

Walden's Hospitality and Fugitive Slave Law Hostility

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The development of *Walden: A Fluid-Text Edition* as part of the Digital Thoreau project has been a boon to scholars interested in the various manuscript versions of *Walden*.¹ The edition title alludes to the work of John Bryant, who, in *The Fluid Text: A Theory of Revision and Editing for Book and Screen* (2002), asserts that texts are never stable; they are constantly under revision, first, by their authors and, second, by their readers (Bryant 1). In the case of *Walden*, fluidity is obvious because Thoreau produced seven versions of the text between 1847 and 1854 (Schacht).² Bryant contends that examining texts in process, as it were, allows for more nuanced interpretations than one might produce by analyzing a seemingly finished, final text alone. In the introduction to the fluid-text edition of *Walden*, Paul Schacht asserts fluid texts enable and compel critics to offer “a revision *narrative*: the editor’s best judgment as to what end or ends the revision was designed to realize.” I have applied that method here.

In 1852 and 1853 Thoreau substantially expanded and altered the “Visitors” and the “Former Inhabitants; and Winter Visitors” chapters. The latter chapter especially is one that critics have largely ignored or found dissatisfying, but it and “Visitors” manifest the influence of historical events on the content and form of *Walden*. The most pressing historical event of those years was the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850, a law that, upon its enactment, enraged Thoreau and many of his contemporaries as it affected fugitive slaves they knew personally. Additionally, this law was at odds with hospitality, a subject of debate in

the antebellum era and a virtue that looms large in the American ethos. In what is likely surprising to many, Thoreau gives focused attention to hospitality in *Walden*, and he does so in the years after the implementation of the Fugitive Slave Law as he continues to compose and revise his work into its final 1854 version. In the aftermath of this egregious legislation, Thoreau adds explicit references to hospitality and fugitive slaves. Further, he utilizes the form of *Walden* to illustrate that hospitality creates a place for difference: he expands the boundaries of chapters in *Walden*, creating space for Concord's erstwhile inhabitants to re-inhabit their homes within the pages of his text and challenging his fellow citizens in Concord to choose hospitality rather than conformity to the strictures of an unethical law.

Thoreau championed what Anthony Szczesiul defines as republican hospitality. In the opening chapters of *The Southern Hospitality Myth* (2017), Szczesiul mines antebellum etiquette books, literature, sermons, and political pamphlets to suggest that antebellum Americans were embroiled in complex definitional debates about hospitality. Within these debates, two "competing notions of manners and hospitality" emerged (Szczesiul 53). These competing categories of hospitality were "aristocratic and republican," which Szczesiul describes as follows: aristocratic hospitality "emphasized refinement, display, and consumption and was essentially antidemocratic; exclusivity is in fact the essence of its appeal"; in contrast, republican hospitality "drew more on Christianity as its basis to offer a more democratic, inclusive, and potentially progressive alternative" (53). This latter kind of hospitality constitutes "true hospitality," which "is not about confirming our comfortable assumptions and reaffirming our self-identity; it is about opening ourselves to difference" (Szczesiul 22). It is this latter form of hospitality that Thoreau presents in *Walden*.

That Thoreau addresses hospitality positively at all in his works is perhaps unexpected. The lines anyone familiar with *Walden* would recite to counter the assertion that Thoreau valued hospitality highly come from the "Solitude" chapter: "I find it wholesome to be alone the greater part of

the time. To be in company, even with the best, is soon wearisome and dissipating. I love to be alone. I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude" (135). Thoreau's reputation for *inhospitality*, thanks in part to Ralph Waldo Emerson and James Russell Lowell, remains influential today.³ Nonetheless, one of Thoreau's early essays counters conventional wisdom and demonstrates that republican hospitality was important to the so-called misanthrope. In a little-known and often ignored essay titled "The Landlord,"⁴ which was originally printed in John O'Sullivan's *Democratic Review* in October 1843, Thoreau lauds republican hospitality as a virtue and praises the tavern keeper (the landlord) as one who readily practices this virtue. The tavern keeper, Thoreau explains, welcomes travelers indiscriminately and encourages espousal of a variety of opinions and ideas in conversations with his guests.

