

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN CAPE COD

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN A WEEK

MENTIONED IN WALDEN, A WEEK, AND CAPE COD:

OSSIAN (OISÍN)



“NARRATIVE HISTORY” AMOUNTS TO FABULATION,
THE REAL STUFF BEING MERE CHRONOLOGY



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Henry Thoreau characterized "the desolate hills" standing between the house of the Wellfleet oysterman and the shore as "worthy to have been the birthplace of Ossian":



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CAPE COD: When I approached this house the next summer, over the desolate hills between it and the shore, which are worthy to have been the birthplace of Ossian, I saw the wizard in the midst of a cornfield on the hillside, but, as usual, he loomed so strangely, that I mistook him for a scarecrow. This was the merriest old man that we had ever seen, and one of the best preserved. His style of conversation was coarse and plain enough to have suited Rabelais. He would have made a good Panurge. Or rather he was a sober Silenus, and we were the boys Chromis and Mnasilus, who listened to his story.

“Not by Hæmonian hills the Thracian bard,
Nor awful Phœbus was on Pindus heard
With deeper silence or with more regard.”

There was a strange mingling of past and present in his conversation, for he had lived under King George, and might have remembered when Napoleon and the moderns generally were born. He said that one day, when the troubles between the Colonies and the mother country first broke out, as he, a boy of fourteen, was pitching hay out of a cart, one Doane, an old Tory, who was talking with his father, a good Whig, said to him, “Why, Uncle Bill, you might as well undertake to pitch that pond into the ocean with a pitchfork, as for the Colonies to undertake to gain their independence.” He remembered well General Washington, and how he rode his horse along the streets of Boston, and he stood up to show us how he looked.

“He was a r-a-ther large and portly-looking man, a manly and resolute-looking officer, with a pretty good leg as he sat on his horse.” -“There, I’ll tell you, this was the way with Washington.” Then he jumped up again, and bowed gracefully to right and left, making show as if he were waving his hat. Said he, “That was Washington.”

He told us many anecdotes of the Revolution, and was much pleased when we told him that we had read the same in history, and that his account agreed with the written.

“O,” he said, “I know, I know! I was a young fellow of sixteen, with my ears wide open; and a fellow of that age, you know, is pretty wide awake, and likes to know everything that’s going on. O, I know!”

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SILENUS
CHROMIS
MNASILUS

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JOHN DRYDEN
KING GEORGE
NAPOLEON

He bravely quoted these contested lines attributed to Ossian by James Macpherson, despite being aware that readers could suppose



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him to be merely another credulous victim of literary fraud:

WALDEN:

“Mourning untimely consumes the sad;
Few are their days in the land of the living,
Beautiful daughter of Toscar.”

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A WEEK: The genuine remains of Ossian, or those ancient poems which bear his name, though of less fame and extent, are, in many respects, of the same stamp with the Iliad itself. He asserts the dignity of the bard no less than Homer, and in his era we hear of no other priest than he. It will not avail to call him a heathen, because he personifies the sun and addresses it; and what if his heroes did "worship the ghosts of their fathers," their thin, airy, and unsubstantial forms? we worship but the ghosts of our fathers in more substantial forms. We cannot but respect the vigorous faith of those heathen, who sternly believed somewhat, and are inclined to say to the critics, who are offended by their superstitious rites, — Don't interrupt these men's prayers. As if we knew more about human life and a God, than the heathen and ancients. Does English theology contain the recent discoveries? Ossian reminds us of the most refined and rudest eras, of Homer, Pindar, Isaiah, and the American Indian. In his poetry, as in Homer's, only the simplest and most enduring features of humanity are seen, such essential parts of a man as Stonehenge exhibits of a temple; we see the circles of stone, and the upright shaft alone. The phenomena of life acquire almost an unreal and gigantic size seen through his mists. Like all older and grander poetry, it is distinguished by the few elements in the lives of its heroes. They stand on the heath, between the stars and the earth, shrunk to the bones and sinews. The earth is a boundless plain for their deeds. They lead such a simple, dry, and everlasting life, as hardly needs depart with the flesh, but is transmitted entire from age to age. There are but few objects to distract their sight, and their life is as unencumbered as the course of the stars they gaze at.

...

