

*From Margaret Fuller**October 18, 1841*18<sup>th</sup> Oct<sup>r</sup> 1841.

I do not find the poem on the mountains<sup>1</sup> improved by mere compression, though it might be by fusion and glow.

Its merits to me are a noble recognition of nature, two or three manly thoughts, and, in one place, a plaintive music. The image of the ships<sup>2</sup> does not please me originally. It illustrates the greater by the less and affects me as when Byron compares the light on Jura to that of the dark eye of woman.<sup>3</sup> I cannot define my position here, and a large class of readers would differ from me. As the poet goes on to

Unhewn, primeval timber

For knees so stiff, for masts so limber"<sup>4</sup>

he seems to chase an image, already rather forced, into conceits.

Yet now that I have some knowledge of the man, it seems there is no objection I could make to his lines, (with the exception of such offences against taste as the lines about the humors of the eye &c<sup>5.a</sup> as<sup>a</sup> to which we are already agreed) which I could not make to himself. He is healthful, sane, of open eye, ready hand, and noble scope. He sets no limits to his life, nor to the invasions of nature; he is not wilfully pragmatical, cautious, ascetic or fantastical. But he is as yet a somewhat bare hill which the warm gales of spring have not visited. Thought lies too detached,<sup>a</sup> truth is seen too much in detail, we can number and mark the substances embedded in the rock. Thus his verses are startling, as much as stern; the thought does not excuse its conscious existence by letting us see its relation with life; there is a want of fluent music.

Yet what could a companion do at present unless to tame the guardian of the Alps too early? Leave him at peace amid his native snows. He is friendly; he will find

the generous office that shall educate him. It is not a soil for the citron and the rose, but for the whortleberry, the pine or the heather. The unfolding of affections, a wider and deeper human experience, the harmonizing influences of other natures, will mould the man, and melt his verse. He will seek thought less and find knowledge the more. I can have no advice or criticism for a person so sincere, but if I give my impression of him I will say He says too constantly of nature She is mine; She is not yours till you have been more hers. Seek the lotus, and take a draught of rapture. Say not so confidently All places, all occasions are alike. This will never come true till you have found it false.

I do not know that I have more to say now, perhaps these words will say nothing to you; If intercourse should continue, perhaps a bridge may be made between the minds so widely apart, for I apprehended you in spirit, and you did not seem to mistake me as widely as most of your kind do. If you should find yourself inclined to write to me, as you thought you might, I dare say many thoughts would be suggested to me; many have already by seeing you day by day. Will you finish the poem in your own way and send it<sup>a</sup> for the Dial. Leave out "And seems to *milk* the sky"<sup>6,a</sup> The image is too low. Mr Emerson thought so too. Farewell. May Truth be irradiated by Beauty!— Let me know whether you go to the lonely hut, and write to me about Shakspeare, if you read him there.<sup>7</sup> I have many thoughts about him which I have never yet been led to express.

Margaret F.

The pencilled paper Mr E. put into my hands. I have taken the liberty to copy it You expressed one day my own opinion that the moment such a crisis is passed we may speak of it. There is no need of artificial delicacy, of secrecy, it keeps its own secret; it cannot be made false.

Thus you will not be sorry that I have seen the paper.<sup>8</sup> Will you not send me some other records of the *good week*.<sup>9</sup>

*Correspondent*: See pp. 70-71.

<sup>1</sup> Fuller refers to T's poem "With frontier strength ye stand your ground"; see p. 78, note 1. The version T sent to Fuller has not survived. T incorporated some of Fuller's suggestions into a manuscript version that exists among Emerson's papers; this indicates that T acted on Fuller's request that he "finish the poem in [his] own way and send it for the Dial."

<sup>2</sup> In the manuscript version he gave Emerson, T describes the mountains as follows (*Henry David Thoreau: Collected Essays and Poems* [New York: Library of America, 2001], p. 546):

Ships of the line each one  
That westward run,  
Always before the gale,  
Under a press of sail,  
Convoing clouds  
Which cluster in your shrouds—  
With your slant masts 'tis sixes and sevens  
But that ye rake the heavens,  
So near the edge ye go,  
Under the roof so low;  
With weight of metal all untold,  
I seem to feel ye in my firm seat here,  
Immeasurable depth of hold,  
And breadth of beam, and length of running gear.  
The vessels on the sea  
Are relative to ye,  
Sailing by sympathy.

