book is "out of character" has gone virtually unchallenged; critical speculation centers principally around the issue of why Thoreau wrote the Canada article, and only secondarily on how Yankee acquired such a distinctive, that is to say, uncharacteristic, style.²⁵ One hypothesis about Thoreau's motive in writing Yankee (first entitled "An Excursion to Canada" when three parts of the book were published in Putnam's Magazine in 1853) is that Thoreau needed to earn money. A Week had been a financial as well as literary disaster, for Thoreau had incurred the publishing debt resulting from that book's poor sales.²⁶ Closely connected in reasoning to this motive is the speculation that Thoreau, urged by Horace Greeley to submit an article from his Canada trip, anticipated its placement in a magazine catering to a mass audience, and therefore deliberately wrote to appeal to that audience.²⁷

However attractive these speculations may be, their truth is in no way assured. For one thing, Thoreau's financial difficulties were nothing new, and while it was undoubtedly to his liking to profit from his writing, during these years he found surveying and lecturing more dependable ways to earn income.²⁸ If a profit motive were the strongest priority for Thoreau in writing about Canada, how then to explain the delay between his return from Canada and his ready manuscript? A Week left him in debt in the autumn of 1849, he returned from Canada in

October of 1850, and he had his first manuscript ready for Greeley no earlier than May of 1852.

Secondly, were Thoreau consciously catering to the tastes of the magazines, he surely would have shown more willingness to adapt his long pieces to the shorter length preferred by the editors. Greeley for one advised Thoreau many times over between 1848 and 1852 that "the length of your papers is the only impediment to their appreciation by the magazines."²⁹ Even more importantly, the history of Thoreau's editorial disputes over the integrity of his manuscripts shows that he would brook no editor's ameliorating influence between his ideas and public sensibilities. Like Yankee, Cape Cod and Maine Woods appeared in the magazines in serialized sections before being brought out posthumously as books.³⁰ Incidents behind the publishing scenes of all three serve to illustrate best that Thoreau would cater to no one. In the case of Cape Cod, a series of disagreements, one involving editor George Curtis's unhappiness with the tone Thoreau used toward the Cape Codders, prompted Thoreau to withdraw his manuscript before its last two parts were published.³¹ Regarding Maine Woods, Thoreau's scathing rebuke of editor James Russell Lowell, who chopped Thoreau's pantheistic pine tree from a chapter in that text, left no doubt that, for Thoreau, selling his work was secondary to seeing it printed as he had written it.³² Nor was Yankee's publication free from the type of editorial conflict characterizing the other travel books. Thoreau clashed with Putnam's editor because, as he self-righteously explained to his friend Blake, "the editor Curtis requires the liberty

to omit the heresies without consulting me--a privilege California is not rich enough to bid for" (C, p. 299). As a result, Thoreau withdrew his manuscript from publication even though he knew there would be no hope of selling its remaining sections.³³ While Thoreau did not often feel so gloriously idealistic at this stage of his writing career as he had when he was younger,³⁴ nevertheless, there is no evidence to dispute his continued loyalty to a principle which he first recognized in 1842: "Those authors are successful who do not write down to others, but make their own taste and judgment their audience. . . . It is enough if I please myself with writing; then I am sure of an audience."³⁵ A decade later, Thoreau, no less uncompromising as his rows with his editors attest, continued to write to please himself first. If in fact Thoreau had contrived a Yankee role and a super-chauvinistic stance in A Yankee in Canada principally to please his New England magazine audience, that subterfuge would be unique among all his writings. Therefore, despite claims that Yankee is like none of his other books, and as appealing as it might be to locate a singular cause to account for this work, too few real facts argue for the solution that he deliberately constructed the piece to be more marketable. The dilemma remains why he wrote as he did a book whose tone and content is so seemingly "out of character."

The first part of the solution comes from those very comments by Thoreau that have been judged so self-indicting. When they are read in the broader context of relevant background information, and reconsidered in light of Thoreau's

characteristic attitudes, his remarks are more clearly seen as his defensive admission of the several problems he had writing about the trip to Canada. In his statements, Thoreau intended only to refer to these difficulties, not to confess to a knowledge of the book's failure. How to write about Canada was Thoreau's problem, and A Yankee in Canada is his solution.

To consider first the reply to Blake, Thoreau shows that his aim, essentially, is to justify his part in writing such an account as "Excursion to Canada" turned out to be. He wastes few words on the subject:

I do not wonder that you do not like my Canada story. It concerns me but little, and probably is not worth the time it took to tell it. Yet I had absolutely no design whatever in my mind, but simply to report what I saw. I have inserted all of myself that was implicated or made the excursion. (C, p. 299)

Yet his four statements, each viewed in its full context, render a clearer picture of what Thoreau thought about his book.

Because he had not been able to see much on the short excursion, he defensively implies that Canada did not show him much, just as in the book he adopts a Yankee persona who makes the same claim. The affiliations he evoked in this role as irreverent chauvinist would not appeal to everyone. Clearly, Blake was not one who would best appreciate his traveling narrative about Canada. Thoreau's friendship with Blake was not founded on the writer's public anthems

but upon his lofty idealism. Thoreau well knew that the tenor of his Canada essay was far beneath that which Blake, or he himself, generally found inspirational. Thoreau's first rejoinder to Blake's criticism--"I do not wonder that you do not like my Canada story" (emphasis added)--recognizes his friend's preference for discourses on "higher laws" over diatribes on Lower Canada. In all of his correspondence with Blake, Thoreau endeavored to present his truest, his most transcendental, self; and it was this side of him that Blake revered. Whenever Thoreau's imagination lay dormant, or his spirits low, he would beg Blake's forbearance. Between them was an understanding of the use Blake made of him as a philosophic mentor,³⁶ as on August 9, 1850, when Thoreau asks for Blake's indulgence during a time that is currently unfruitful for him. He warns Blake, "I do not dare invite you earnestly to come to Concord, because I know too well that the berries are not thick in my fields, and we should have to take it out in viewing the landscape."³⁷ Such a complaint, characteristic with Thoreau, expresses his dissatisfaction with time spent on external, rather than internal, significances, and aptly describes his disappointment with shallow views of life in general.

Furthermore, Thoreau complains to Blake that the story "probably is not worth the time it took to tell it." Because too great a distance had been covered in too short a time on the Canada tour, he spent the next year trying to fill in his own sketchy notes with information gathered from his extensive readings in Canadian geography and history, principally ac-

counts by the early explorers.³⁸ A Journal entry from this period shows him keenly aware of the importance of spending the necessary time required for a well-finished project; "Thinkers and writers," he cautions, "are in foolish haste to come before the world with crude works" (J, III: 121). Nevertheless, knowing the hard work needed to produce good writing was one thing, but finding that work totally agreeable was quite another. Personally experiencing the pressure that "Young men" feel when they "are persuaded by their friends, or by their own restless ambition" to produce a quantity of work in a short time, Thoreau felt disheartened (J, III: 121). In the end, he judges, the results for the writer and his audience are inequitable, for "what it took the lecturer a summer to write, it will take his audience an hour to forget" (J, III: 121-22). Besides feeling discouraged over the slow process of completing his Canada story, he experienced more frustration when the manuscript which he finally sent off was returned by Greeley, who suggested that it was too long and "unmanageable," and required further revision, specifically abridgment (C, p. 277). Thoreau's comment above to Blake reflects disappointment over the troublesome business of a year's researches and writing, further revisions, and at the end, a difficult six-month waiting period before Greeley could find it a home in Putnam's Magazine (C, pp. 281, 290). Thoreau knew better than anyone that "the cost of a thing . . . is the amount of life it requires to be exchanged for--immediately or in the long run" (W, p. 31).

Moreover, Thoreau assures Blake that the Canada story concerns me but little" (emphasis added). What Thoreau deemed the essential side of himself was involved to a far less extent than had been, or would be, involved in his other writings. Thoreau's emotions are at the heart of A Week, a journey whose telling constituted a memorial tribute to his brother John. In "Civil Disobedience" he espouses a principle at the core of his transcendentalist beliefs. Certainly Walden, too, whose many revisions occupied him at the same time as "An Excursion to Canada" was published, reflects a deeply personal inner voyage in the two years spent at the pond. Even Maine Woods and Cape Cod made a deeper claim on his innate affinities by virtue of their being centered around preferred natural settings, the woods and the ocean. Canada for Thoreau had been neither memorable nor wild.

And in addition to his qualifications, Thoreau offers Blake a slight defense of the text. For, he presses, "I had absolutely no design whatever in my mind, but simply to report what I saw" (emphasis added). What he had in fact seen on the short excursion did not amount to much, and he wanted Blake to place any blame on the circumstances surrounding the trip rather than on a misguided text. Protesting that his intention had not been to manipulate the events, but only to present a straightforward, objective account, Thoreau seems to be rationalizing his part as the defensive Yankee behind the narrative. For design or no, Thoreau does not so much tell what he saw in Canada as conduct a self-styled tour in which he informs all within earshot that American ways are superior to foreign

ways. Although he was known as a Concord rebel at home, in this book he assumed the role of an unequivocally patriotic Yankee to accommodate his unabashedly biased view of Canadian affairs. As he tells Blake, he only reported what he saw, and his view of Canada, albeit speedily gathered, was that she was strangled by the Old World ties that America had long ago succeeded in throwing off.

Thoreau's last statement to Blake is one added justification of the book's finished product: "I have inserted all of myself that was implicated or made the excursion." He claims no responsibility for not experiencing more in Canada. That nine-day trip covering over eleven hundred miles had been altogether too fast-paced to allow his customary saunterer's eye a thorough investigation. Nor did he customarily claim to seek an involvement in foreign affairs. As he had responded to Emerson's suggestion to form a new journal which would encompass American and British views, "Who has any desire to split himself any further up, by straddling the Atlantic? We are extremities enough already. There is danger of one's straddling so far that he can never recover an upright position" (C, p. 227). Domestic affairs, or more specifically home affairs, involved the better part of Thoreau's interest. During the week in Canada he had experienced little of the wealth of discovery culled from even one day's experiences at Walden; whereas life at the pond effected realizations for him greater than the sum of his experiences, Canada had failed to add up satisfactorily. Her archaic systems cast his mind back into history rather than forward into the world of

future possibilities. He favored traveling to areas which featured natural terrains accessible to man but not yet overly civilized, like the Maine woods or Cape Cod. Little of him was implicated in Canada East, he tells Blake, with its two large cities; trips concentrated around his naturalist interests involved him far more.

Overall, Thoreau's reply to Blake is not meant to indict the quality, but to justify the substance, of his narrative. Thoreau is not surprised Blake did not care for the article; he treated a subject that was far from revolutionary. And he hastens to warn Blake against applying criteria that are too strenuous for the subject matter, for he intended the book to tell only what he saw and thought of Canada.

It is true that no reader of A Yankee in Canada can come away from that book without knowing exactly what Thoreau thought about Canada. His strident opinions dominate its text--that is, once the reader gets past Thoreau's chilly opening sentence: "I fear that I have not got much to say about Canada, not having seen much; what I got by going to Canada was a cold" (YC, p. 3). Certainly Thoreau did not intend in this sentence to warn his audience against reading the rest of his Canada story. Yet, intentional or not, his sour observation has seemed to some critics a gloomy forecast of the narrative that follows. To Edmund Berry, for instance, the sentence "augurs badly; it sounds like Dr. Johnson on Scotland, and we fear Henry Thoreau is going to be witty and ponderous."⁴⁰ But if Thoreau meant to be funny, it will be recalled that Sidney Poger for one is not amused: "His first

sentence is a bad joke," Poger complains.⁴¹ Worse than bad, the very "outrageousness of the book's beginning," Joseph Basile rebukes, "sets a jaundiced tone for the entire book."⁴²

Yet such indictments seem far too harsh in light of Thoreau's penchant for wry understatement. How similar Yankee's opening is to that in Cape Cod, hailed as "Thoreau's sunniest book."⁴³ Both books begin as Thoreau establishes with a startling degree of aplomb his relative inexperience in those regions. Within Cape Cod's first paragraph Thoreau drily informs his readers that their narrator is more land-lubber than seadog:

I have spent, in all, about three weeks on the Cape; . . . but having come so fresh to the sea, I have got but little salted. My readers must expect only so much saltiness as the land breeze acquires from blowing over an arm of the sea, or is tasted on the windows and the bark of trees twenty miles inland, after September gales.⁴⁴

Thoreau's defensive, though humorous, disclaimer functions as a narrative ice-breaker. The reader, meeting his guide for this book-voyage, is straightaway warned that it is no expert on New England's seashores that awaits him, but instead Henry Thoreau from inland Concord. A similar tone informs Yankee's opening. When Thoreau discloses, "I fear that I have not got much to say about Canada, not having seen much," he pleads for immunity from readers expecting more of Canada than he is offering. Nor does admitting this shortcoming faze him, for Thoreau is convinced that it was the place, and not he himself, that harbored ill: "what I got by going to Canada was a cold."