Thoreau commences "The Landlord" by claiming that men and women search in vain for "the entire and perfect house" and "the perfect man" (47). The nearest approximation of each is the tavern and the tavern keeper, for travelers find hospitality in the inn and the innkeeper. For Thoreau, hospitality is a liberal welcome extended to any stranger who arrives. It includes a spatial component, giving place to the displaced. The tavern is the quintessential house because it welcomes travelers indiscriminately. Welcome to a broad and diverse population is the primary criterion by which Thoreau evaluates a house. He claims that "that should be the most sacred roof which shelters most of humanity. Surely, then," he continues, "the gods who are most interested in the human race preside over the Tavern," those "shrines erected to Hospitality shining afar in all countries, as well Mahometan and Jewish, as Christian, khans, and caravansaries, and inns, whither all pilgrims without distinction resort" (47). Later in the essay, Thoreau compares the property boundaries of a neighbor to the landlord's to offer a stark contrast between the physical characteristics of inhospitable and hospitable houses. The inhospitable property includes at its perimeter "a screen of poplars and willows, and a fence with sheaves of spears at regular intervals, or defended against the

tender palms of visitors by sharp spikes” (51). In juxtaposition to this enclosed, protected property is the tavern, which includes a front door so exposed and open and unprotected that “the traveller’s wheels rattle over the door-step of the tavern, and he cracks his whip in the entry” (52).

Thoreau’s tavern keeper clearly keeps his door open if a traveler can ride right “over the door-step” of the entry way (“The Landlord” 52). As Edward F. Mooney claims about “The Landlord,” “Thoreau elaborates a primal religious theme—unstinting welcome to the stranger and traveler.... The Inn, its keeper, and his tavern answer pervasive estrangements, answer the sense of placeless *Unheimlichkeit*. This generous host offers shelter to those of all faiths and walks of life” (152). According to Thoreau, the innkeeper has “open and general sympathies” (“The Landlord” 47) and “universal sympathies” (48). He possesses “so broad and genial a human nature” that he “loves all men equally” (48). He has “no idiosyncrasies, no particular bents or tendencies to this or that, but a general, uniform, and healthy development, such as his portly person indicates, offering himself equally on all sides to men” (50). Last, he also has “indulgent and open ears” (53). This openness to the stranger and his ideas stems from, according to Thoreau, “pure love of” them (47). The landlord “loves men, not as a philosopher, with philanthropy, nor as an overseer of the poor, with charity, but by a necessity of his nature” (48). For this reason, he waits “at his *open door from morning till night*” and “would fain see more and more [travelers] come along the highway, and is never satisfied” (48, emphasis added). In this way, the landlord stands ready to offer republican hospitality to any travelers whom he encounters. The innkeeper is an exemplar of republican hospitality because he is a man of open mind, open heart, and, consequently, open door. This early essay, then, establishes that hospitality is a subject of deep interest to Thoreau and situates his ideas within debates in antebellum America concerning what constitutes true hospitality, a subject he considers in greater depth in *Walden*.

In the early 1850s, Thoreau adds a passage to *Walden* from the Vishnu Purana that reminds himself (and his readers) of his ethical responsibility to strangers. When Thoreau adds this description of the “duty of hospitality”

(*Walden* 270), the vulnerable migrants likely on Thoreau's mind were fugitive slaves, people to whom northerners could not legally offer hospitality after passage of the Fugitive Slave Law.⁵ In the words of Frederick Douglass, the law "makes MERCY TO THEM, A CRIME; and bribes the judge who tries them" (162, emphasis original).⁶ Douglass, of course, was not alone in his outrage against the law. Emerson was defiant in his journal, writing, "I will not obey it, by God" (qtd Myerson 586), and Thoreau contemplated "murder to the State" in the aftermath of the Anthony Burns affair (*Journal, 1837–1861* 268). This unjust law profoundly influenced the writing of Thoreau and his contemporaries.