The profession of the bard attracted more respect in those days from the importance attached to fame. It was his province to record the deeds of heroes. When Ossian hears the traditions of inferior bards, he exclaims, —

"I straightway seize the unfruitful tales,
And send them down in faithful verse."

His philosophy of life is expressed in the opening of the third Duan of Ca-Lodin.

"Whence have sprung the things that are?
And whither roll the passing years?
Where does Time conceal its two heads,
In dense impenetrable gloom,
Its surface marked with heroes' deeds alone?
I view the generations gone;
The past appears but dim;
As objects by the moon's faint beams,
Reflected from a distant lake.
I see, indeed, the thunderbolts of war,
But there the unmighty joyless dwell,
All those who send not down their deeds
To far, succeeding times."...

OSSIAN



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A WEEK: There are other, savager, and more primeval aspects of nature than our poets have sung. It is only white man's poetry. Homer and Ossian even can never revive in London or Boston. And yet behold how these cities are refreshed by the mere tradition, or the imperfectly transmitted fragrance and flavor of these wild fruits. If we could listen but for an instant to the chant of the Indian muse, we should understand why he will not exchange his savageness for civilization. Nations are not whimsical. Steel and blankets are strong temptations; but the Indian does well to continue Indian. After sitting in my chamber many days, reading the poets, I have been out early on a foggy morning, and heard the cry of an owl in a neighboring wood as from a nature behind the common, unexplored by science or by literature. None of the feathered race has yet realized my youthful conceptions of the woodland depths. I had seen the red Election-bird brought from their recesses on my comrades' string, and fancied that their plumage would assume stranger and more dazzling colors, like the tints of evening, in proportion as I advanced farther into the darkness and solitude of the forest. Still less have I seen such strong and wilderness tints on any poet's string. These modern ingenious sciences and arts do not affect me as those more venerable arts of hunting and fishing, and even of husbandry in its primitive and simple form; as ancient and honorable trades as the sun and moon and winds pursue, coeval with the faculties of man, and invented when these were invented. We do not know their John Gutenberg, or Richard Arkwright, though the poets would fain make them to have been gradually learned and taught. According to Gower, -

“And Iadabel, as saith the boke,
Firste made nette, and fishes toke.
Of huntynge eke he fond the chace,
Whiche nowe is knowe in many place;
A tent of clothe, with corde and stake,
He sette up first, and did it make.”

Also, Lydgate says: -

“Jason first sayled, in story it is tolde,
Toward Colchos, to wynde the flees of golde.
Ceres the Goddess fond first the tilthe of londe;
Also, Aristeus fonde first the usage
Of mylke, and cruddis, and of honey swote;
Peryodes, for grete avauntage,
From flyntes smote fuyre, daryng in the roote.”

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A WEEK: What a contrast between the stern and desolate poetry of Ossian, and that of Chaucer, and even of Shakespeare and Milton, much more of Dryden, and Pope, and Gray. Our summer of English poetry like the Greek and Latin before it, seems well advanced toward its fall, and laden with the fruit and foliage of the season, with bright autumnal tints, but soon the winter will scatter its myriad clustering and shading leaves, and leave only a few desolate and fibrous boughs to sustain the snow and rime, and creak in the blasts of ages. We cannot escape the impression that the Muse has stooped a little in her flight, when we come to the literature of civilized eras. Now first we hear of various ages and styles of poetry; it is pastoral, and lyric, and narrative, and didactic; but the poetry of runic monuments is of one style, and for every age. The bard has in a great measure lost the dignity and sacredness of his office. Formerly he was called a *seer*, but now it is thought that one man sees as much as another. He has no longer the bardic rage, and only conceives the deed, which he formerly stood ready to perform. Hosts of warriors earnest for battle could not mistake nor dispense with the ancient bard. His lays were heard in the pauses of the fight. There was no danger of his being overlooked by his contemporaries. But now the hero and the bard are of different professions. When we come to the pleasant English verse, the storms have all cleared away and it will never thunder and lighten more. The poet has come within doors, and exchanged the forest and crag for the fireside, the hut of the Gael, and Stonehenge with its circles of stones, for the house of the Englishman. No hero stands at the door prepared to break forth into song or heroic action, but a homely Englishman, who cultivates the art of poetry. We see the comfortable fireside, and hear the crackling fagots in all the verse.