Both Cape Cod and A Yankee in Canada show in their openings Thoreau's attempt to control his audience's expectations of the book he is about to deliver.

As it turned out, Thoreau's opening disclaimer continues to haunt only one of these books, Yankee. Certainly, the books' openings are no accurate gauge of their success, for if they were, we could expect more equivalent ratings. Yet critics have judged Cape Cod a masterwork of its kind⁴⁵ while only the opposite claim exists for Yankee. It should be clear now that the relevant point is not that Thoreau's opening in Yankee forewarns us of the book's shortcomings. The openings of both Cape Cod and Yankee show Thoreau's defenses up,⁴⁶ but, and this difference is all important, in Yankee his defenses never come down. Once Thoreau's defensiveness, which resounds throughout this book, is seen for what it is, the problem of how to account for A Yankee in Canada resolves itself.

III

Thoreau's much-maligned opening sentence can help in deciphering his real feelings about Canada. An earlier version of the sentence contained in an August 21, 1851, journal entry fills in its context: "I fear that I have not got much to say, not having seen much, for the very rapidity of the motion had a tendency to keep my eyelids closed" (emphasis added) (J, II: 418). Unlike the cynicism that results when the passage is reduced, in his private version Thoreau offers an explanation, even an apology, for not having more to report from his excursion. He does not blame Canada but only his mode of travel, that bewildering high-speed scuttle to and fro. Most importantly, although Thoreau excised this justification from his published version, its intent nonetheless remains in the account to show the Concord saunterer feeling knocked off his feet and dizzy from the rapid transport of train and steamer. Traveling north, Thoreau attended to the autumn scene out the train car window as he was "whirled rapidly along." The elms seemed denser than they really were due to the train's "rapid progress" (YC, p. 3). Later few elms were spotted as seven other varieties of trees dominated the mountainsides, but Thoreau, a "rapid traveller" (YC, p. 5), judged the urbanity of a town by how many elms it contained. After being "whirled over" (YC, p. 6) more mountains to Vermont, Thoreau and the others "rush to a wharf" to board their steamboat (YC, p. 7).

Hearing French spoken among those on board reminded Thoreau that he was "being whirled towards some foreign vortex" (YC, p. 8).

The dizzying speed of the journey seemed to spin Thoreau back in time as he arrived at St. John, "an old frontier post" whose stationhouse looked "like a log-house in a new settlement" (YC, p. 8). Apart from Montreal, which "appeared to be growing fast like a small New York" (YC, p. 14), Canada suggested to Thoreau a much earlier age. The Upper Town of Quebec "was such a reminiscence of the Middle Ages as Scott's novels" (YC, p. 21), and the rural parish of Ange Garden found him "on the verge of the uninhabited, and, for the most part, unexplored wilderness stretching toward Hudson's Bay" and within a few steps of being "out of the civilized world" altogether (YC, p. 39). In short, Lower Canada appeared to be "as old as Normandy itself" (YC, p. 53).

Thoreau's scrambled first impressions of Canada persuade one to reconsider Yankee's opening, to disregard for the moment its literal effect. For it establishes from the book's very beginning that Thoreau feels apprehensive in Canada as a result of feeling out of place. Little seemed homely or familiar in that country, and he was uncomfortable being away from the beloved landmarks and the daily routines he enjoyed in Concord. The Canada tour had offered too little time for detailed observations, too poor accommodations for foreign travelers, and too few opportunities for studying nature.

By anyone's standards, the cut-rate excursion to Canada covered a lot of ground, some eleven hundred miles, in a very short amount of time, leaving Boston on September 25 and returning on October 3 (YC, pp. 3, 101). And the excursion fare was cheap, even for 1850; afterwards, Thoreau figured his total expense, including guidebooks and map, to be only twelve dollars and seventy-five cents (YC, p. 100). Consider that just two months earlier, while traveling to Fire Island to uncover whatever he could of the shipwrecked remains of Margaret Fuller Ossoli, he had been advanced seventy dollars "to cover his expenses" with authorization from the family for "further funds" if needed.⁴⁷ But, notwithstanding the bargain price of the Canadian tour, Thoreau never makes peace with its conditions; that much is clear from both his private impressions in the Journal and from his public report in Yankee.

For one thing, he found the non-exclusive tour quite impersonal; he drily regrets that he cannot introduce all in his traveling company, for "there were said to be fifteen hundred of them" (YC, p. 3). To his Journal he confides his resentment at the impersonal treatment accorded the large group, who are to a greedy tour operator nothing more than human cargo calculated to fulfill his profit motive:

Yes, a certain man contracted to take fifteen hundred live Yankees through Canada, at a certain rate and within a certain time. It did not matter to him what the commodity was, if only it would pack well and were delivered to him according to the agreement at the right

place and time and rightly ticketed, so much in bulk, wet or dry, on deck or in the hold, at the option of the carrier how to stow the cargo and not always right side up. (J, II: 417-18)

Perhaps here he is thinking of the sheep he had seen in Canada loaded into a deep cart and transported "with their legs tied together, and their bodies piled one upon another, as if the driver had forgotten that they were sheep and not yet mutton" (YC, p. 19). Not surprisingly, Thoreau chafes at the purely commercialistic spirit of travel business where, as he sees it, the promoter's only concern for his passengers is for their value as freight. "There is no glory so bright but the veil of business can hide it effectually," he complained in 1850 (J, II: 328); considering the Canadian tour arrangements, he might have meant, "There is no country so promising but the veil of business can hide it effectually." For while on the tour, "It was understood that the freight was not to be willfully and intentionally debarred from seeing the country if it had eyes"; but Thoreau feels that seeing the sights was a "secret advantage" of which the contractors seemed unaware (J, II: 418). Their crime was against nature, for to Thoreau seeing Canada's countryside was the reason he took a chance on the public tour. "The man of business," he disdainfully notes a few years later, "does not by his business earn a residence in nature, but is denaturalized rather" (J, V: 497). Prior to the Canadian tour, Thoreau's only experience with the business end of travel was the personal use in his writings he made of the natural locales he visited. But this tour was

itself a business deal, and to his dissatisfaction, he was trapped in its arrangements. It may well have been the stifling confinement of the crowded railcar to Canada that caused him to avow in Walden that "I would rather ride to earth in an ox cart with a free circulation, than go to heaven in the fancy car of an excursion train and breathe a malaria all the way" (W, p.37). Although in the Journal he vents his feelings about the conditions of the trip, in the book he omits all references to his bitterness about the tour, probably because he decided that to portray himself feeling victimized by the tour company was neither an interesting story for the magazines nor a flattering description of his self-reliance while traveling. Only in the privacy of his Journal does he admit feeling on the defensive in Canada, visiting that country ". . . as the bullet visits the wall at which it is fired, and from which it rebounds as quickly, and flattened (somewhat damaged, perchance!)" (J, II: 417). Such an image stresses the impact he felt from the trip's rapid-fire pace. The hasty journey aboard train and steamer strictly opposed Thoreau's preferred method of more leisurely observations in which he enjoyed a sauntering pace⁴⁸ and repeated experiences. To write Yankee he had to go against the grain of his practical experience, for his habit both before and after that book was to compress actual time spent by half or more when he wrote his accounts. A Week describes a trip that actually lasted two weeks, and its chapter titles called after days of the week are for structur-

ing purposes. Walden is the condensation of his actual two-year stay by the pond into one year's seasonal frame for the book. And both Maine Woods and Cape Cod contain experiences from three separate trips each.⁴⁹ Even the Journals, begun in 1837 and ending only with his death, testify to his habit of repeated observations when looking at the world around him.

But Yankee's narrative, unlike those of the other writings, accounts for Thoreau's activities on virtually every part of each day of the nine-day trip. His aim does indeed seem to be "to report what I saw," as he told Blake. First, however, he had to adjust to the new situation, for he was awed at the suddenness at which he had been transferred from home to a foreign country; "We had left Concord Wednesday morning," he marvels, "and we endeavored to realize that now, Friday morning, we were taking a walk in Canada . . ." (YC, p. 31). He had lost his sense of reality as his awareness too rapidly teetered from Concord, where he might have been "rambling to Flint's Pond or the Sudbury Meadows," to Canada, where he was actually "taking a walk down the bank of the St. Lawrence" (YC, p. 31). Perhaps to regain his sense of place, he self-consciously tried to work up his enthusiasm for the new experience, saying, "Well, . . . here I am in a foreign country; let me have my eyes about me, and take it all in" (YC, p. 31). But, as it turned out, he could not "take it all in" on his limited schedule. Turning thoughts of sauntering aside, he set a hurried pace in order to see all that he could in the available time. To locate the Falls of St. Anne after he

lost the path leading to a house where he was to get directions, he did not retrace his steps but instead "dashed at once into the woods, steering by guess and by compass" (YC, p. 53). And when he had to retrace his steps "to ask a man in the field the name of the river which we were crossing," he did not walk but instead "ran back" to inquire (YC, p. 56). After returning from his walk through Quebec's northern countryside and wishing to see sights south of the city, he uncharacteristically elected to travel in a public conveyance, the caleche, "as our hours were numbered" (YC, p. 70). Busily seeing Quebec's city sights on the day of his departure, he then "made haste to the steamer" to take his seat on deck; but once there, however, he found "I had still an hour and a half to spare" and so hurried off to copy a map of Canada he had admired earlier in a restaurant (YC, p. 95).

Not only was the impersonality and bustling pace of the excursion frustrating to Thoreau, he also felt thwarted by circumstances he experienced as a foreign traveler in Canada. In Yankee he claims that when inexperienced travelers back home asked if he "found it easy to get accommodated" in Canada, he disdained to respond, only saying, "as if we went abroad to get accommodated, when we can get that at home" (YC, pp. 33-34). But his boast of being a self-reliant traveler is largely contradicted by the reactions he has to his foreign experiences seeking accommodations in Canada.

Thoreau was not at all disposed to accept just any lodging the first evening he spent in the countryside north of Quebec. When he first began "to look round for a lodging," he inquired

"at the most promising-looking houses," but scornfully adds, "if, indeed, any were promising." But to his amazement, he found that the people in the region "spoke French only"; when he realized that "nobody spoke English at all," his surprise turned to shock to discover "in fact, we were in a foreign country, where the inhabitants uttered not one familiar sound to us." Forced to try to communicate with his own rusty French, he "succeeded sometimes pretty well, but for the most part pretty ill" (YC, p. 35) although finally he came to understand that "they had no more beds than they used." Trying to be resourceful, he reasoned that a local citizen of higher status might live in better circumstances and so "called on the public notary . . . but he had no more beds nor English than the rest." So mentally unprepared was Thoreau for the difficulties he was experiencing trying to find a room that he was slow to grasp the reality of the new situation. At one house he had to be shown physical evidence before he could believe the truth:

When our host and his wife spoke of their poor accommodations meaning for themselves, we assured them that they were good enough, for we thought that they were only apologizing for the poorness of the accommodations they were about to offer us, and we did not discover our mistake till they took us up a ladder into a loft, and showed to our eyes what they had been laboring in vain to communicate to our brains through our ears, that they had but that one apartment with its few beds for the whole family. (YC, p. 36)

After this incident, Thoreau wryly admits to experiencing a disturbing sense of isolation at being adrift in a foreign

land and says, "We made our adieux forthwith, and with gravity, perceiving the literal signification of that word" (YC, p. 36). When, at length, he was "finally taken in at a sort of public house," he found the accommodations different from, and inferior to, those he was used to at home. Even though he had "a bed in their best chamber," it was located in a loft, "very high to get into," and had "no cotton sheets, but coarse, home-made, dark-colored linen ones" whose quality never improved so long as he slept in foreign beds, all having "sheets still coarser than these, and nearly the color of our blankets" (YC, p. 37). Certainly these foreign lodgings compared unfavorably with home, accustomed as he was to the higher standards of his mother's boarding house. These unhappy circumstances--French as the dominant language, lodgings hard to come by, loft beds with coarse sheets--all pronounced Thoreau in an alien environment. Even while traveling, there was little that relieved his sense of isolation for "there were no shops nor signs, because there were no artisans to speak of, and the people raised their own provisions; and there were no taverns, because there were no travelers" (YC, p. 50). Moreover, the backs of the houses faced the road so that one had to "go down a lane to get round to . . . where the door was," for in a Canadian house "Every part is for the use of the occupant exclusively, and no part has reference to the traveler or to travel" (YC, p. 59). His homesickness for familiar ways is apparent after only three days in Canada by his reaction when he sees above

a public house a sign printed in English which advertised
 "'The best Snipe-shooting grounds'":

These words being English affected me as if I had been absent now ten years from my country, and for so long had not heard the sound of my native language, and every one of them was as interesting to me as if I had been a snipe-shooter, and they had been snipes. (YC, p. 48)