The fugitive slave as a traveler in need of republican hospitality was a prominent theme in antislavery literature produced while Thoreau was busy revising *Walden* and, similar to sermons of the era, these literary depictions attempted to concretize the plight of runaway slaves by leading readers to an encounter with them in the pages of their poetry and prose. In *The Trials of Anthony Burns: Freedom and Slavery in Emerson's Boston* (1998), Albert J. von Frank reflects on the relation between stirring words and action in the context of the Fugitive Slave Law. He notes that even though Thoreau, like his one-time mentor Emerson, believed that conscience would ultimately convince people of the immorality of the Fugitive Slave Law, antebellum Americans still needed prodding to physically resist the law. Recognizing its immorality was one thing, but disobeying it required fortitude, von Frank asserts. He writes that "the public has to be taught to suspend its law-abidingness" and that "to rush voluntarily into physical danger needs a devotion to abstract principle such as literature and culture alone can provide and which they do routinely provide" (103). Several of Thoreau's contemporaries, such as John Greenleaf Whittier, Walt Whitman, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Thoreau himself, used literary means to confront their readers' complicity in and to embolden their resistance to the Fugitive Slave Law.

From its earliest version, the "Visitors" chapter of *Walden* focused on hospitality, especially on hospitality to travelers moving about on the margins of Concord. This chapter begins with Thoreau's famous

disavowal of his putative hermitism. Thoreau declares himself “naturally no hermit,” the evidence for which is his readiness “to fasten [himself] like a bloodsucker ... to any full-blooded man that comes in [his] way” (140). Indeed, Mary Hosmer Brown (1856-1929), one of Thoreau’s acquaintances, recalled that Thoreau, when he was not busy writing, placed a chair “outside the door” of his Walden shack that signaled “his readiness for company” (qtd Cramer 135). Thoreau reputedly “preferred the company of ne’er-do-well hunters and fishermen ... to that of the village elite” (Gross 183), and one so-called “ne’er do-well” whom Thoreau frequently hosted was Alek Therien, a French Canadian woodcutter. In *Walden*, Thoreau reveals obvious admiration for Therien. He worked hard, “was so quiet and solitary and so happy withal” (146), and “never failed to look at [reforms of the day] in the most simple and practical light” (148). Thoreau’s affinity for Therien is a stark contrast to Concord’s general antipathy toward French immigrants and other outsiders. As Richard S. Randolph claims, “In making a poor French Canadian woodcutter one of the major characters and heroes of his narrative, Thoreau is willfully challenging social prejudices and reversing the established social hierarchy in which French Canadians are scorned and undesirable” (55). Into a chapter already subtly exposing Concordians’ lack of republican hospitality to various others, Thoreau adds, in 1852, references to interactions with runaway slaves so as to apply a prominent critique to the most pressing issue of the historical moment, namely the response of Concordians to fugitive slaves seeking hospitality. To be sure, Concord was a hotbed for antislavery sentiment, but vestiges of the town’s slavery past continued to hold influence even in Thoreau’s day.⁷ Therefore, Thoreau adds a complicated but important reference to fugitive slaves to the “Visitors” chapter to confront those who looked down on blacks on the margins of Concord in the past or present.

Thoreau’s mention of fugitive slaves appears near the end of the chapter in a lengthy paragraph. While this passage reveals that Thoreau did respond to the Fugitive Slave Law through his writing, it is complicated by two factors: 1) the context surrounding Thoreau’s

references to fugitive slaves who visited him and 2) the stilted, fragmented style of the writing itself. Here is the passage.

I had some guests from those not reckoned commonly among the town's poor, but who should be; who are among the world's poor, at any rate; guests who appeal, not to your hospitality, but to your *hospitalality*; who earnestly wish to be helped, and preface their appeal with the information that they are resolved, for one thing, never to help themselves. I require of a visitor that he be not actually starving, though he may have the very best appetite in the world, however he got it. Objects of charity are not guests. Men who did not know when their visit had terminated, though I went about my business again, answering them from greater and greater remoteness. Men of almost every degree of wit called on me in the migrating season. Some who had more wits than they knew what to do with; runaway slaves with plantation manners, who listened from time to time, like the fox in the fable, as if they heard the hounds a-baying on their track, and looked at me beseechingly, as much as to say,—

"O Christian, will you send me back?"