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297 CE

Yet more battles involving our favorite pushy people, the [Romans](#): at Armenia and Ctesiphon the legions of Galerius defeated the Persians under Narses, creating [the Pax Romana](#) (Rome recaptured Armenia and Mesopotamia).



This was the year of the first mention by the Romans of people living north of Hadrian's Wall who dyed their bodies with woad to ensure their life after death. The Romans termed them "Picts," meaning "Blue People," and "Caledonians," meaning "People of the Underbrush."¹ Fingal and his son [Oisín \(Ossian\)](#) were for these people legendary hero-kings.²

1. The Scots referred to them as Cruithni, and they were terming themselves Gaedil, a Gaelic word meaning "Stormy People."
2. Whether Fingal and Ossian had been real people is a matter of scholarly debate but in any case, they were not in any sense Scots; this Pict group is instead the origin of the Gaelic, the Irish, and the Manx. The name "Scott" only dates to the late 4th Century CE, when Norwegian pirate worshippers of the Finno-Ugric snow-goddess Skadi would begin settling in northern Britain (a wife of Odin, Skadi was the daughter of an ice-giant killed by Thor; she hunted wolves and bears from skis and was notorious for her collection of dead men's penises).

WHO WERE THESE FOLKS?



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1736

[James Macpherson](#) was born. After an education at Aberdeen and Edinburgh, he would spend his early years as a schoolmaster. In later life he would hold a colonial secretaryship in West Florida (1764-1766), and then from 1780 until his death would serve as a member of Parliament. He would become something of a poet and an antiquarian — although he would get these two roles so sadly entangled in his poems attributed to [Ossian](#) that he would wind up being accused of a serious literary fraud.

NOBODY COULD GUESS WHAT WOULD HAPPEN NEXT



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1760

A COLLECTION OF ORIGINAL POEMS, Blacklock.

With the encouragement of the Reverend [Hugh Blair](#), John Home and others, [James Macpherson](#) published FRAGMENTS OF ANCIENT POETRY COLLECTED IN THE HIGHLANDS OF [SCOTLAND](#) AND TRANSLATED FROM THE GALIC OR ERSE LANGUAGE, which supposedly amounted to his own translations of ancient Gaelic poems (these poems were all in fact of recent composition, perhaps by Macpherson himself). The Reverend Blair provided an anonymous “Preface.” Later Macpherson would add to this literary ventriloquism by publishing “translations” of two epic poems, FINGAL (1761) and TEMORA (1763), which he would represent similarly as the work of a 3d-century Irish bard named [Ossian](#).



JAMES MACPHERSON

DO I HAVE YOUR ATTENTION? GOOD.



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1761

The Scott schoolmaster [James Macpherson](#)'s epic poem FINGAL, represented as the work of a 3d-century Irish bard named [Ossian](#). It would not be upon this suspect material, but upon page 193 of the 1841 London edition of [Patrick Macgregor](#)'s retranslation of the materials as blank verse, that Thoreau would rely in his chapter on "Solitude," for the poem "Croma."

WALDEN :

"Mourning untimely consumes the sad;
Few are their days in the land of the living,
Beautiful daughter of Toscar."

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JAMES MACPHERSON

CHANGE IS ETERNITY, STASIS A FIGMENT



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1763

Scott schoolmaster [James Macpherson](#), who had in the previous year reported that he had discovered, and translated from the Gaelic, an epic poem FINGAL by a 3d-Century bard named [Ossian](#), “discovered” another epic poem TEMORA, allegedly by this same antique person. These two epics of forgery would become favorites of the young generation in Germany and help touch off the movement that would be referred to as “Romanticism.”



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“He was a r-a-ther large and portly-looking man, a manly and resolute-looking officer, with a pretty good leg as he sat on his horse.” -“There, I’ll tell you, this was the way with Washington.” Then he jumped up again, and bowed gracefully to right and left, making show as if he were waving his hat. Said he, “That was Washington.”

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The Reverend [Hugh Blair](#) took the position that the poems were authentic, in A CRITICAL DISSERTATION ON THE POEMS OF [OSSIAN](#), THE SON OF FINGAL.