Not nearly so interesting to him was the French-Canadian diet, which he found as frugal as their furnishings, consisting of "what I suppose is called potage (potatoes and meat boiled with flour), the universal dish as we found, perhaps the national one" (YC, p. 51). Even in the city, when he had tried to arm his pack with something tasty for his country travels, he had been disappointed, for he "saw nothing like pie for sale, and no good cake to put in my bundle, such as you can easily find in our towns" (YC, p. 17). Nor were there "such restaurants in Quebec or Montreal as there are in Boston," as Thoreau discovered the hard way after he had "hunted an hour or two in vain . . . to find one, till I lost my appetite." Twice he thought he was on the verge of finding a meal only to learn that appearances in foreign restaurants were deceiving. The first time he was fooled was when he went

In one house, called a restaurant, where lunches were advertised, [and] I found only tables covered with bottles and glasses unnumberable, containing apparently a sample of every liquid that has been known since the earth dried up after

the flood, but no scent of solid food did I perceive gross enough to excite a hungry mouse. (YC, p. 85)

He was fooled again "In another place [where] I once more got as far as the bottles, and then asked for a bill of fare; was told to walk up stairs; had no bill of fare, nothing but fare" (YC, pp. 85-86). He was no more successful at satisfying his sweet tooth than he was at finding a meal, for when he inquired about the availability of "pies or puddings," the waitress's response was, "'No, Sir; we've nice mutton-chop, roast beef, beefsteak, cutlets,' and so on" (YC, p. 86). Thoreau's facetious protest that "I am obliged to keep my savageness in check by a low diet" was probably an attempt to disguise how keenly he craved a sweet. He must have sorely missed the homemade treats of pies, doughnuts, and cookies that his mother and aunts regularly indulged him with.⁵⁰ Even after he was advised by "A burly Englishman . . . in the midst of the siege of a piece of roast beef" to give up his search, and told, "'You'll find no pies or puddings in Quebec, sir; they don't make any here,'" Thoreau was still stubbornly skeptical. He could not easily believe that Canada had no desserts such as were common at home, but eventually he "found it was even so" and had to settle instead for "some musty cake and fruit in the open market-place" (YC, p. 86).

In all, Thoreau's reaction to the differences of travel in a foreign country was to feel basically unaccommodated. Furthermore, he felt discomfited at being in a strange country inhabited by foreigners who went about their business, taking

no particular notice of him, though he was having his fill of them. In the Church of Notre Dame Thoreau noted that the women seated there "did not look up" when he entered (YC, p. 12), that on the streets of Montreal the nuns he saw "never once lift[ed] their eyes from the ground" (YC, p. 16), and that in a country church, the few "villagers at their devotions . . . did not look up" at their visitor (YC, p. 51); even the soldiers who were drilling "did not appear to notice us any more than the devotees in the church" (YC, p. 16). His wonderment underscores the fact that he felt uncomfortable at being a foreign element himself, an obtrusive presence, when out of his own country. Not at all inclined in Yankee to admire the self-sufficiency of the French-Canadians, "people [who] raised their own provisions," he instead focuses on the insufficiency with which his own personal needs are met. Undoubtedly, his responses in Canada are no demonstration of his belief that "Man is an animal who more than any other can adapt himself to all climates and circumstances" (W, p. 63). On the contrary, his account of traveling through a country whose unsettling differences contrast sharply with all that he was used to makes it clear he preferred Concord to Canada.

Beyond the excursion's rush and crowds, and beyond Canada's foreign differences, the most disappointing aspect of the tour to Thoreau was that nature was, by and large, unavailable to him. His motive in traveling in Canada had been "to go a little behind the word Canadense, of which naturalists make such frequent use" (YC, p. 101). Thoreau was clearly prepared to wed himself to nature in Canada as he had at home⁵¹ and judged

himself well-suited to undertake some serious walking; "I had on my 'bad-weather clothes,'" he says proudly, "like Olaf Trygvesson the Northman, when . . . he won his bride" (YC, p. 28). But this trip was not the occasion for a successful compact between Thoreau and nature, as he is quick to admit:

"what I got by going to Canada was a cold."

Thoreau failed to bring enough warm clothes for his trip through East Canada; that region "looked and felt a good deal colder than it had in New England, as we might have expected it would . . . [because it] was four degrees nearer the pole" (YC, p. 31). The weather, even "colder than usual that season," caught Thoreau underdressed in "a thin palm-leaf hat without lining" and a "thin, brown linen [sack-coat]" worn over his regular-weight coat (YC, pp. 76, 31). When he tried to realize his single most important aim in Canada, to "take one honest walk there as I might in Concord woods," he found a foe in Canada's weather, for in addition to the cold, rain followed Thoreau for most of his walk through Montmorenci county north of Quebec (YC, pp. 3, 42, 44, 45). Since the soil of the region was mostly clay, the road was "exceedingly muddy" because of rains, and walking was difficult (YC, p. 44).

Nor could he experience much of nature along the way. Although at home Thoreau defied beaten tracks and preferred to take his walks cross country,⁵² in Canada's countryside he was bound to the region's "single road," one which "never ran through the fields or woods." When he ventured "a quarter of a mile from the road," he discovered that he was "on the

verge of the uninhabited, and, for the most part, unexplored wilderness stretching toward Hudson's Bay" (YC, p. 42). But that area is out-of-bounds for him on this trip; it would have to wait, he realizes, until he can "make a longer excursion on foot through the wilder parts of Canada" (YC, p. 101).

In addition to the season's bad weather and his limiting schedule, other obstacles interfered with his naturalist studies. Sometimes the inhabitants simply did not know the answer to his questions, as when he haltingly asks a curé the "names [of three little birds] in such French as I could muster, but he neither understood me nor ornithology" (YC, p. 47). Mostly his studies were reduced to collecting bits of information such as the inhabitants could provide, like the name of the "red and very acid [fruit] whose name a little boy wrote for me, 'pinbéna'" (YC, p. 48). And he depended on chance discoveries, such as when he had the opportunity to taste a strange fruit that a French-Canadian family, "when snells were mentioned, . . . went out in the dark and plucked" (YC, p. 61)

The principal attraction of Canada East being its falls, Thoreau tried to see as many as he could, even finding one that "Most travelers in Canada would not hear of . . ." (YC, p. 58). But for the most part, he is dispirited in his account of his findings for the reason he gives in this description of the Montmorenci Falls: "It is a very simple and noble fall, and leaves nothing to be desired; but the most that I could say of it would only have the force of one other testi-

mony to assure the reader that it is there" (YC, p. 38). By the time he observes his last falls on the La Puce River, he flatly declines to offer any response more personal than to say, "we pronounced them as beautiful as any that we saw." However obvious Thoreau's awareness "that this was the country for waterfalls" (YC, p. 58), equally apparent is his lack of deep feeling for Canada's wonders. His enthusiasm had clearly ebbed since his first day in Canada when even such commonplace scenery as fifteen miles of level land observed out the train window evoked the stronger response that the "novel but monotonous scenery was exciting" (YC, p. 11). By the end of the trip, even Canada's best show of natural beauty, the waterfalls abundant along the St. Lawrence, fails to register significantly with Thoreau: "Falls there are a drug, and we became quite dissipated in regard to them" (YC, p. 58).

The natural attraction in Canada that claimed Thoreau's greatest interest was not the falls but the mighty St. Lawrence River (YC, p. 89); however, his direct experience of the river lagged far behind his enthusiasm. Since both his voyages on the St. Lawrence occurred at night, his grandest claim in Yankee might be that he could say he had "seen a pretty accurate map of it"; for he was "not long enough on the river to realize it had length; we got only the impression of its breadth" (YC, pp. 20, 96, 89, 97). Even the short time he actually spent on the river one dawn during the return voyage from Quebec to Montreal seemed vague and unreal to him: "Our boat advancing with a strong and steady pulse over the calm surface, we felt as if we were permitted to be awake in the

scenery of a dream" (YC, p. 97). Nor when he climbed to the top of Mount Royal for his last view of the great river did he feel his own experience was sufficient to describe that panoramic scene. Instead, he merged his present-day description with history's and says, "like [Cartier], 'we saw the said river as far as we could see, grand, large, et spacieux, going to the southwest'" where there was a splendid land of "much cinnamon and cloves, . . . three great lakes, . . . a sweet sea . . . [and] no mention . . . [of ever seeing] the end" (YC, pp. 98-99). But against Cartier's original vision Thoreau contrasted his current disillusionment; for "instead of an Indian town far in the interior of a new world, with guides to show us where the river came from, we found a splendid and bustling stone-built city of white men, and only a few squalid Indians offered to sell us baskets" (YC, p. 99). For Thoreau it is clear that the only vital vision of the St. Lawrence region exists in the memory of the past.

Two years later Thoreau's disappointment at not having seen more of nature in Canada must have been sorely revived when Horace Greeley, whose opinion he greatly respected, returned his "Excursion" manuscript with suggestions for its abridgment, advising Thoreau, "The cities [in Canada] are described to death [in other travelers' accounts]; but I know you are at home with Nature" (C, p. 277). Greeley was of course right; Thoreau was "at home with Nature," but for that same reason, he was not at home in Canada.

In Yankee Thoreau's failure to take his foreign experience in stride comes as a shock to those of us more used to

his success in living self-sufficiently. He does not seem himself in Canada, most would agree. But surprisingly, his poor response in 1850 to Canada's differences could have been foreseen seven years earlier, at a time when he too felt himself on "foreign soil." This soil was in reality sand, and was not foreign but domestic; yet to Thoreau living on Staten Island, it was nothing like home. His unhappy reactions to being there, away from Concord, are a remarkable predictor of how he later sees Canada.

IV

In 1843 Thoreau had ventured to Staten Island where Emerson, by way of encouraging Thoreau to begin a professional writing career, arranged a tutoring position with his brother's family. Staten Island was judged a favorable location to encourage Thoreau's acquaintance with New York publishing circles. Despite the opportunities for making important connections, Thoreau was unhappy living away from home. The only other time he had been away was as a student at Harvard, and even then he thought often of Concord and his family, visiting as often as he could.⁵³ On Staten Island Thoreau's acute sense of estrangement can be traced through his correspondence from that period. The Emersons, though kind, could not substitute for his own family and friends; "Mr and Mrs Emerson & family," Thoreau wrote, "are not indeed of my kith or kin in any sense."⁵⁴ Worst of all, he missed his daily communion with nature in Concord's ponds, fields and woods: "All my inner man heretofore has been a Concord impression; and here come these Sandy Hook and Coney Island breakers to meet and modify the former; but it will be long before I can make nature look as innocently grand and inspiring as in Concord" (C, p. 100).

What Thoreau reported from Staten Island sounded similar to what he later wrote of Canada, also a place where he did not feel at home. The physical adjustment to a new locale was bothersome in both places:

I have had a severe cold ever since I came here
[Staten Island] . . . so I have not seen much
in the botanical way. (C, p. 105)

I fear that I have not got much to say about
Canada, not having seen much; what I got by
going to Canada was a cold. (YC, p. 3)

Comparisons in Thoreau's writings reveal his unrest at being away from home, as he held up Concord as the yardstick by which to measure the outside world. Nature's wonders were mirrored best in Concord settings for Thoreau, who wrote from both Staten Island and Canada that "It will be long before I can make nature [in Staten Island] look as innocently grand and inspiring as in Concord" (C, p. 100), and "I wished only to be set down in Canada, and take one honest walk there as I might in Concord woods of an afternoon" (YC, p. 3).

In addition, Thoreau made observations of Staten Island that are similar to what he writes about Canada. First, he expressed a dislike for busy urban centers and military trappings--"I do not like their cities and forts, with their morning and evening guns" (C, p. 100). Also, he witnessed the truth to his preconceived notion that little outside Concord would attract him--"Everything . . . disappoints me but the crowd--rather I was disappointed with the rest before I came. I have no eyes for their churches and what else they find to brag of" (C, p. 107). And finally, he voiced his characteristic demand that individual worth be recognized--"When will the world learn that a million men are of no importance compared with one man?" (C, p. 112).

In all, these similarities between Thoreau's discontent in Staten Island and his tone in A Yankee in Canada are significant because they demonstrate the same basic insecurity with the world outside of Concord. On Staten Island Thoreau remained fiercely loyal to his native identity:

I have hardly begun to live on Staten Island yet; but, like the man who, when forbidden to tread on English ground, carried Scottish ground in his boots, I carry Concord ground in my boots and in my hat,--and am I not made of Concord dust? (C, p. 103).