One real runaway slave, among the rest, whom I helped to forward toward the northstar. Men of one idea, like a hen with one chicken, and that a duckling; men of a thousand ideas, and unkempt heads, like those hens which are made to take charge of a hundred chickens, all in pursuit of one bug, a score of them lost in every morning's dew,—and become frizzled and mangy in consequence; men of ideas instead of legs, a sort of intellectual centipede that made you crawl all over. One man proposed a book in which visitors should write their names, as at the White Mountains; but, alas! I have too good a memory to make that necessary. (*Walden* 152)

Understandably, critics who have addressed this passage have offered harsh readings of it, finding therein evidence of Thoreau's alleged misanthropy.⁸ Additionally, the style of the passage adds difficulty to the task of interpretation, and the paragraph raises several questions: Is Thoreau disparaging "runaway slaves" as some of those with "more wits than they" can use? Is he suggesting most fugitive slaves are duplicitous when he singles out "One *real* runaway slave" [emphasis added] as though the others were insincere and, thus, unworthy of pity?

One can answer these latter questions by remembering that Thoreau himself described *Walden* as a record of observations similar to contemporary travel writing. In form, this passage is similar to a travel writer's quick descriptions of a motley group. The passage juxtaposes these different people to showcase Thoreau's openness to whomever traveled to his cabin. Among his various guests were men who want charity without duty, men unaware that they have overstayed their welcome, men with and without wit, men escaping chattel slavery, men of one or many ideas, and one man who recommended that Thoreau keep a guest book. There seems little justification for suggesting that Thoreau has fugitive slaves in mind when he describes men with or without wit or that fugitive slaves appeal to one's *hospitality*.

Understanding of what Thoreau means by *hospitality* and why this term ought not be applied to fugitive slaves becomes apparent through analysis of the passage in conjunction with what Thoreau says elsewhere about people who take advantage of one's hospitality. In the passage quoted above, Thoreau explains that *hospitality* is something desired by those who "are resolved ... never to help themselves" (*Walden* 152). Such people may be "Objects of charity," but they "are not guests" (152), for guests are, as Thoreau reveals at the beginning of "Visitors," "full-blooded" (140), by which he seems to mean men and women of self-determination rather than passivity. As one applying Emerson's idea of self-reliance, Thoreau, not surprisingly, is critical of those who shirk responsibility for their wellbeing and, instead, take advantage of hospitable people.

At the beginning of his essay "Walking," Thoreau makes a distinction that applies to this complicated passage in *Walden*. Thoreau opens "Walking" by musing on the etymology of the word *sauntering*. That word, he explains, possibly "derived 'from idle people who roved about the country, in the middle ages, and asked charity, under pretence of going *à la sainte terre*'—to the holy land" until "*sainte-terror*" became a byword for pretend pilgrims ("Walking" 185). In the context of the middle ages, there were legitimate mendicants, such as mendicant friars who took oaths of poverty, and there were illegitimate mendicants who exploited the hospitality of people. According to Thoreau, the latter group is integrally related to the etymology of *sauntering*. Additionally, this latter group of people is akin to the group Thoreau criticizes in *Walden* for similarly exploiting actual hospitality. Thoreau suggests in *Walden* that aiding such people, those who seek one's *hospitality*—meaning those who want help but refuse to help themselves—merely perpetuates their penury.⁹

In contrast to those who seek *hospitality*, fugitive slaves, by virtue of their willingness to accept the risk of escape, exhibit self-reliance and responsibility that would have appealed to Thoreau. To aid runaway slaves, as opposed to those who refuse to help themselves, is to promote their prosperity. Thus, when Thoreau imagines a fugitive slave asking him, in the words of Elizur Wright's well-known poem "The Fugitive Slave to the Christian," "O Christian! will you send me back?" (Wright 35; *Walden* 152), Thoreau provides proof of his republican hospitality to vulnerable travelers. He assisted a fugitive slave in his escape northward where that slave can find freedom and prosperity. Indeed, in the final verse of Wright's poem, the speaker expresses his hope for prosperity. He looks to the future in which he will find "a home where man is man" where he can "draw [his] kindred" near "its free, though humble hearth" (Wright 35-36). The home he seeks is not the Christian's but, rather, his own, yet reaching that eventual home depends on the Christian's welcoming and protecting this traveler.