<sup>3</sup> Fuller refers to the following lines by Byron (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, 3.92.1-9):

The sky is changed!—and such a change! Oh night,  
And storm, and darkness, ye are wondrous strong,  
Yet lovely in your strength, as is the light  
Of a dark eye in woman! Far along,  
From peak to peak, the rattling crags among  
Leaps the live thunder! Not from one lone cloud,  
But every mountain now hath found a tongue,  
And Jura answers, through her misty shroud,  
Back to the joyous Alps, who call to her aloud!

<sup>4</sup> T retained these lines in the published versions; see “A Walk to Wachusett,” in *Excursions* 2007, p. 30, and *A Week* 1980, p. 164.

<sup>5</sup> Fuller may refer to the following lines, which are omitted from the published versions and are quoted here from the version found in Emerson’s papers (*Henry David Thoreau: Collected Essays and Poems* [New York: Library of America, 2001], p. 545):

The iris of the sky,  
Ye run  
Round the horizon of its eye  
Whose pupil is the sun.

<sup>6</sup> T omitted this line from the published versions.

<sup>7</sup> On December 24 of the same year, T wrote in his Journal, “I want to go soon and live away by the pond where I shall hear only the wind whispering among the reeds— It will be success if I shall have left myself behind, But my friends ask what I will do when I get there? Will it not be employment enough to watch the progress of the seasons?” (*Journal 1* 1981, p. 347). Flint’s Pond (also known as Sandy Pond), rather than Walden, may have been the pond that first attracted T.

<sup>8</sup> The “pencilled paper” is not extant. The “crisis” Fuller refers to may have been described in some autobiographical sketch that T apparently had written at this time; or she may refer to some early, preliminary material for an essay or lecture based on T and John’s 1839 trip to the White Mountains in New Hampshire. No other material describing this crisis survives.

<sup>9</sup> This phrase, much commented upon, may refer to the days Fuller had spent visiting Emerson in the first week of October, when T was also living in Emerson’s house. It could not refer specifically to *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, for T did not conceive of that book until after John’s death in 1842.

*Copy-text:* ALS (TxAuHRH, Ms Thoreau, H. D. Recip.)

*Published:* *HDT* 1882, 169-172; *Life* 1890, 50, 80; *Life* 1896, 47, 63; *T: Home* 1902, 246; *Friendly Craft* 1908, 194-195; *Cor* 1958, 56-57; *Letters of Margaret Fuller*, 2:242-243

#### *Editor’s Note*

This letter is addressed “Henry Thoreau.”

#### *Author’s Alterations*

&c] followed by cancelled with regard  
as] interlined with a caret  
detached,] interlined above cancelled obvious

it] followed by cancelled me  
sky"] interlined below

*From Isaiah Thornton Williams*

*November 27, 1841*

Buffalo N.Y. Nov 27 1841-

My dear Friend

I feel rebuked as I draw your most interesting letter from my file and sit down to answer it—that I have so long delayed so grateful a task— For—though I rarely get away from the world & Law long enough to retire within myself and inquire how I am—how I feel and what sentiments and what responses<sup>a</sup> my heart gives out in answer to your voice whose notes of sweetest music comes from that “Land—of every land the pride Beloved of Heaven o’er all the World beside” “That spot of earth divinely blest—That dearer sweeter spot than all the rest”<sup>1</sup> Yet—when weary and heart sick—when disgusted with the present—and memory, as if to give relief, retires to wander in the ‘Graveyard of the past’—she passes not unmindful nor lingers briefly around that spot where more than in any other I feel I first tasted of that bread I hope will yet nourish my youth strengthen my manhood—cheer and solace “when the daughters of music are brought low”<sup>2</sup>

Time’s devastating hand is beginning already to obliterate the traces of my youthful feelings—and I am becoming more & more contented with my present situation and feel less and less a desire inexorable to return and be a child once more—

This I suppose to be the natural<sup>a</sup> tendency of the circumstances in which I am placed. Man’s ends are shaped for him<sup>3</sup> and he must abide his destiny. This seems a little like fatality—yet, how can we avoid the conclusion that the Soul is shaped by circumstances and many of those circumstances beyond man’s control<sup>a</sup>? I think that could I