Nor does Thoreau ever shake the "Concord ground" from his boots in Canada. For his Canada book Thoreau dons at times a Yankee mask which, far from diminishing his identity as Concord native, instead enlarges his background to encompass a New Englander's patriotism. Spotlited in Yankee are the ideals he formulated back home--individualism, self-reliance, and personal independence. All of these qualities Thoreau professed throughout his life, just as everlastingly as he proclaimed his loyalty for Concord. In many ways, the two, his ideals and his hometown, were one in his mind. For Concord represented an ultimate in natural perfection which man by study could emulate.⁵⁵

That Concord meant the world to Thoreau is documented most consistently in his personal writings, the correspondence and especially his Journals, aptly termed The Book of Concord by a recent critic. But A Yankee in Canada also attests to Thoreau's love for Concord in that his criticism of Canada's

foreign ways was founded on home-grown principles. These principles, which resound in Yankee, show how characteristically he responded to Canada's foreign culture. But first, to see why he was so unwilling in Canada to leave his Concord allegiances behind, it is important to trace the process that resulted in his feeling about Concord as he did.

In simplest terms Concord, the heart of Thoreau's existence,⁵⁶ was where his life began and ended, literally as a man and figuratively as a writer. His deepest convictions were founded, like the seat of the Revolution itself, at home in Concord. Richard Lebeaux in Young Man Thoreau offers perhaps the best look at an evolving Concord in the early decades of the 1800's and the effects of its changes on Thoreau. As Concord grew from a village to a town, it lost its autonomy as it became more dependent on the larger world around it.⁵⁷ Thoreau disapproved of these changes in the town, for he saw "social propriety and conventional behavior . . . valued over personal authenticity." He believed such behavior would lead to a loss of self-determination for men as it had for Concord, for "only through truly individual definition of identity and behavior could men achieve autonomy." For himself, Thoreau's struggle against dependence was "a response to his personal situation [of family and social conflicts]," but it was also "a response to what he perceived as the dependence of Concordians on everything but themselves."⁵⁸ He wanted his life to be different from theirs.

Faced with the dilemma of choosing a profession, Thoreau resented how few options were available to him in Concord;

but "he could not leave" because "he was in too many ways emotionally attached" to the town. His decision to stay behind was not easy. At this time of the great migration westward, the "sedentary inhabitants of many established towns" could not fail to witness those more adventurous ones, young and old alike, who passed through as they made their way west, bragging of their futures. Thoreau and other stay-at-home inhabitants of Concord "had the choice of either leaving for the frontier themselves or remaining where they were and 'bragging louder'" than these strangers:⁵⁹

Thus the knowledge that some people were boldly setting out for the frontier, with its exciting opportunities and unknown danger, compelled those who did not leave to be 'defensively sedentary and defensively proud.' It is likely that 'town boosting' was one manifestation of defensive sedentariness. Certainly Concordians' frequent invocations of the town's Revolutionary heritage was a kind of boosting, an attempt to associate themselves closely with their courageous, liberty-loving ancestors. But self-boosting was often needed to accompany identifications with the town's unique glories. Thoreau, who so highly cherished independence and bravery, felt uncomfortable about staying behind in the relatively sedate, sedentary community of Concord--especially when so many young would-be professionals, aspiring farmers, and businessmen were leaving Concord for opportunities elsewhere. In such a situation, Thoreau found it necessary to 'brag as lustily as Chanticleer in the morning' about his own independence, to boast that he was a frontiersman even while remaining in his native town.⁶⁰

In his lifetime Thoreau never gave up the boast for Concord; his identification with his hometown only grew stronger as he grew older. When as a young man he had become homesick on Staten Island, he recognized that he was slow to adapt to the new setting and judged Concord to be the cause: "Give me time enough,

and I may like it. All my inner man heretofore has been a Concord impression, and here come these Sandy Hook and Coney Island breakers to meet and modify the former" (C, p. 100). But seven years later, back from Canada and home to stay, he encouraged the "Concord impression" to deepen and take root, and eschewed all non-domestic modifications. At this time Thoreau, "Working largely in isolation" on his Journal, had as his purpose "to mirror his love . . . for Concord."⁶¹ By 1855 Thoreau, comfortable in a self-tailored lifestyle involving little that was beyond Concord's outskirts, could fondly acknowledge that Concord suited him better than anywhere else:

I am so wedded to my way of spending a day--require such broad margins of leisure, and such a complete wardrobe of old clothes, that I am ill fitted for going abroad. . . The old coat that I wear is Concord--it is my morning robe & study gown, my working dress and suit of ceremony, and my night-gown after all. (C, p. 386)

With a fervor suggestive of his famous prescription from Walden for "Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity!,"⁶² he then redressed his formula for the sake of Concord, saying, "Cleave to the simplest ever--Home--home--home" (C, p. 386).

Thoreau's faithfulness to Concord is self-determined; she locates his ideals. Personal independence is proclaimed in the memory of her Revolutionary glory; individualism is celebrated in her natural perfection; and self-reliance is heralded in her inhabitants' potential for autonomous growth. Concord embodies all that Thoreau values. When he travels to Canada, he learns

that his ideas about personal freedom do not exist in her Old World culture.

Thoreau reports in Yankee that his values are missing in Canada. Her inhabitants are unlike Thoreau, who "burns with the ardor of a Yankee"⁶³ when his personal liberties are threatened, for the French-Canadians are "suffering between two fires,--the soldiery and the priesthood" with no thoughts of rebellion (YC, p. 84). Indeed, "their vice and their virtue is content," Thoreau charges, for the Canadians "are very far from a revolution"; in fact, they "have no quarrel with Church or State" (YC, p. 64). Moreover, he blames their sense of individual responsibility in that they are not dissatisfied enough with their lives to want to change. The fault does not rest only with the State, says Thoreau. He believes, in fact, that "Their government is even too good for them" since in 1825 Parliament outlawed the feudal tenures, "But as late as 1831 . . . the design of the act was likely to be frustrated, owing to the reluctance of the seigniors and peasants" (YC, p. 65). Newspaper reports on Canadian affairs largely support Thoreau's view of the events. In an article from the New York Tribune of May 17, 1850, which discusses the persistence of feudal tenure in Canada, an Englishman explains the poor response to the reform, saying "It would be as easy to introduce some aristocratic element into your constitution as it would be to democratise a monarchical institution."⁶⁴ An earlier article from that same newspaper published November 19, 1849, expresses the British sentiment that the problems in Canada

are intrinsically her inhabitants': "The energy and industry which have made the United States prosperous might have made Canada no less prosperous; the British Constitution has not checked them; the colonial office has not stifled them"65

Concerning Thoreau's argument, it is interesting to note that his facts, stopping as they do with the year 1831, must have come from one of the many source books he consulted after his return from Canada. That he traveled there twenty years later but did not update his text to the French-Canadians' current situation in regard to their feudal ties has two probable explanations. First, as already told, his trip was so short that his observations of Canadian culture were superficial rather than specific, and outward appearances, or reports recalled from the newspapers, indicated that the old customs still prevailed. Secondly, the older fact works to illustrate specifically his view that they were a people who lacked the initiative to become independent of their old ties to the Church. Far from having any motive to write an updated Canadian history, Thoreau instead used life in Canada to illustrate his own favored arguments about the self-reliance that is lost when a culture clings to institutional relics.

In this regard, he was likely unchastened by Horace Greeley's mild reproof in November of 1852 that "Your 'Canada' is not so fresh and acceptable as if it had just been written on the strength of a last summer's trip" (C, p. 289). He was like Walden's artist of Kouroo; as Thoreau had "made no compromise with Time, Time kept out of his way" (W, p. 326). His aim in writing even the chapters of his travel books that were published in the magazines

was not to produce timely seasonal pieces, the kind of tourist's account that any traveler who had visited the locale could write. And although Thoreau undoubtedly would have preferred to center his account around nature, as Greeley had suggested in the preceding March, he knew he could not; the conditions of the trip barred any possibility of his finding a natural theme. In his Journal of January 30, 1852, he may have had Canada on his mind when he mused, "It is in vain to write on chosen themes. We must wait till they have kindled a flame in our minds. . . . The cold resolve . . . begets nothing." "The poet's relation to his theme," he continued, "is the relation of lover" (J, III: 253). In place of nature in Yankee, he substitutes his passion for individual freedom, for he observed conventions in Canada that were antithetical to his values. From his book it is clear that he deplores Old World institutions because they have dispossessed the individual in Canada of his personal liberties. Among the Yankees traveling to Canada that September, perhaps none had so personal a stake as Thoreau in ballyhooing these institutional fixtures. In Yankee he cites their example as a warning of what happens to those who allow institutions to become the principal regulators of their lives.

Thus Thoreau is constantly on the defensive in Canada because his personal values are assaulted at almost every turn of his short journey. Canada's cities are swarming with soldiers whose regimentation is antithetical to Thoreau's desired autonomy.

Montreal looms menacingly before him, larger than "he had expected to find," and Thoreau is ill-at-ease walking through this foreign city filled with its foreign inhabitants. His way is directed by ominous-sounding place-markers, so that in the midst of squares named "Champs de Mars" and "Place d'Armes," he "felt as if a French revolution might break out any moment" (YC, p. 15). His sense of becoming involved in impending conflict is heightened by the sheer numbers of militia men he sees. The overt signs of British domination offend Thoreau, who broadly caricatures the inevitable exhaustion of Britain's aggression, a bully whose grasp must eventually weaken; "On every prominent ledge you could see England's hands holding the Canadas, and I judged by the redness of her knuckles that she would soon have to let go" (YC, p. 16). British soldiers are of course "red-coats," and Thoreau regards them through the eyes of a minuteman.

The business of soldiering which actively engages the troops everywhere transmits a challenge to the other touring Yankees as well; for at the first stop in Canada where soldiers from nearby barracks were drilling, the Yankees "[discussed] the possibility of their driving these troops off the field with their umbrellas" (YC, p. 10). The physical spectacle of military men put through their paces strikes Thoreau as little more than a blustering show of national strength (YC, p. 17). He pretends to acknowledge the country's high estimation of these soldiers, but in fact, he mocks their function, saying only that "The inhabitants evidently rely on them in a great measure for music and entertainment" (YC, p. 16). His mock-appreciative observations continue as he judges the soldiers' "harmony . . . far more

remarkable than that of any choir or band" which could be had for the money. But, making "a thousand men move as one man, animated by one central will" was "obtained, no doubt, at a greater cost" (YC, p. 17). The price is high, involving as it does the loss of self-determination. Striking such a deal with one's drill chief amounts to a Mephistophelian compact, Thoreau insinuates later while watching the Scottish soldiers go through their paces in Quebec. Though the "Highlanders manoeuvred very well," Thoreau acknowledges, the loss of a man's soul results from his persisting too long at military drills that leave him "destitute of originality and independence." Proof of this destructive eventuality is observed in the person of "one older man among them, gray as a wharf-rat, and supple as the Devil, marching lock-step with the rest who would have to pay for that elastic gait" (emphasis added) (YC, pp. 26, 27).

As one man, Thoreau cannot physically rival the legions of the soldiers, but he effectively diminishes their stature by comparing them to insects. The numbers of the men are "in the proportion . . . to the laborers in an African anthill," he says disparagingly; their individuality is buried in these military ranks (YC, p. 16). The soldiers' drills give him "the impression not of many individuals, but of one vast centipede of a man," a man who has surrendered his personal freedom and blindly follows another's lead. But "the universal exhibition in Canada of the tools and sinews of war" strikes Thoreau as a sham display in which "the keeper of a menagerie [shows] his animals' claws" (YC, p. 79). The enslaved rank

and file who parade in lines, brandishing their arms, belong to a past age. Among the military "menagerie" then in Canada, Thoreau is especially intrigued by the Scottish soldier, probably because he finds the disparity between a soldier's projected manliness and the Highlander's skirt to be a ludicrous contradiction. He reports seeing "a real live Highlander under a cocked hat, and with his knees out," and another "bare-legged Highlander in cocked hat and full regimentals" (YC, pp. 25, 27). "If you wish to study the muscles of the leg about the knee, repair to Quebec," is Thoreau's lame advice (YC, p. 79). But even without skirts, the soldiers' physical show of power fails to impress Thoreau. The might of the military is no match for the power of the mind. "The sentinel with his musket beside a man with his umbrella is spectral," Thoreau scoffs; "There is not sufficient reason for his existence." Modern society's heroes, like Thoreau, fight, and win, with words, not weapons; "Does my friend there, with a bullet resting on half an ounce of powder," Thoreau asks in disbelief, "think he needs that argument in conversing with me?" (YC, p. 78). And Britain's government precluded any hope for a man to be other than a cog in the war machine, for only with institutional change will individuals be free to develop their potential. Thoreau had long believed "The progress from an absolute to a limited monarchy, from a limited monarchy to a democracy, is a progress toward a true respect for the individual."⁶⁷

In Yankee Thoreau's overly defensive reaction to the soldiers communicates more about him and his beliefs than about Canada and British dominance. He is clearly uncomfortable being where "a

private man was not worth so much" as at home. His own best interests recommend that he stay in Concord, where he feels himself rich in nonmaterial possessions. In the book he counsels his readers that "if your wealth in any measure consists in manliness, in originality, and independence, you had better stay" in the United States. As a Concord-born citizen, he is proud of his ancestors' revolution against oppression, and he boasts that "A New Englander would naturally be a bad citizen, probably a rebel," in Canada, "certainly if he were already a rebel at home" (YC, p. 82). Here his own natural instincts are transparently self-proclaimed.