While the passage mentioning fugitive slaves in *Walden* may be complicated, critics ought to acknowledge that there is no indication that

Thoreau turned away any visitors to his Walden cabin, regardless of his feelings toward them. In fact, he associated with the vulnerable, with those who were down-and-out, and with so-called ne'er-do-wells such as Therien. Further, that Thoreau would disparage runaway slaves is illogical given his history of helping them. The fact remains that in this passage Thoreau offers hospitality according to its broader definition of giving place to a displaced person. He does not turn away anyone who visits, runaway slaves included. The same cannot be said for law-abiding citizens at the time.

In the "Former Inhabitants; and Winter Visitors" chapter, Thoreau conjures up the people whom Concord's citizens pushed to the margins in the past to spur reflection on the limits of their hospitality. Thoreau profoundly alters the form of *Walden* in late 1852 and early 1853, expanding its chapter boundaries considerably by adding historical material about the region's former residents.¹⁰ Given Thoreau's intimacy with Concord¹¹ and his role as a travel writer, it is not surprising that he would include this historical information. Yet as Elise Lemire argues in an essay on the former inhabitants of Walden Pond, Thoreau's historical record does more than recount the past. The more pressing question is what Thoreau hopes to accomplish by "Repeopling the Woods," to borrow Lemire's title.¹² In reimagining Walden's former inhabitants and their lives, Thoreau, according to Lemire, "explodes linear time" by "open[ing] the past onto the present" ("Repeopling" 71). He repopulates the woods around Walden with its former inhabitants and expands his text to give them a place in its pages. He hopes that confronting Concordians specifically, but Americans generally, with images of the displaced will move his audience to offer republican hospitality to the displaced fugitive slaves they may encounter in the near and distant future.

In the beginning of the "Former Inhabitants" subchapter, Thoreau describes four slaves or former slaves—Cato Ingraham, Zilpah White (whom Thoreau calls Zilpha in *Walden*), Brister Freeman, and his wife, Fenda. The inclusion of these passages accomplishes two purposes for Thoreau. First, he reintroduces Concordians to the people relegated to the

margins of Concord's geographical place and history by extending the boundaries of *Walden* in order to reserve a place for these former inhabitants. Second, Thoreau utilizes the histories of these former inhabitants as a counter-discourse to challenge the persistence of inhospitality in the aftermath of the Fugitive Slave Law.

At times, Thoreau accomplishes his purposes by way of sympathetic portrayals that reveal injustices done to these former inhabitants. Early in *Walden*, Thoreau describes himself as a squatter on the land (*Walden* 64). While Thoreau utilizes that description for its comedic effect—"I enhanced the value of the land by squatting on it" (64)—it nonetheless reveals that the land around Walden Pond is largely infertile, a fact that imperiled those relegated to this region in the past. Thoreau first leads his readers to encounter a squatter named Cato Ingraham, a slave of Duncan Ingraham, one of Concord's élites who accumulated immense wealth from the slave trade (Cramer 247). Duncan, according to Thoreau, "built his slave a house, and gave him permission to live in Walden Woods" (*Walden* 257), an arrangement that seems beneficial but proves detrimental to Cato. In an undated journal entry from Thoreau's Walden period, he adds to the passage quoted above, "no doubt he [Duncan] was thanked" (*Journal* 1: 420). This evident sarcasm reveals that Thoreau knew something of the history behind the arrangement between Duncan Ingraham and Cato. Duncan's ostensibly generous offer was actually more akin to a kind of banishment in response to Cato's marriage to a woman named Phyllis. Duncan refused to support any of Cato's dependents. "In effect," Lemire concludes, "Cato had not been freed so much as he was abandoned for exerting his will and asking for, in exchange for his labor, the support of not only himself but a wife and two children besides" (*Black* 125).