JAMES MACPHERSON

SCOTLAND



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NO-ONE'S LIFE IS EVER NOT DRIVEN PRIMARILY BY HAPPENSTANCE





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1764

[James Macpherson](#), a Scott schoolmaster and poet, obtained a colonial secretaryship in West Florida which he would hold until sometime in 1766.

JAMES MACPHERSON

THE FUTURE IS MOST READILY PREDICTED IN RETROSPECT





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1765

A collection of the poems of [James Macpherson](#), THE WORKS OF [OSSIAN](#), appeared. Dr. Samuel Johnson and others began heatedly to challenge the authenticity of this version of the poems. After Macpherson's death an investigating committee of scholars would agree that although this poet had accessed some ancient Gaelic poems and traditions, he had himself composed most of this supposedly ancient stuff. By this point, however, these prose poems, written in their loose, rhythmical style, filled as they were with supernaturalism and melancholy, had become a powerful influence upon the rising romantic movement in literature, especially upon Germanic literature.

JAMES MACPHERSON

SCOTLAND

**LIFE IS LIVED FORWARD BUT UNDERSTOOD BACKWARD?
— NO, THAT'S GIVING TOO MUCH TO THE HISTORIAN'S STORIES.
LIFE ISN'T TO BE UNDERSTOOD EITHER FORWARD OR BACKWARD.**

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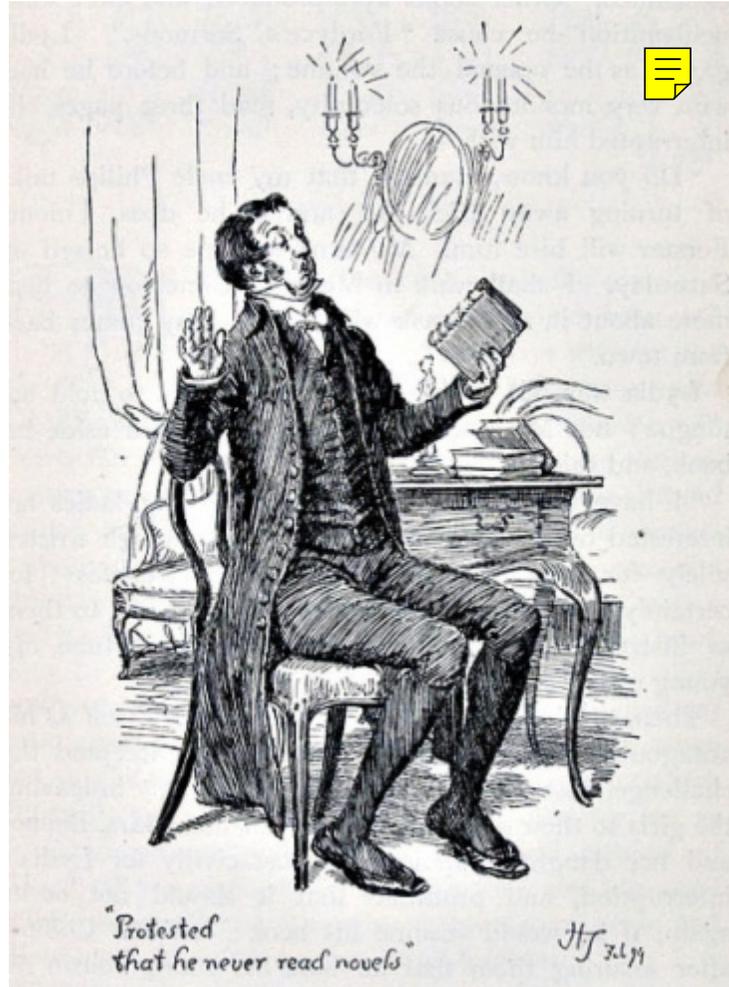
PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1766

[James Macpherson](#) went home to Scotland from the colonial secretaryship which he had held in West Florida.

JAMES MACPHERSON

[Reverend James Fordyce, D.D.](#)'s SERMONS TO YOUNG WOMEN (2 volumes, Printed for A. Millar and T. Cadell in the Strand, J. Dodsley in Pall-Mall and J. Payne in Pater-Noster Row). This would popularly come to be referred to as FORDYCE'S SERMONS.