Because Thoreau in his lifetime wrote a great many irreverent opinions of organized religion, his diatribe against the institutionalized faith of the French-Canadians should come as no surprise. Yet the book has been faulted because in it "Thoreau displays the violent anti-Catholicism of the mid-nineteenth century Yankee."⁶⁸ Some might feel that Thoreau's castigation of Roman-Catholicism is gratuitous in an account of a tour through Canada, but Yankee is only secondarily a travel book. While its argument against institutions is set on foreign ground in Canada, the issue is thoroughly domestic and was heard in Concord as well, for it involves Thoreau's support of his personal values against all outside interferers. In A Yankee in Canada Thoreau's opinions occupy center stage, and Canada's foreign sights serve him only as props. It is certainly true to say

that Thoreau's views matched the temper of the time seen in an article published in July 1850 in a southern magazine, De Bow's Review, which describes British feelings against the French in Canada: ". . . the English looked upon the French as an ignorant, bigoted, priest-ridden faction, behind the spirit of the age."⁶⁹ However, in Thoreau's case, it is probably fairer to say that he strongly endorses his values, American values, in Yankee than to say that he denounces Catholicism; for the former is his purpose in writing the text, and the latter only makes up his proofs. Provoking Thoreau's blast at the Church was the fact that he took personal umbrage at the Church's outward form, its institution, that "destroyed rather than developed the strength of the individual."⁷⁰

Therefore, in addition to quarreling with the many signs of State dominance in the Canadian cities, Thoreau also speaks against the predominance of the Catholic Church in Canada. His complaints against the Church revolve around his belief that it stifles worldly views and imposes constraints reflecting its own conservative outlook. He challenges the Church on three levels: first, Catholicism's spiritual and material effects on the population at large; then, its clergy and religious orders who serve the Church; and finally, its faithful members who dutifully obey Her doctrines.

Thoreau believed of course that religion should ideally be a direct communion with God, whose effects are best seen through nature. The Catholic Church, on the contrary, did not provide for its members' immediate interaction with God and His world, Thoreau felt. Instead, the Church instituted a hierarchy of

officials who maintained its cloistered viewpoint. Approaching Montreal by water, Thoreau notices that "Above all the church of Notre Dame was conspicuous" just as among the French-Canadians their religion stands most prominently in their lives (YC, p. 11). But because the grand church provides a retreat for those in the city, Thoreau approves of its "still atmosphere and somber light" even though nature remains his own favored sanctuary (YC, p. 13). He can appreciate the quiet serenity Notre Dame immediately affords when he enters, leaving the "hurrahing mob and the rattling carriages" of the city behind (YC, p. 12). The church appears "a great cave in the midst of a city" whose "altars and . . . tinsel [are] but the sparkling stalactites," and so might suit a man "disposed to serious and profitable thought" and "religion, if one had any" (YC, pp. 13, 12). In such an atmosphere of personal reflection, Thoreau believes, "the priest is the least part" (YC, p. 13). In such a cave, worshipers may do their "own preaching," and there, as at home in Concord's woods, "the universe preaches to you and can be heard" (YC, pp. 13, 12). Because the individual may rely directly on God in such an atmosphere, the grand church has some appeal for Thoreau, and he admits, "I am not sure but this Catholic religion would be an admirable one if the priest were quite omitted" (YC, p. 14). But for Catholicism's devotees, whose priest is the most rather than the least part, the significance of such a natural setting is lost on them; they sit instead in their churches "a long time with their little book before the picture of one saint" and then go on to another (YC, p. 52). Moreover, however

conducive to reflective thought Notre Dame might be for city-dwellers, Thoreau firmly denies wanting such a building at home, for "In Concord, to be sure, we do not need such. Our forests are such a church, far grander and more sacred" (YC, p. 14).

Catholicism's effects on its population were, moreover, pervasive. When Thoreau leaves the city for the rural countryside, he finds that he does not leave behind the Church. All along the roadside he comes across "wooden crosses . . . about a dozen feet high, often old and toppling down . . . with a little niche containing a picture of the Virgin and Child, or of Christ alone, sometimes with a string of beads." Thoreau reacts skeptically to such tokens of the Church, calling the wooden carvings he sees mounted on the crosses "a collection of symbolical knickknacks" (YC, p. 45). To his thinking, religious symbols must be "consecrated by the imagination of the worshipers" to be worthwhile, but those used by the French-Canadians, including such representations as "a flask of vinegar" look "like an Italian's board" (YC, pp. 14, 45). The number of symbols is so overwhelming that when he notices at the top of many crosses a weathercock, he says in mock-despair, "I could not look at an honest weathercock in this walk without mistrusting that there was some covert reference in it to St. Peter" (YC, p. 46). Just as he had desired to take "one honest walk" in Canada free from outside interference, here too he decries the institutional effects of the Church that would extend so far as to taint a natural symbol, the "honest weathercock." In his life Thoreau wished to

know which way the real wind blew, without having to experience religion's undercurrents first. Like Church symbolism, religious miracles are wasted on Thoreau. When he visits the Church of La Bonne Ste. Anne, known, according to his guidebook, for "'the miraculous cures said to have been wrought on visitors to the shrine,'" he is one visitor who is plainly immune to its beneficences. Counting "more than twenty-five crutches suspended on the walls . . . which it was to be inferred so many sick had been able to dispense with," Doubting Thoreau has his own pragmatic explanation: "they looked as if they had been made to order by the carpenter who made the church" (YC, p. 51).

In addition to the frequent crosses he discovers along the road, there are individual chapels, "shrine/s/ . . . close to the path-side, with a lattice door, through which we could see an altar, and pictures about the wall." Although "it was just six miles from one parish church to another," these chapels were available in the meantime where "the inhabitants kneeled and perhaps breathed a short prayer" (YC, pp. 42, 46). On the contrary, Thoreau does not draw a free breath in Canada; everywhere he is reminded of the Church. Just as Notre Dame dominates the cityscape of Montreal, so too the village churches dominate the landscape of the outlying region. In Canada the church buildings show all the signs of wealth while domestic structures show none. "The comparative wealth of the Church in this country was apparent," so that even in the smallest villages, the interior of their churches were "much more showy than the dwelling houses promised" (YC, p. 46). In one

village he "did not see one good house besides" the church. "They were all humble cottages," but that church appeared to Thoreau "a more imposing structure than any church in Boston." He quickly adds, "But I am no judge of these things," for despite his many opinions of the Church in Canada, he does not wish his readers to mistake his interest as directly personal so far as religion is concerned (YC, p. 67). He has little involvement in the topic except as Catholicism's underlying effects deny the individual his just apportionment. Thoreau's concern in this matter is not limited to the French-Canadians, for he wrote also in Walden of the inequal distribution of wealth between the Church and its followers. In response to his stolen copy of Homer, he judged that robbery would disappear if there were not disparity in a community between the rich and the poor; for if the wealth were shared equally, "The Pope's Homers would soon get properly distributed" (W, p. 172).

Besides the pervasiveness of the Church's symbols and the inequity of its economic system, Thoreau denounces the cloistered habits that still carried over from the Old World practice of Catholicism. This seclusion is seen literally in the design of the French-Canadians' houses, Thoreau discovers, and figuratively, as a result, in their minds. Unlike a "New England house [which] has a front and principal door opening to the great world, . . . the Canadian's door opens into his backyard and farm alone"; and the road that runs by the New England house "comes from the Old World and goes to the far West" but "the road which runs behind [the Canadian's] house leads only from the church of one saint to that of another" (YC, p. 55).

The Church's effect, insinuates Thoreau, has been to stifle natural growth, refusing to come out of the Old World into the modern age. Thoreau admires, on the other hand, the foresight town-planners showed in one New England town which was laid out with its main "street eight rods wide" instead of the customary four. "It is best to lay our plans widely in youth," Thoreau advises, "for then land is cheap, and it is but too easy to contract our views afterward" (YC, p. 4). The narrow boundaries of Church dogma in Canada make no allowance for individuals' self-expansion.

Thoreau also disparages those employed in the Church, its priests and nuns, whom he faults for enforcing the restrictions of the Church's institution. As he said in regard to civil disobedience, "It is not a man's duty . . . to devote himself to the eradication of any . . . wrong; . . . but it is his duty, at least . . . not to give it practically his support" ("CD," p. 71). His denunciation of the clergy in Canada is harsh, and in some respects, his defensiveness overpowers his descriptions. The mere sight of those wearing the uniforms of the Church suggests a poverty of spirit to Thoreau. Their allegiance to the Church has caused them to repress their individual natures, as the soldiers' allegiance to the State caused a similar loss of identity. To Thoreau the crime is greater when young people renounce their individualism for a lesser conformity. The seminary youths he sees in Quebec "wearing coats edged with white . . . looked as if their expanding hearts were already repressed with a piece of tape" (YC, p. 84).

His defensiveness is most evident in his mordant descriptions of the clergy which force his subjects to become the objects of his gibe. As is true of humor generally, when Thoreau's works, it illuminates the issue, and when it fails, it sheds more light on him than on his topic. Whereas a good joke at the Church's expense may reinforce anti-institutional sympathies, a bad joke only confirms the writer's religious intolerance. As mentioned, Thoreau has a strong reaction to the uniforms of the clergy, as he did to those of the soldiers. He sardonically notes that the clergy on the city streets "are distinguished by their dress, like the civil police," hardly a surprising comment from the fellow who so adamantly opposed moral policing throughout his life. But he continues, "Like clergymen generally, with or without the gown, they made on us the impression of effeminacy" (YC, p. 15). His point involves the appropriateness of the clergy's dress, just as that point underlaid his particular notice of the Highland soldier. Remove the dress as instructed, and imagine clergymen without their gowns, and there are two possible conclusions to draw. Either men of this vocation appear effeminate in manner even when wearing nonclerical garb, or more pointlessly, men of the church wearing no clothes appear effeminate. Readers have a choice of no joke, a poor joke, or a distasteful joke. His criticisms of people in his other writings seldom fall to the level they do in Yankee; here his harsh and hasty judgments are based on outward appearances and colored by inward biases. He is perhaps trying too hard to match their descriptions to the presumed character of the institutions they support.

Thoreau does not attempt to evoke a laugh at the nuns he sees on the street; on the contrary, he paints as morbid a picture of their appearance as possible. These "Sisters of Charity [are] dressed in black, with Shaker-shaped black bonnets and crosses, and cadaverous faces, who looked as if they had almost cried their eyes out, the complexions parboiled with scalding tears." Thoreau reads into their very expressions a sacrilege against his own faith in the individual. In their commitment to their Church, the Sisters forswore their personalities; to Thoreau they are "insulting the daylight by their presence, having taken an oath not to smile." The fact that he takes their unnatural austerity personally is evident when he belabors their description with needless repetition of their death-in-life appearance: "By cadaverous I mean that their faces were like the faces of those who have been dead and buried for a year, and then untombed, with the life's grief upon them, and yet, for some unaccountable reason, the process of decay arrested" (YC, p. 15). Thoreau's depiction of this holy horror is, shall we say, wholly horrible. Such excess is serious overkill for Thoreau, whose pen more commonly mocked than murdered its subjects. In this segment he entombs his wit right alongside the deathly faces of the grieving Sisters. Thoreau's point in these examples is that the very spirit of the individual is stunted from too much association with the Church. But when he defends his viewpoint only by harsh judgments of outward appearance, his defense is at the expense of his ideas which begin to appear as dogmatic as those of the institution he is railing against.