Thoreau's wordplay with *squatter* was more than scatological humor. It was true that Thoreau's feces could actually improve the soil. It turns out that land in New England that slaves or former slaves could occupy was often available because of its inferior soil. Lemire, for example, reveals that, in New England, "former slaves lived in areas that were isolated, usually, as so many examples make clear, by virtue of the soil's

poor quality” (*Black* 118). Therefore, Duncan’s generosity to Cato is dubious. Indeed, Cato’s history near Walden is a sad one. Lacking food in the early days of their residence near the pond and their pleas for help unanswered by Duncan, Cato and Phyllis’s younger child died. The rest of the family (Cato, Phyllis and a daughter) survived for ten years more, but they all died over the course of eight months (Lemire, “Repeopling” 65). In his description of Cato Ingraham, Thoreau foregrounds Cato’s vulnerability so as to humanize him and, in a subtle way, to foster sympathy for his plight.

At other times, Thoreau is bolder in his criticisms. As he turns attention to the stories of Brister and Fenda Freeman, other former inhabitants of the area, Thoreau exposes and adopts the pejorative othering of some of his contemporaries. Having read Brister Freeman’s epitaph, Thoreau exposes its words as ridiculous.¹³ On the gravestone, Brister “is styled ‘Sippio Brister,’—Scipio Africanus he had some title to be called,—‘a man of color,’ as if he were discolored. It also told me,” Thoreau writes, “with staring emphasis, when he died; which was but an indirect way of informing me that he ever lived” (*Walden* 258). He pointedly professes the absurdity of labeling Brister “a man of color,” and he derides the epitaph for including a death date only. The absence of a date or approximate date of birth is one more reminder that Concord’s residents in the recent past endowed the lives of slaves or former slaves with little worth.

Thoreau next describes Brister Freeman’s wife, Fenda, and his description mimics the pejorative othering of other writers. Most of his portrayal dwells on her physical characteristics. She was “large, round, and black, blacker than any of the children of night, such a dusky orb as never rose on Concord before or since” (*Walden* 258). Taken by themselves, these comments may implicate Thoreau in promulgating offensive, hackneyed descriptions. In light of his marking the absurdity of appending to a man’s epitaph the descriptor “a man of color,” Thoreau’s emphasis on Fenda’s unequaled blackness is his way of ridiculing the prejudices of his neighbors. Their attitude is juxtaposed with Fenda’s reputation for republican hospitality. Thoreau places her hospitality in an

appositional relationship to her name—"With [Brister] dwelt Fenda, his hospitable wife" (258), indicating that hospitality is part of her very identity while hinting at its lack in her Concord neighbors.

Thoreau reserves his most severe criticism for the end of this passage in which he repopulates the woods of Walden with its former inhabitants. Sounding much like a traveler in search of picturesque landscapes, Thoreau laments the intrusion of memories of these people when seeking beautiful scenes. "Alas!" he exclaims, "how little does the memory of these human inhabitants enhance the beauty of the landscape!" (264). Thoreau's use of two exclamation points reveals, according to Lemire, his "mocking tone" and makes plain that his "overly dramatic fashion" ("Repeopling" 72) was meant to jolt his Concord neighbors out of their complacency.