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1770

[William Guthrie](#)'s A NEW SYSTEM OF MODERN GEOGRAPHY.

[Dr. Samuel Johnson](#)'s THE FALSE ALARM. At some point during the 1770s, he would begin to challenge the [James Macpherson](#) "translation" of the bard "[Ossian](#)," as an evident forgery.



JAMES MACPHERSON

WHAT I'M WRITING IS TRUE BUT NEVER MIND
YOU CAN ALWAYS LIE TO YOURSELF



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1775

[Dr. Samuel Johnson](#) had so contemptuously dismissed the 3d-Century epic poems of [James Macpherson](#), that at this point he was threatening a physical assault. At the age of 65 Johnson needed to begin to carry a cudgel, with which to defend himself if attacked. From this point forward all Johnson's work against this "Ossian" thingie would need, for his personal safety, to be conducted behind the scenes.



JAMES MACPHERSON

[Dr. Johnson](#)'s A JOURNEY TO THE WESTERN ISLANDS OF SCOTLAND and his TAXATION NO TYRANNY.

He visited France with the Thrales.

THE FUTURE CAN BE EASILY PREDICTED IN RETROSPECT





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1780

[James Macpherson](#) became a member of the British Parliament. He would serve until his death in 1796.

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1782

At the age of 16, [Isaac C. D'Israeli](#) addressed some verses to [Samuel Johnson](#). He would become a frequent guest at table with the publisher John Murray.

A new expanded edition of William Shaw's AN ENQUIRY INTO THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE POEMS ASCRIBED TO OSSIAN was presented, about half of which we believe to have been contributed by [Johnson](#). Evaluation: This stuff had been a fraud (nevertheless, in this year in Copenhagen Nicolai Abildgaard was painting his "[Ossian](#)").



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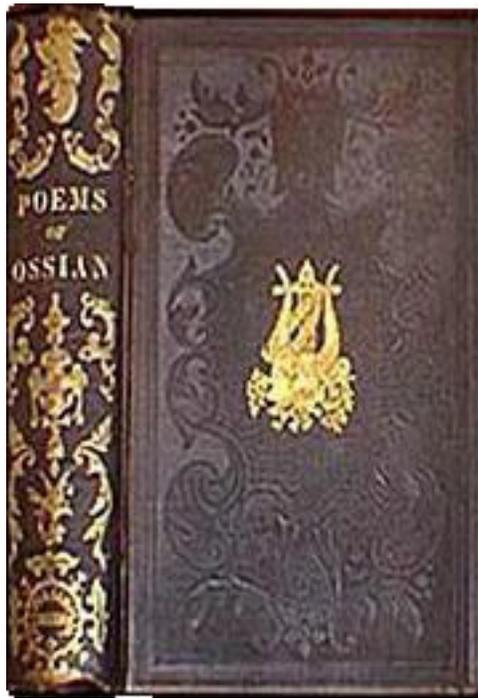
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1796

February 17, Wednesday: [James MacPherson](#) died on his estate Belville (formerly known as Raitts) in Invernesshire, [Scotland](#) at the age of 59. This edition of his "[Ossian](#)" poems was issued in the year of his death:



JAMES MACPHERSON

His popular literary fraud had made him wealthy enough to purchase a burial site in [Westminster Abbey](#) (to which his remains were forwarded), and so now his remains are in the general vicinity of the remains of



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Dr. Samuel Johnson (who, it hardly need be pointed out, did not need to pay anybody so much as a farthing).





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1798

[Silvio Pellico](#), at the age of 10, composed a tragedy inspired by a translation into Italian of the poems of "[Ossian](#)."



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1800



It was at about this point that we began to import goat-fleece shawls from Kashmir, imprinted with a motif which is commonly referred to as “the pine-cone.” The material of which these shawls were knitted would become known here as “cashmere.” The pattern utilized, which the historian of textiles Martin Hardingham believes was originally “the cashew fruit and seed pot which has been a symbol of fertility for thousands of years,” would commonly be used on shawls manufactured in the town of Paisley in [Scotland](#), and thus this pattern would become known here as “paisley.”

Posthumous publication of [Robert Burns](#)’s [MERRY MUSES OF CALEDONIA](#), found in a drawer.