On Thoreau's sliding scale of personal culpability, those in the active service of the Church rated far worse than those who were its members. Nevertheless, he in no way excuses the French-Canadians for their blind faith but instead blames that shortcoming on their bovine complacency. "These Roman Catholics," groans Thoreau, "impress me as a people who have fallen far behind the significance of their symbols. It is as if an ox had strayed into a church and were trying to bethink himself" (YC, p. 13). They allow the Church's institution to control not only their spiritual being, but their political and economic existence as well. Thoreau sarcastically congratulates the British monarchy for allowing the French-Canadians freedom in their faith; for with Catholicism so restrictive of free thought, England's subordination of her subjects was assured. "The English government has been remarkably liberal to its Catholic subjects in Canada," he chuckles, "permitting them to wear their own fetters, both political and religious, as far as was possible for subjects" (YC, p. 64). Further, he is disbelieving when he reports that the French-Canadians' loyalty to their faith is such that land taxes and church assessments levied solely on Roman-Catholics, taxes "to which they are not subject if . . . [they] change their faith," did not cause the inhabitants to become "the less attached to their church in consequence" (YC, p. 63). Such complicity renders these people less victims than conspirators, in Thoreau's estimation. For it will be recalled that Thoreau formally resigned in 1840 from his family's church when he found that he was involuntarily being included in its

annual tax roll.⁷¹ In short, Thoreau finds that the French-Canadians in Lower Canada "had not advanced since the settlement of the country, . . . were quite behind the age, and fairly represented their ancestors in Normandy a thousand years ago" (YC, p. 64). Yet he willingly concedes that they possess one virtue in that "they are capable of reverence" whereas "we Yankees are a people in whom this sentiment has nearly died out" (YC, p. 13). In Thoreau's estimation, that quality is so admirable that in the end, his judgment softens when he declares, "If the Canadian wants energy, perchance he possesses those virtues, social and others, which the Yankee lacks, in which case he cannot be regarded as a poor man" (YC, p. 68).

Beyond Thoreau's general treatment of signs of the military and of the Church in Canada, he discovers a symbol for the oppressive effects of institutionalism in the walled city of Quebec. That fortress is an unnatural constraint on the region's resources, because "Montmorenci County . . . was nearly as large as Massachusetts, . . . but by far the greater parts . . . continue to be waste land, lying, as it were, under the walls of Quebec" (YC, p. 57). Man's higher instincts and power of reason naturally dominate, Thoreau believes, over the animal instincts and brute force that are characteristic of fortresses. Thus, "The most modern fortifications have an air of antiquity about them . . . because they are not really

the work of this age," work more rightfully inspired by loftier and more civilized goals beyond mere military domination. The citizens of Quebec will make an important first step, Thoreau judges, if they act as planned by "abandoning the wall about the Upper Town, and confining the fortification to the citadel of forty acres." But the final reduction must go beyond the physical razing of the wall until that time comes when the inhabitants "finally reduce their intrenchments to the circumference of their own brave hearts," if they are ever to experience a genuine reform (YC, p. 71).

The climax both to Thoreau's tour through Canada and to his developing theme occurs in Yankee's fourth chapter entitled "The Walls of Quebec." In this section he undertakes a mock-heroic siege on the walled city, the natural result of his affinity for heroic ideals. The climax occurs in a totally engaging bit of serious play that borrows its heroic character from Thoreau's self-styled role as a defender of faith in the individual against encroaching institutionalism. He disdained those, he had written in his Journal, who "would have you doff your bright and knightly armor and drudge for them--serve them and not God" (I: 212). Thoreau imaginatively transfers the knight with his swordplay to his own image to become a defender with inspired wordplay. The association with the knight is evoked by Quebec's atmosphere, which is to Thoreau's perception, "a reminiscence of the Middle Ages" (YC, p. 23). Thoreau thus becomes the adventurous defender-errant who will unmask the antiquated fortress and reveal to all the Yankees in New England its true character, a useless relic.

"The Martello Towers looked, for all the world," Thoreau previews, "exactly like abandoned wind-mills which had not had a grist to grind these hundred years" (YC, p. 71).

Thoreau's show of bravura in this section is not uncharacteristic. Such defensive blustering in Yankee is a way of "protecting his emotional flanks," something he had done other times in his life.⁷² He badly needed to expand his role in Yankee, to invent a way to rise above the tourist he had literally been to portray himself more heroically. He obviously could not reveal himself feeling like the "flattened bullet" he had confided to his Journal after the trip; he himself must aim the fire. To do so, he becomes a man who challenges the oppressive institutionalism of Canada. Nowhere else in Yankee is Thoreau so personally involved in the issues than here when he takes on Quebec's walled fortress.⁷³ Being in Canada touched off in Thoreau every conflict with an institution he had felt from his battles at home. But whereas America's institutions were newly-formed improvements over the steeped traditions of the Old World, Canada's centuries' old institutions thrived still, and, to Thoreau's mind, all at the expense of her inhabitants' personal liberties. Embodied in the walled city was the perfect symbol which Thoreau could use to lambast both Church and State. In a marvelous mock search-and-destroy mission behind British lines, Thoreau challenges Old World ideals.

The escapade begins with Thoreau's desiring a final look at Quebec's walled city before his steamer departed. In contrast to previous literary strategies where Thoreau's

defensiveness distanced him from the people and events in his account, here Thoreau inverts his reactions to put his defensive side outside; he goes on the offensive. His excursion around the walls is an imaginative farce in which the reality of the sights is subordinated to Thoreau's purpose for examining them. They are the targets against which he mounts his attack.

The excursion immediately takes on the overtones of a spy mission as Thoreau, "like a rat looking for a hole," anxiously scours the two-and-three-quarter-mile circumference of the walls before happening upon "an obscure passage" which leads him to the glacis fronting the citadel itself (YC, p. 72). Here he is afforded a unique view and believes he is "the only visitor then in the city who got in there"; his solitary stroll of the glacis functions as the calm before his impending storm on the city's wall. While taking in the panoramic view, he is soothed by "the sound of a bagpipe" from inside the citadel. Complementing the peacefulness of that moment, a cat appears above Thoreau "walking up a cleated plank into a high loophole designed for mus-catry, as serene as Wisdom herself; and with a gracefully waving motion of her tail, as if her ways were ways of pleasantness and all her paths were peace." The serenity of this scene starkly contrasts with his earlier descriptions of the military "busyness" of the soldiers. Although Thoreau personally identifies with that feline symbol of peace, for the sake of his defending mission, he catapults into action. First he "[scales] a slat fence, where a small force might have checked" him, and then enters

the Governor's Garden, which featured "amid kitchen vegetables, [and] beside the common garden flowers, the usual complement of cannon," the natural fruit, he implies, of this unnatural foreign interior (YC, pp. 73, 74). The sight of these weapons "directed toward some future and possible enemy" inspires him to keep moving (YC, p. 74). Although feeling very tired after these exertions, he recommences his exploration of the Upper City, "this time on the inside of the wall," for, as he facetiously explains, becoming for the moment a Yankee again, "I knew that the wall was the main thing in Quebec, and had cost a great deal of money, and therefore I must make the most of it." In fact, a Yankee instinct spurs Thoreau to confront Quebec's walls. Just as days before, the Yankees on his tour had mockingly threatened an assault with their umbrellas against the armed soldiers they saw, now too Thoreau admits "[yielding] in some measure to the soldier instinct, and . . . [therefore] thought it best to examine the wall thoroughly that I might be the better prepared if I should ever be called that way again in the service of my country."

He begins his one-man siege by explaining his strategy:

I committed all the gates to memory, in their order, which did not cost me so much trouble as it would have done at the hundred-gated city, there being only five; nor were they so hard to remember as those seven of Boeotian Thebes; and, moreover, I thought that, if seven champions were enough against the latter, one would be enough against Quebec, though he bore for all armor and device only an umbrella and a bundle. (YC, p. 74)

Thoreau obviously relishes his maurauding role and boldly announces that his first offensive is the despoiliation of the Church. "I took the nunneries as I went," he crows, "for I had learned to distinguish them by the blinds"; here he alludes to the unenlightened, cloistered view of life that is characteristic of the Church's converts, such as the Sisters of Charity he had earlier observed "never once lifting their eyes from the ground" (YC, pp. 74, 16).

In a journal entry of August 1851, Thoreau admitted thinking that "Some institutions . . . have had a divine origin." But of those like Church and State in Canada which originated in a past age, "the life is extinct, . . . there is nothing divine in them"; "prevailing in society" is "nothing but the form, the shell" (J, II: 403). In Yankee he likens Quebec and its walls to "inedible shell-fish," and preserves the sense of their hollow function which he described in his Journal. From his siege on this "shell-fish," he plans to keep for his spoils the nunneries, orphanages and convents, "the only pearls" (YC, p. 74). After his behind-the-lines examination of the walled city, he feels himself expert on its construction and offers a short lesson in the manner of a city guide. "Quebec is chiefly famous for the thickness of its parietal bones," he solemnly intones, implying that those behind the construction of such a structure must themselves be thick-headed (YC, pp. 74-75).

Thoreau launches his next offensive in the area of the artillery barracks. Because "the sentries, like peripatetic philosophers, were so absorbed in thought" that they do not

notice him, he passes easily through the gates. The irony of his analogy is apparent from his earlier denunciations of soldiering activities (here it is guarding) that are but physical, not rational, uses of men. He repeatedly points out the guards' purposeless activity. They guard against nothing, for in this age of peace "both honest and dishonest men all the world over have been in their beds nearly half a century" (YC, p. 80). To compound the dim view he takes of their needless vigils, he playfully twists the root form of guard to change its sense from "watchfully protecting" to merely "watching" and finally, "ignoring" as the soldiers on duty "pace back and forth before some guard-house . . . guarding, regarding, and disregarding all kinds of law by turns" (emphasis added) (YC, p. 16). While it is not surprising that at another gate Thoreau "did not heed the sentries," it is ironical that he can claim of the guards, "nor did they" pay attention to him. Nevertheless, they are an unnatural disturbance in his walking route, and he does not breathe freely around them; "what under the sun they were placed there for," he says querulously, "unless to hinder a free circulation of the air, was not apparent" (YC, p. 24). What is apparent is that in the cat-and-mouse game Thoreau plays when he sees them, he clearly feels superior to "these creatures standing sentry," who let him "go without shooting" him "or even demanding the countersign" (YC, pp. 25-26). Underlying his ridicule of the guards' useless posturing is his conviction that men should not allow themselves to be misused by their State. Considering that the sentries' duty was not to guard at all

but only to be physically present at the gate like so many cigar-store soldiers, their inane function triggers in Thoreau the same disdain he earlier expressed in "Civil Disobedience" for the "mass of men [who] serve the State . . . not as men mainly, but as machines, with their bodies. . . . [though] wooden men can perhaps be manufactured that will serve the purpose as well" (p. 66).

He continues his mock-heroic passage through enemy territory in Quebec. Inside an artillery barrack he spies a formidable stock of small arms weaponry "so arranged as to give a startling coup d'oeill to strangers." He does not enter, sure that he would "get a black eye." Relentlessly stalking the wall, his prey, the view is temporarily obstructed by the barracks, but then he "recovered it again" (YC, p. 75). Thoreau completes his exploration of the walls when he has gone full-circle and ends with the sight of two dozen big cannon, well-stocked with cannon balls, facing out over the harbor. Their readiness, he sees, is "in accordance with the motto, 'In time of peace prepare for war,'" although he ironically concludes, there are "no preparations for peace: she was plainly an uninvited guest."

Thoreau's surveillance of Quebec's walls has proven successful, but he stops, fearing that too much time spent in the vicinity of this monument of such single vision could cause him to become "wall-eyed" as well. Still, he is satisfied that he has undermined the British military institution with his exploits and so brags, "I think that I deserve to be made a member of the Royal Sappers and Miners" (YC, p. 76).

After proving by his infiltration that the wall serves no effective defensive function, he argues that it is a poor natural resource also. The wall is so meticulously tended that "not even . . . the lichens [are permitted] to grow on it"; nor do natural activities take place on its glacis, "no cultivation nor pasturing . . . and cattle were strictly forbidden to feed . . . under the severest penalties" (YC, p. 80). In short, the citadel, where the British "planted themselves," proves a Confucian-style truth, "He who plants upon a rock cannot expect much increase" (YC, p. 86).

The mock-heroic tone of Thoreau's "attack" on the walled city makes his pretense of physical assault wonderfully ironic. Thoreau knows that the wall, a tireless, though to him, a tiresome challenge, will still stand long after his sport has ended. Like a man who first exerts full strength against an arm-wrestling contender but then strategically withdraws his force, causing his antagonist to lurch unavoidably forward and perhaps land on his face, so in Quebec Thoreau pretends to pit his republican self wholeheartedly against Britain's bullying image, but then suddenly withdraws the pretense. Only children persist after the game has ended; men know when to stop. "The citadel of Quebec says, 'I will live here, and you shan't prevent me,'" and Thoreau surprisingly rejoins, I "have not the slightest objection; live and let live" (YC, pp. 76-77). He realizes that ultimately the individual must be responsible for his own reform. His task has been only to point out the situation's irrationality, not to institute a reform movement himself, becoming in the process his own

worst enemy. His play in Quebec has shown his belief that

the whole castle here was a 'folly,'--England's folly, . . . Such works do not consist with the development of the intellect. Huge stone structures of all kinds, both in their erection and by their influence when erected, rather oppress than liberate the mind. They are tombs for the souls of men, as frequently for their bodies also. (YC, p. 78)

The fortress thus symbolizes Thoreau's principal theme in Yankee; institutions entomb the spirits of men who support them. With a singular persistence he champions throughout the book man's spiritual and intellectual well-being. Earlier in Quebec he had witnessed "a man [who] lay on his back on the wharf, apparently dying, . . . groaning, 'O ma conscience!'" This morbid sight struck Thoreau as little relevant to his narrative except as it furnished a light twist to the language difficulties he often complained of; so that this time Thoreau judges, "I thought that he pronounced his French more distinctly than any I heard" (YC, p. 72). In contrast, the day after reviewing the fortress, he is uncommonly sympathetic when he comes across a tomb

behind in the woods, with a remarkably high wall and higher monument. . . . He could not have imagined how dead he would be in a few years, and all the more dead and forgotten for being buried under such a mass of gloomy stone, where not even memory could get at him without a crowbar. Ah! poor man, with that last end of his! (YC, p. 98)

The empathy Thoreau feels for the man in the tomb, but not for the dying man on the wharf, testifies to the particular

significance he perceives in the figure of the stone monument.
"Rest in peace" is a message America's institutions must never
bear.

