

*To Henry Swasey McKean**Before November 7, 1843*

{MS torn}be kind
 {MS torn}me take
 {MS torn}hapman's Trans-
 {MS torn} of the Greek Pastoral
 {MS torn}ts"¹ & "Ossian's
 Genuine Remains"²

Yrs resp^{ly}

Henry D. Thoreau.

Correspondent: Henry Swasey McKean (1810-1857), librarian of the Mercantile Library Association in New York City, was the son of Rev. Joseph McKean and Amy Swasey McKean. The elder McKean was the Boylston Professor of Rhetoric at Harvard until his death in 1818. Henry McKean graduated from Harvard in 1828 and was a tutor there during T's first two years. With Charles Stearns Wheeler, McKean helped Emerson produce the first two volumes of a four-volume edition of Carlyle's *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays* (Boston: James Munroe, 1838-1839). McKean later pursued a career as a civil engineer in Boston. In 1851 he married Anna Hunstable Hosmer (1827-1903), daughter of Ephraim and Sarah Hunstable Hosmer.

¹ M. J. Chapman, trans., *The Greek Pastoral Poets: Theocritus, Bion, and Moschus*.

² T refers to *The Genuine Remains of Ossian, Literally Translated*. As were many others of his generation, T was enthusiastic about the poetry that James MacPherson (1736-1796) attributed to Ossian. He wrote in his Journal on November 7, 1843: "In the oldest poems only the most simple and enduring features of humanity are seen, such essential parts of a man—as stonehenge exhibits of a temple" (*Journal 1* 1981, p. 485). Meditations on Ossian and other poets that T recorded on several pages of his Journal in November formed the basis of his lecture "Ancient Poets," which he delivered at the Concord Lyceum on November 29. He included portions of the lecture in the January 1844 *Dial* essay "Homer. Ossian. Chaucer." (pp. 290-305; see *Early Essays* 1975, pp. 154-173) and later included passages from the essay in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*. *The Genuine Remains of Ossian* was later exposed as a hoax: MacPherson had freely translated and rewritten selections of traditional Gaelic verse and published the volume as a literal translation of the work of an ancient poet named Ossian.

Copy-text: ALS (VtMiM, Thoreau/2)

Published: *Cor* 1958, 150; *Transcendentalists and Minerva* 1958, 2:371-372

Editor's Notes

This letter is addressed "Mr Mackean / {MS torn}."

The copy-text, written in pencil, is probably the recipient's copy; perhaps McKean returned T's note with the books T asked to borrow. The document also contains a long list that T made of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English poets and dramatists; this list may be part of the literary project that he began in the fall of 1841 and resumed in August 1843 (see p. 247, note 4).

PE supplies the date "Before November 7, 1843" based on the fact that T first quotes Ossian in his Journal on that date. From May to December 1843 T lived on Staten Island with the William Emerson family.

From Ralph Waldo Emerson

November 23, 1843

Thursday P. m.

Dear Henry,

I am not today quite so robust as I expected to be & so have to beg that you will come down & drink tea with Mr Brownson & charge yourself with carrying him to the Lyceum & introducing him to the curators.¹ I hope you can oblige me so far.

Yours,
R. W. E.

Correspondent: See p. 53.

¹ Emerson was one of the curators of the Concord Lyceum for this season. Orestes Brownson lectured on "Demagogism" on November 23.

Copy-text: ALS (CSmH, HM 7321)

Published: "Emerson-Thoreau Correspondence," *AM* 69 (June 1892): 736; *Cor* 1958, 150; *Letters of RWE* 1990-1995, 7:577

Editor's Notes

This letter is addressed "Henry D. Thoreau."

PE supplies the date "November 23, 1843," the only Thursday on which Brownson spoke before the Concord Lyceum.