[Malcolm Laing](#)’s THE HISTORY OF [SCOTLAND](#), FROM THE UNION OF THE CROWNS ON THE ACCESSION OF KING JAMES VI. TO THE THRONE OF ENGLAND, TO THE UNION OF THE KINGDOMS IN THE REIGN OF QUEEN ANNE. WITH TWO DISSERTATIONS, HISTORICAL AND CRITICAL, ON THE GOWRIE CONSPIRACY [BY PINKERTON], AND ON THE SUPPOSED AUTHENTICITY OF [OSSIAN](#)’S POEMS (London: Printed by A. Strahan, Printers Street, for T. Cadell Jun. and W. Davies, in the Strand; and Manners and Miller, Edinburgh).³

THE HISTORY OF SCOTLAND

THE HISTORY OF SCOTLAND

His exacting prosecutorial case against Queen Anne as guilty of causing the death of her competitor, although unpleasant, has been said to have been sufficient to convict her of the crime of murder in any legal jurisdiction in the land.

His dissection of the historical evidence for the [Ossian](#) materials, also displeasing, would cause, under the superintendence of Henry Mackenzie in 1805, “The Report of the Committee of the Highland Society, appointed to inquire into the nature and authenticity of the Poems of Ossian,” and again, the verdict of history would be in his favor.

3. Laing was not the first scholar to detect Ossian as a forgery. That honor goes to Dr. Samuel Johnson, who had issued his declaration about these materials as early as the 1770s.

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1804

➡ [Walter Scott](#) took a lease on the property of Ashiestiel, on the River Tweed near Selkirk. From this point until the purchase of “Abbotsford” in 1811, the guy would be spending more than half his time there.



[Malcolm Laing](#) prepared a revised second, 4-volume edition of his THE HISTORY OF [SCOTLAND](#), FROM THE UNION OF THE CROWNS, ON THE ACCESSION OF KING JAMES VI TO THE THRONE OF ENGLAND, TO THE UNION OF THE KINGDOMS IN THE REIGN OF QUEEN ANNE. WITH TWO DISSERTATIONS, HISTORICAL AND CRITICAL, ON THE GOWRIE CONSPIRACY [BY PINKERTON], AND ON THE SUPPOSED AUTHENTICITY OF OSSIAN’S POEMS (his merciless attack on the authenticity of the [Ossian](#) materials was creating no little indignation, Highlanders in particular being “loud in their wail”). His first two volumes concentrated on the “Dissertation on the participation of Mary Queen of Scots in the Murder of Darnley,” making a strong case against Queen Mary. During this year he also edited THE LIFE AND HISTORIE OF JAMES VI.

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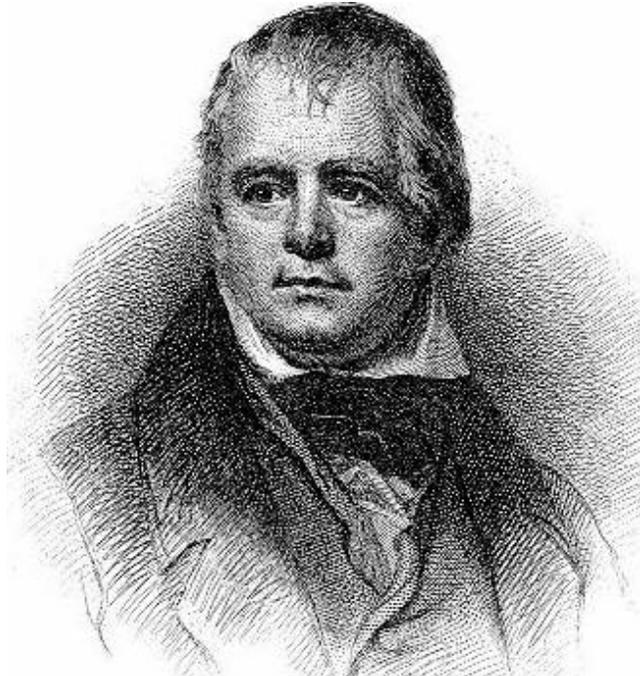
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1805

 The Highland Society of [Scotland](#) declared "[Ossian](#)" to have been a forgery.