IV

From his trip Thoreau learned that Canada's institutionally-derived culture precluded those values that were his personal investment at home. Yankee is, to a great extent, a means to protect that investment in the eyes of his Concord townsmen. Thoreau undoubtedly had his townsmen in mind as he wrote his narrative; they had furnished perhaps his strongest incentive to tell the story of his Canada trip. He acknowledges that inducement in his Journal when he vents the mock-complaint that "I found last winter that it was expected by my townsmen that I would give some account of Canada because I had visited it, and because many of them had, and so felt interested in the subject" (II: 417). Thoreau knew to expect their inquiries about his trip, for, characteristically, they were the first to demand an account of the latest event in his life. When he lived by himself at the pond, they were curious to know why, as he acknowledges in his first draft of Walden. The public interest in his affairs was his justification for writing about his unique experiment in living: "I should not presume to talk so much about myself and my affairs as I shall in this lecture if very particular and personal inquiries had not been made concerning my mode of life . . ." ⁷⁴ And after Thoreau went to jail rather than pay his poll tax, a levy which Abolitionists then construed as support for the government's immoral stance on slavery, he was repeatedly pressed by his townsmen to explain the motives behind his action so that at last he complied by giving a lecture on the subject, followed later by an

essay, "Resistance to Civil Government."⁷⁵ Thoreau's seemingly begrudging acknowledgment of the particular interest Concord's residents took in hearing his version of events no doubt belied his deeper pleasure at being so in demand. And evidently so he was, for as Walter Harding has pointed out, "It was curious how much his opinion was sought, considering how much it was derided. No sooner did any extraordinary news arrive than everyone must know what Thoreau thought about the last happening."⁷⁶ Like every writer, Thoreau craved an audience, and the Concord townspeople were his first. That he wanted to tell was not enough; his audience must also want to hear. Capitalizing on their curiosity about him, Thoreau allowed that he could be prodded into producing an account of Canada; and, once again, having that concrete reason for writing helped justify his own need to write and be heard.

Thoreau's grumbling response to their promptings, then, was less a sign of real reluctance to tell about himself than a characteristically defensive response to reminders that he was different from them. In the last decade of his life, he softened somewhat so that, according to William Howarth, "he was no longer so defensive about his solitary ways, so hostile to the mores and manner of others."⁷⁷ But Yankee shows the old-style Thoreau, at his most defensive. In that way Yankee contrasts most sharply with his other travel books, which most agree possess a more relaxed tone and portray a less guarded figure. As Sherman Paul explains,

The Thoreau of the travel books 'smiles at us.' He is not on the defensive, as he was from first to last

at Concord, because his stakes were less and he had nothing to prove; in the intervals his travels commemorate he was free from the judgment and expectations of his transcendental worthies, neighbors, and disciples, and also free from the terrible burdens he imposed on himself because Concord was his place of work . . . and his time was running out. We find him instead, outside of his familiar fields, manfully owning up to his own inexperience, being tested merely as a man.⁷⁸

But while it was true in general that when away from Concord, Thoreau's "stakes were less and he had nothing to prove," that was not true of Canada. For when he targeted her institutions to be the objects of his scrutiny, his self-esteem was once again on the line as he sought to defend in Yankee those values he upheld at home. In his account Thoreau lacks real evidence and must rely instead on the superficial sights of his tour and his subsequent researches. He sounds far more blustering as a result than when he has his facts at hand, especially firsthand. In Thoreau's defensive show of knowledge where there were only opinions, he is like the spunky dog described in Yankee pulling a small wagon along a rutted, muddy road: "But harnessed to the cart as he was, we heard him barking after we had passed, though we looked anywhere but to the cart to see where the dog was that barked" (YC, p. 44). The Yankee traveler was bound, too, by a tourist schedule covering too much area in too little time. But his fiercely spirited "barking" from Canada nonetheless sounded a formidable warning to Americans back home. The intrinsic chauvinism of Thoreau's role, clothed as he was in a "thoroughly Yankee costume," disguises personal motives at defending what is really at

issue in Yankee, his values. The predominance of Church and State and their implicit restriction of individual rights is an affront to which he reacts in the name of all New England patriots. Bearing his Yankee background as the chip on his shoulder, Thoreau challenged the presumptions of Canadian culture with the same zealous spirit that his ancestors long before had displayed against the British. He knew to expect that even those of his townsmen who had also visited Canada could not be assumed to have viewed the lethal signs of its institutional culture as more than curious foreign workings. Thoreau, more than his neighbors, practiced what he preached; going to jail was one way he had of showing them that. As he declared in his Journal, "How vain it is to sit down to write when you have not stood up to live" (II: 404).

Yankee's epigraph foreshadowed Thoreau's intention to claim for New England, and for himself by association, an autonomy which clearly contrasted with the state of affairs in Canada. Taken from a text of "oddities," the epigraph states, "New England is affirmed by some to be an island, bounded on the north with the River Canada" Just as Thoreau strove to be an island of self-reliance apart from the materialistic mainland of his neighbors in Concord, so too in Canada he maintains his individual identity beneath the Yankee veneer. Building a hut for one at Walden Pond was an act of selective isolation that spoke worlds. Yankee's role-playing narrator also speaks worlds; in Canada's case, they are the Old and the New Worlds. Yankees reading

Thoreau's Canada book could trust that their guide through the Old World which still dominated that country knew which side of the "River Canada" his bread was buttered on. The Yankee role, like the Yankee costume Thoreau wore, provided him in one sense a cover, being a way to hide from foreign differences, and in another sense a visibility, a way to affirm his strong New England affiliations. In the narrative the persona appeared or disappeared, depending on how much distance he wished between himself and the subject. Matters of the Church he held at arm's length, for example, and so, speaking as a Yankee, he drily pretended to lack experience with matters of religion. In one instance, Thoreau effected a Yankee provincialism as he gawked uncomprehendingly at Notre Dame before finally saying, "I saw that it was of great size and signified something" (YC, p. 12).

Although he tags himself and his notions in the book as thoroughly Yankee, in fact his ideas are more thoroughly Thoreau's own. For one thing, his irreverent humor only traveled to Canada whereas it lived in Concord. At home this irreverence, while not caused by his feeling himself to be a superior American, was nonetheless related to his feeling himself superior. "We are enabled to criticise others," he claimed in his Journal, "only when we are different from, and in a given particular superior to, them ourselves. By our aloofness from men and their affairs we are enabled to overlook

and criticise them" (II: 267). To the extent that his townsmen can identify with him, he plays a Yankee role in this book, but overall, he takes pains to distinguish himself from the others. His singularity is serious business, even when it is accomplished by so seemingly inconsequential a detail as looking the most beggarly of the Yankee travelers. He emphasizes this difference, pointing out with pleasure that "Probably there was not one among all the Yankees who went to Canada this time, who was not more splendidly dressed than I was." He wryly judges this humble difference to be worthy insofar as it allowed him to stand out from the others, as he notes, "It would have been a poor story if I had not enjoyed some distinction" (YC, p. 28).

In the book he plays the Yankee uncle to the troop of Yankee boys full of chauvinistic enthusiasms, most of which Thoreau shared, and ebullient Yankee spirits, which he only forbore. For instance, Thoreau did not share in the conviviality of the other train passengers who all "smile whenever . . . one man in the cars" exhibited "a bottle full of some liquor"; "I find no difficulty containing myself," Thoreau responded, showing by his smugly sober demeanor that he was indeed full of himself (YC, p. 5). Thoreau's disapproving countenance so juxtaposed against a railcar of spirited travelers showed him on the defensive from the start, even against his fellows. There were possibly none in Canada that trip who escaped Thoreau's disapprobation. In the traincar Thoreau, never one to swallow his spirits, clearly relished feeling superior to those who would unnaturally intoxicate their senses; for he was a man

committed to "higher laws," and so life's elixir was all the stimulant he required. Therefore, from Yankee's very beginning, Thoreau makes it obvious that his role in Canada, as at home, is to be the critic.

Of course, Thoreau's difference from the other Yankees was more than a matter of mere appearance or behavior. He was also more principled; he held personal values more sacred, so that in the book he must argue seriously, or sometimes humorously, his viewpoint against Canada's foreign example. Furthermore, he took those values more to heart than the other Yankees did. Although he approved of the others' spunk when, armed only with civilian umbrellas, they threatened to run off the British armed militia, he does not feel they are discriminating in their passions. When the Yankees saw the Canadians "riding about in caleches and small one-horse carts," they boisterously "assumed that all the riders were racing, or at least exhibiting the paces of their horses, and saluted them accordingly" (YC, p. 10). The Yankees' reaction as a group, whether making signs of war against the militia or signs of sport with the inhabitants, seemed not to be provoked by anything deeper than mere impulse. There is overall a sense in Yankee that Thoreau would like to redirect the Yankees' enthusiasms, as when, for example, he described their activities on the train ride home: "In the La Prairie cars the Yankees made themselves merry, imitating the cries of the charette-drivers to perfection . . . and they kept it up all the way to Boston" (YC, p. 99). Underlying his observation of their delight in curiosities is the suggestion that to

find a jest in the inconsequential fact of a foreign horse-cry may be amusing, but it is possible to find an even greater joke, as he himself does, at the expense of Canada's institutions. Reading Yankee gives the impression that Thoreau found Canada's institutions were largely overlooked by most of the Yankees except as foreign curiosities attracted notice, such as whether the candles in Notre Dame were wax or tin. Thoreau carefully looked over the effects of those institutions, but unlike the Yankees, cared little about the material of the candles or even which symbol of faith a worshiper used so long as "it were consecrated by the imagination of the worshipers" (YC, p. 14).

Thoreau played at being the Yankee to parade his assumptions of American ideals, and in this way he modeled the spirit he wished his countrymen to display more often. He wanted them to realize for themselves the importance of standing up for American values, against any and all who threaten by their unliberated practices not to respect man's personal independence in the New World. To the other Yankees, their umbrella play is idle sport, holding their attention only until another foreign attraction catches their eye. But unlike them, Thoreau takes his play seriously, and makes a grand game of surveying Quebec's walls "in the service of my country" (YC, p. 74). He acknowledged by his example that a true Yankee's business should be to topple Old World ways that threaten New World freedoms, for relics of the past rarely accommodate willingly the independent spirit of the modern man.

Thoreau alluded in his Journal to his preference for domestic rather than foreign commentary, saying "As travellers go round the world and report natural objects and phenomena, so faithfully let another stay at home and report the phenomena of his own life" (II: 403). In his account of Canada, he had it both ways, for his report, though ostensibly about foreign affairs, was most truly a rehash of domestic beliefs he had long ago formulated. In Yankee Thoreau's critical stance on Church and State gave him a stability in the narrative that he did not feel traveling on his excursion. Of "natural phenomena" he had little to report from Canada, so he railed against the natural phenomena of institutions in Canada as he had at home. His ideas in Yankee do not strike us as fresh thinking. Rather they resound familiarly, traced to similar passages in his Journals and "Civil Disobedience," for he spent much of his life on guard against the threat of institutional encroachments upon individual liberties. He was against institutions on the grounds that they reflect narrow, not universal interests. Their products are men whose desire to fill the emptiness of their lives

made the least traditional expression and shadow of a thought to be clung to with instinctive tenacity. They atone for their producing nothing by a brutish respect for something. They are as simple as oxen, and as guiltless of thought and reflection. The reflections are reflected from other minds. The creature of institutions, bigoted and a conservatist, can say nothing hearty. He cannot meet life with life, but only with words. (II: 468)

In Yankee Thoreau once again publicized the underlying danger of institutions to individual autonomy. The defensive tone of that book, moreover, underscores his personal involvement with its issues, though not with its foreign subject. A Yankee in Canada's tone is unmistakably characteristic of Thoreau. Though he named his foes in that book Church and State, he faced a more real enemy in Canada's alien environment. In the book Thoreau's most basic conflict is Concord, or home, versus anything that is foreign. His habitual defensiveness in view of this conflict is nowhere in his writings more evident than in A Yankee in Canada. "Men are not concealed under habits," Thoreau once said, "but are revealed by them; they are their true clothes."⁷⁹ While the excursion to Canada took Thoreau out of Concord, no number of foreign experiences could ever take Concord out of Thoreau.