Lest one accuse Thoreau of merely exposing a problem without proposing a solution, however, he reserves the end of his chapter to promote the practice of republican hospitality. Thoreau first described the former inhabitants of Walden in his 1845 journal, but he added those descriptions to *Walden* sometime between 1852 and 1853, expanding the boundaries of his chapters significantly in an effort to make room for their presence. The timing of this expansion suggests that the duty of hospitality with which Thoreau closes the chapter is his particular response to Concord's past history of slavery. Thoreau concludes the "Former Inhabitants; and Winter Visitors" chapter of *Walden* by quoting from the Vishnu Purana. "There too, as every where, I sometimes expected the Visitor who never comes," Thoreau writes. "The Vishnu Purana says, 'The house-holder is to remain at eventide in his court-yard as long as it takes to milk a cow, or longer if he pleases, to await the arrival of a guest.' I often performed this duty of hospitality," Thoreau concludes, "waited long enough to milk a whole herd of cows, but did not see the man approaching from the town" (270). Some may see this as a failure of hospitality, for Thoreau waits but receives no one. Yet he illustrates the disposition of a proper host. Hospitality is the action of welcoming a traveler, of giving place to the displaced. A disposition of

welcome, or what some in Thoreau's milieu called mental hospitality, obviously makes the act of welcoming one who arrives much easier. Thoreau develops the descriptions in his journal into the fuller, more complete historical figures he imagines and describes in *Walden* to call to mind Concord's failure to treat the oppressed hospitably. The location of Thoreau's Walden residence does more than point to Concord's past history of slavery and its immediate aftermath. The very reason Thoreau added this material to *Walden* seems a response to Concord's, and indeed America's, present complicity in slavery under the strictures of the Fugitive Slave Law. Perhaps surprisingly, Thoreau is interested in the complexity of hospitality and keenly aware of those in his historical context in most need of it. Thoreau adds these sympathetic depictions of these people in 1852 and 1853 against the backdrop of government-sanctioned inhospitality in an effort to spur his countrymen and women to practice the duty of hospitality enjoined upon them by a higher law than the Fugitive Slave Law.

Notes

¹ Prior critical works such as Stephen Adams and Donald Ross Jr.'s *Revising Mythologies: The Composition of Thoreau's Major Works* (1988) and Robert Milder's *Reimagining Thoreau* (1995) have dealt extensively with the development of *Walden* over the years leading up to its publication in 1854, yet these works have left room for more consideration of the influence of Thoreau's historical context on his additions to *Walden*.

² The manuscript of *Walden* housed at the Huntington Library (San Marino, CA) includes seven versions.

³ Emerson bears some responsibility for Thoreau's reputation as a misanthrope for his editorial choice to compile letters for inclusion in *Letters to Various Persons* that play up "Thoreau's alleged stoicism" (Scharnhorst 18). That collection long influenced appraisals of Thoreau and his works. In reviewing *Letters to Various Persons* in October 1865, James Russell Lowell only exacerbated charges of Thoreau's misanthropy. According to Lowell, Thoreau is a miserable man. He

"condemns doing good as one of the weakest of superstitions," "had little active imagination," manifests "conceit" and "intellectual selfishness" (440, 441), had little "familiarity with ordinary men," and "confounded physical with spiritual remoteness from men" (442). Lowell's review has often been reprinted and continues to shape perceptions of Thoreau (Scharnhorst 19). For more recent examples of critics who focus on Thoreau's misanthropy, see Van Doren, Gross, and Schulz.

⁴ Perhaps Thoreau's own comments on this piece bear some responsibility for the ease with which scholars dismiss or ignore it altogether. Thoreau himself admitted in a letter to his mother to having written the piece for reasons of expediency. The essay, Thoreau explains, is "a short piece I wrote to sell" (qtd Moldenhauer 421). Therefore, biographers and critics who refer to "The Landlord" at all do so disparagingly. In Samuel Arthur Jones's estimation, "The Landlord" is merely the "outcome" of Thoreau's "flirtation" with the literary marketplace (225). Walter Harding laments that "The Landlord" "is poor Thoreau," an essay that reveals his "heart is not in the matter," a work composed "to please the general public," and an essay "jejune, almost puerile" (*Thoreau Handbook* 46-47). In his biography of Thoreau, Harding, to show how little the essay meant to Thoreau, reveals that "after it appeared" Thoreau "refused to pay fifty cents for an extra copy to send home to his parents." To punctuate the point and to exonerate himself and others for avoiding this essay, Harding notes with satisfaction, "Few now would dispute his judgment" (*Days* 142). Fellow-biographer Robert Richardson describes "The Landlord" as "surely the least characteristic piece Thoreau ever allowed into print" (*Henry* 141), and in *American Transcendentalism*, historian Philip Gura evaluates the same essay as "a somewhat nostalgic piece about tavern keepers, given that the metropolis now was overrun with boardinghouses" (201). These comments are representative of critical assessments of Thoreau's early essay extolling the virtues of tavern keepers.