NOTES

¹Paperbound Books in Print, 1983 Spring ed. (New York: Bowker, 1983), pp. 2930-31.

²Books in Print, 1983-84 ed. (New York: Bowker, 1984), p. 4346.

³The most recent example of a critic who has adopted this practice of treating A Yankee in Canada only shallowly is Richard Lebeaux in his otherwise excellent psychological study of Thoreau's adult development, Thoreau's Seasons (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984). In its 375 pages only one paragraph mentions Yankee, a short aside from the main work under discussion, "Walking." In the paragraph Lebeaux, who acknowledges the book as "one of his [Thoreau's] most lack-luster performances, as even Blake had the gumption to tell him," makes just one new observation about the book: "While the trip to Canada disappointed him, it also helped crystallize further the parameters of his identity; if he was to travel, it would be primarily in New England," p. 131. Lebeaux's observation is, I believe, correct and helpful but as a treatment of Yankee related to his thesis, it is sorely lacking. ~~The implication is that Yankee has little to offer in the way of documenting evidence about Thoreau's actions or behavior.~~

⁴Henry David Thoreau, A Yankee in Canada in "Excursions and Poems," The Writings of Henry David Thoreau (Boston: Houghton Mifflin & Company, 1906), V, 82--hereafter cited in this paper as YC.

⁵Sherman Paul, The Shores of America (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972), p. 33.

⁶Paul, p. 371.

⁷The books include those by Richard Lebeaux, Thoreau's Seasons (1984); William Howarth, The Book of Concord: Thoreau's Life as a Writer (New York: The Viking Press, 1982); Walter Harding and Michael Meyer, The New Thoreau Handbook (New York: New York University Press, 1980)--Harding's reading of Yankee is essentially the same as that he first published in A Thoreau Handbook (1959); John Christie, Thoreau as World Traveler (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965); Walter Harding, The Days of Henry Thoreau (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1965); and Sherman Paul, The Shores of America (1972).

The articles concentrating on Yankee are by Stephen Adams, "Thoreau Catching Cold: A Yankee in Canada," Emerson Society Quarterly, 25, No. 4 (1979); Joseph Basile, "Thoreau's Uncommon

Cold: A Yankee in Canada Revisited, Concord Saunterer, 13 (Spring, 1978); Sidney Poger, "Thoreau as Yankee in Canada," American Transcendental Quarterly, 14 (1972); Barrie Davies, "Sam Quixote in Lower Canada: A Reading of Thoreau's A Yankee in Canada," Humanities Association Review, 20 (1969); Lawrence Willson, "Thoreau and the French in Canada," Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa, 29 (1959); Max Cosman, "A Yankee in Canada," The Canadian Historical Review, 25, No. 1 (1944); and Edmund Berry, "Thoreau in Canada," Dalhousie Review, 23, No. 1 (1943).

8. Walden, ed. J. Lyndon Shanley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 84 --hereafter cited as W in this paper.

9. Poger, p. 176.

10. Davies, p. 10.

11. Cosman, p. 11.

12. Basile, pp. 10, 7.

13. Adams, pp. 224-25.

14. Paul, p. 390.

15. Berry, p. 74.

16. Harding, Days, p. 283; New Handbook, p. 48.

17. Paul, p. 371.

18. Davies, p. 18.

19. Poger says that "Critics call Thoreau an extremely naive American tourist, a superior Yankee looking down his long nose at an inferior race" (p. 175). Twice more in his article Poger credits Harding as the source for his opinions: "A Yankee in Canada is normally regarded as a simple travel narrative and has been labeled Thoreau's least complex excursion, the simplest and most minor of his books" (p. 174); and, "No more comic or uncharacteristic picture of Thoreau can be imagined than his signing up for a . . . trip . . . along with fifteen hundred other tourists" (p. 174).

20. Davies begins by saying that "To label it [Yankee] 'uncharacteristic' and have done is a dangerous critical practice" (p. 68). In his concluding paragraph Davies alludes to Harding again, saying, "If we . . . think 'he is the superior Yankee looking down his long nose' we are guilty of a sentimentality which mistakes irony for indifference . . ." (p. 76).

21. Berry, p. 74.

22. Harding, New Handbook, p. 47.

23. Harding, New Handbook, p. 48.

24. Poger, p. 175. Other critics who reiterate those points include John Christie (p. 100), Joseph Basile (p. 7), and, most recently, William Howarth (p. 70).

25. As was noted earlier in this text, Barrie Davies does refute Harding's opinion in his article, "Sam Quixote in Lower Canada" (p. 68). However, Davies wrote in 1969. The last word there belongs to Walter Harding, whose revised work, The New Thoreau Handbook, appeared under co-authorship with Michael Meyer in 1980.

Stephen Adams' article, "Thoreau Catching Cold: A Yankee in Canada," published late in 1979, also refutes Harding. Adams argues that Thoreau's rhetorical strategy is to try to "attempt . . . the spare, concentrated, suggestive writing" he alluded to in an earlier Journal entry (p. 224). I feel that my present study complements Adams' perspective since I too emphasize the characteristic aspects of Yankee; however, I favor other causes as the principal influences affecting both Thoreau's tone and purpose.

26. Cosman, p. 33.

27. Barrie Davies also points out that his belief that Thoreau was "writing with an audience in mind" is not meant to imply "that he would compromise himself in any way" but only that Thoreau "was not adverse to writing in a form acceptable to a contemporary audience if it did not jeopardise the moral seriousness of the work" (p. 68).

28. Harding, Days, pp. 234-36.

29. Greeley to Thoreau, C, p. 223. For additional instances of Greeley's comments on the length of Thoreau's manuscripts, see April 17, 1848; February 27, 1852; March 18, 1852; and June 25, 1852 (C, pp. 218, 277, 282).

30. Harding, New Handbook, pp. 63, 66.

31. Harding, Days, pp. 360-61.

32. Harding, Days, pp. 392-94.

33. Harding, Days, pp. 282-83.

34. Sherman Paul writes that during the time "between the publishing of A Week and Walden . . . there was a promise of success in the intermittent and widening demand for lectures, a few articles had been sold, but there was no real success, no self-sufficiency in these vocations" (p. 237).

³⁵The Journal of Henry D. Thoreau, ed. Bradford Torrey and Francis H. Allen (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1906), I: 345--hereafter cited in this paper as J.

³⁶Lebeaux offers a psychological look at how the mentor relationship met the needs of both Blake and Thoreau (pp. 85-89).

³⁷C, p. 266. In a later incident Thoreau again confesses and apologizes for his mundaneness as he writes to Blake on July 21, 1852, "I am too stupidly well these days to write to you. My life is almost altogether outward, all shell and no tender kernel; so that I fear the report of it would be only a nut for you to crack with no meat in it for you to eat" (C, p. 284). In a similar vein Thoreau apologizes once more in a letter to Blake on August 8, 1854, for attending too much to matters at hand to work at "fulfilling the end of his being" and goes on to judge his summer "unprofitable" since, he admits, "I have been too much with the world, as the poet might say" (C, pp. 331, 330).

³⁸Christie, pp. 95-97.

³⁹Howarth, p. 69.

⁴⁰Berry, p. 69.

⁴¹Poger, p. 175.

⁴²Basile, p. 7.

⁴³Harding, New Handbook, p. 66.

⁴⁴The Maine Woods, Cape Cod and Miscellanies. (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1929), p. 3.

⁴⁵New Handbook, p. 69. Harding's opinion that Cape Cod "stands, and long will continue to stand as the book about Cape Cod" agrees with Thomas Higginson's 1865 review of the work, in which Higginson writes that Thoreau's books "will stand for it [Cape Cod], a century hence, as it now does" ("Cape Cod: A Review" in Thoreau: A Century of Criticism, Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1954, p. 43). For an opposite reading, see William Howarth, who in The Book of Concord stresses the book's negativism and subsequent unpopularity (pp. 116-17).

⁴⁶It is interesting to note that it was in Cape Cod's manuscript that Thoreau's editor "objected to 'its tone towards the people of that region'" (Harding, New Handbook, p. 66). In Yankee, on the other hand, Thoreau's frequently belittling comments about French-Canadians seem to have troubled none but modern reviewers. Such a response points out the inconsistency not of Thoreau but only of a contemporary audience's acceptance,

represented by the editor's view, of a writer's foreign but not his domestic prejudices. Because Thoreau is consistently superior-sounding in all of his writings, not just Yankee, the charge by some reviewers that Thoreau's superior attitude is a main fault of this book is not critically illuminating. Why Thoreau maintains a defensive tone throughout Yankee is, it seems to me, a more relevant issue.

⁴⁷Harding, Days, pp. 277-78.

⁴⁸Tony Tanner, The Reign of Wonder (Cambridge: University Press, 1965), p. 48. Tanner describes Thoreau's "prescribed method" of seeing to be that "The eye should meander, passively absorbing impression from the external world" and says that "'Sauntering' is a key idea in Thoreau both as a way of living and a mode of thinking and seeing, and indeed of writing. See also Stephen Adams for a slightly different version of the effects of lost sauntering time on Yankee (p. 226).

⁴⁹Harding, New Handbook, pp. 43, 181, 64, 66.

⁵⁰Harding, Days, p. 184.

⁵¹Lebeaux, Thoreau's Seasons, p. 40. A Journal entry written in 1858 also illustrates the analogy: "And yet there is no more tempting novelty than this new November. . . . Here, of course, is all that you love . . . Here is your bride elect, as close to you as she can be got" (XI: 274-75).

⁵²Howarth says that in Cape Cod Thoreau "took 'retired' roads away from the shore, looked at ponds and forests, avoided houses by walking 'acrosslots,' as was his custom in Concord" (p. 140).

⁵³Harding, Days, pp. 145, 44.

⁵⁴The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau, ed. Walter Harding and Carl Bode (New York: New York University Press, 1958), p. 112--hereafter cited in this paper as C.

⁵⁵Sherman Paul writes, "But if he followed the discoverers on his excursions to Maine, Cape Cod, and Canada, he was the discoverer in Concord, exploring to another end, that of finding for their discoveries a place in the spirit of man. . . . From that time he had been laying back the folds of nature, searching for her laws, and by a sympathetic experience trying to find in all her phenomena the corresponding values for man" (p. 392).

⁵⁶In The Book of Concord Howarth traces Thoreau's "life as a writer. At the center of that life is his Journal At the heart of his Journal is Concord, the place that he came to see as a microcosm, a whole earth living in organic harmony" (pp. xvi-xvii).

⁵⁷(Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1977), p. 24.

⁵⁸Lebeaux, Young Man Thoreau, p. 25.

⁵⁹Lebeaux, Young Man Thoreau, p. 26.

⁶⁰Lebeaux, Young Man Thoreau, pp. 26-27.

⁶¹Howarth, pp. 67-68.

⁶²J. Lyndon Shanley, The Making of Walden (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 104. Thoreau included these words in his first version of the book, written in 1846-47. Thoreau's letter to Ricketson was written in 1855.

⁶³Basile, p. 10.

⁶⁴Vol. X, no. 2835, p. 6.

⁶⁵Vol. IX, no. 191, p. 1.

⁶⁶In the hands of Putnam's editor George Curtis, "the Devil" transformed to become "an eel," "An Excursion to Canada," Putnam's Monthly (Feb. 1853), p. 182.

⁶⁷"Resistance to Civil Government" in Reform Papers, ed. Wendell Glick (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 89. This essay is known by various titles, as Harding explains in The New Thoreau Handbook (p. 41). For this paper I refer to it by its popular title "Civil Disobedience," and will hereafter refer to it in the text as "CD."

⁶⁸Harding, New Handbook, p. 47.

⁶⁹"Annexation of Canada," Vol. IX (July 1850), p. 399.

⁷⁰Harding, New Handbook, p. 70.

⁷¹Harding, Days, pp. 199-200.

⁷²Lebeaux tells of Thoreau's self-aggrandizing reply in response to a questionnaire concerning current occupations sent to him by a former Harvard classmate (Thoreau's Seasons, p. 65).

⁷³Presumably Channing does not accompany Thoreau on this last outing, for the voice changes in number in the text from third to first person. The result is a narrative that, although brief, is more vividly told than previous episodes and is more imaginatively inspired.

⁷⁴Shanley, pp. 104-05.

⁷⁵Harding, Days, pp. 222, 206.

⁷⁶Walter Harding, ed., Thoreau: Man of Concord (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1960), p. 71.

⁷⁷Howarth, p. 73.

⁷⁸Paul, p. 388.

⁷⁹Paul, p. 225, quotes Thoreau from A Week.

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