⁵ Their already perilous flight north had, with the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850, become doubly dangerous; the law required

northerners to assist deputies in capturing and returning escaped slaves and forbade anyone from offering them hospitality. James McPherson distills this law into four provisions: (1) it created a category of U.S. commissioners who were empowered to issue warrants for the arrest and return of fugitives to slavery; (2) it allowed an affidavit by the claimant to be sufficient evidence of ownership, and denied the fugitive the right to testify in his or her own behalf; (3) the commissioner would earn a fee of \$10 if he found for the claimant but only \$5 if he released the fugitive; and (4) the commissioner could deputize any citizen to serve as a member of a posse to aid in enforcement of the law, and stiff fines or jail sentences could be meted out to those who refused such orders or who resisted the law (84).

⁶ These words come from Douglass's famous "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" speech, which he delivered on 5 July 1852 in Rochester, New York.

⁷ For more information on Concord's history of slavery, see Petrulionis's *To Set This World Right* and Lemire's *Black Walden*.

⁸ Offering a broad critique, Richard Bridgman declares, "The most we can assert from this paragraph is that Thoreau mentions runaway slaves in the general context of unwelcome visitors" (94-95). More pointedly, John Ronan focuses on the proximity of Thoreau's neologism *hospitalality* to his references to fugitive slaves and doubts that Thoreau would willingly extend welcome to vulnerable travelers (150).

⁹ In *Henry Thoreau: A Life of the Mind*, Robert D. Richardson notes that a year later, in 1853, Thoreau read Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851). Mayhew's "cyclopedia of the conditions and earnings of those that *will* work, those that *cannot* work, and those that *will not* work" (qtd Richardson 295, emphasis original) surely would have resonated with Thoreau's thoughts about those who appeal to his *hospitalality*.

¹⁰ According to historian Elise Lemire, the material Thoreau provides proved profoundly valuable to historians' attempts to reconstruct a history of slavery in Concord (*Black* 9).

¹¹ Richardson contends that the importance of Concord, Massachusetts, to Thoreau (and to understanding Thoreau) is difficult to overstate. In the annals of "American literature" Richardson writes, "there is no stronger tie between a writer and a place" than that between Thoreau and Concord ("Thoreau" 12).

¹² While Richardson is correct that "The most significant additions" to *Walden* in late 1852 and 1853 (such as "Former Inhabitants; and Winter Visitors") "are the social additions" (Henry 295), he does not see in these additions any future influence on the social environment of Thoreau's day. For Richardson, the significance of these passages is merely that they "draw attention to the fact that the area around Walden had been where Concord's black people lived" (Henry 295).

¹³ In presenting the story of Brister and Fenda Freeman, he actually conflates Brister Freeman with Brister Hoar at one point. Thoreau claims to have recently read Brister Freeman's epitaph on a gravestone near the unmarked graves of three "British grenadiers who fell in the retreat from Concord" (*Walden* 258). That epitaph was actually Brister Hoar's (Cramer 249; Lemire, *Black* 170). Nonetheless, Thoreau uses that epitaph to make trenchant comments. Some might deem Thoreau's conflating Brister Hoar and Brister Freeman an unfortunate mistake, a blunder that undermines any supposed concern Thoreau had for these men, but, as Lemire suggests, Thoreau may have conflated these men intentionally "to associate the heroic traits of Scipio Africanus with Brister Freeman" (*Black* 170). If Thoreau was equating Brister Freeman with the Roman general who defeated Hannibal, this is high praise indeed. Perhaps Thoreau is being a bit more critical, however.

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Joshua T. Boyd, "Walden's Hospitality and Fugitive Slave Law Hostility"

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