[Malcolm Laing](#)'s 2-volume POEMS OF [OSSIAN](#), CONTAINING THE POETICAL WORKS OF [JAMES MACPHERSON](#) IN PROSE AND VERSE, WITH NOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS (Malcolm had never been among the deceived and this was his, and Dr. Johnson's, and Shaw's "victory lap").

[Walter Scott](#)'s THE LAY OF THE LAST MINSTREL. When a 3d edition of the Lay would become possible, Messrs. Longman would offer £500 for the copyright and would tack on another £100 in compensation for the loss of a horse which had unexpectedly died under the author while he was out riding with one of the publishers.





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1815



The [James Macpherson](#) “translation” of the bard [Ossian](#), which had already as of the 1770s been challenged as an evident forgery by [Dr. Samuel Johnson](#), and had already been declared a forgery by the Highland Society of Scotland as of 1805, was continuing to be mined by poets and artists in all the major European languages as a source of inspiration and subject matter. [Napoléon Bonaparte](#) was fond of referring to Ossian as “the Northern Homer,” and had the painter François Gérard decorate his palace at Malmaison “in the style of Ossian,” and for his bedroom in the Quirinale in Rome, had the painter Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres do a “Dream of Ossian” on the ceiling.⁴

JAMES MACPHERSON

4. What, no mirror over the bed? This Ingres ceiling painting is now at the Musée Ingres in Montauban.



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1841

[Patrick MacGregor, M.A.](#)'s blank verse version, THE GENUINE REMAINS OF [OSSIAN](#), LITERALLY TRANSLATED; WITH A PRELIMINARY DISSERTATION, saw publication in London (Published under the patronage of the Highland Society of London. Smith, Elder, & Co., Cornhill; William Tait, Prince's Street, Edinburgh), to clear up all the doubts that had been raised as to the authenticity of such ancient materials. [Henry Thoreau](#) would rely upon page 193 of this, and not upon the 1761 original edition of "Ossian" material by [James Macpherson](#), in his [WALDEN](#) chapter on "Solitude," for the poem "Croma":⁵

GENUINE REMAINS OF OSSIAN

[WALDEN](#) :

"Mourning untimely consumes the sad;
Few are their days in the land of the living,
Beautiful daughter of Toscar."

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OSSIAN

5. Thoreau would insert copied materials into his first Commonplace Book.



PEOPLE OF WALDEN, CAPE COD, AND A WEEK:

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1843

Fall: [Henry Thoreau](#) studied the “[Ossian](#)” of [James Macpherson](#). In particular he read the comments on [Malcolm Laing](#)’s analysis that were printed in [Patrick MacGregor](#)’s volume of 1841 and made entries in his 1st Commonplace Book.

JAMES MACPHERSON GENUINE REMAINS OF OSSIAN

PEOPLE OF
WALDEN

WALDEN :

“Mourning untimely consumes the sad;
Few are their days in the land of the living,
Beautiful daughter of Toscar.”

OSSIAN

November 7, Tuesday morning: A school was being taught by Joseph C. Cole in the hall above the Red Brick Store, a very warm and pleasant room, and Elders Willard Richards and William W. Phelps needed this room so that they might continue working on the Prophet’s history undisturbed. They moved the tables out of that room, but Mr. Cole moved them back in so they went to [Joseph Smith, Jr.](#)’s mansion to complain. The Prophet determined that their reasons were good and instructed them to take the room and advise this schoolteacher that he would need to look out for himself.

MORMONISM

The Treaty of [Nanking](#), by which the island of [Hong Kong](#) had been obtained by Great Britain on August 9, 1842 –which incidentally was the initial such treaty document to be photocopied– was made available to the public in English in the [London Gazette](#) (the document, in both English and Chinese, would be printed in Canton in the [Chinese Repository](#) for August 1844).⁶

The island of [Hong Kong](#) shall be possessed in perpetuity by Her Majesty Queen Victoria and her successors, and shall be ruled as they see fit.



November 7, Tuesday, 1843: When [Ossian](#) personifies the sun and addresses him, it is unnecessary to suppose, as his editor does, that he believed the sun to be an animated being,” like the deer or lion. Wherein are we more believers in a God than the heathen, with their mysterious magic rites? as if one name were not as good

6. We are referring here to Victoria island, the land mass itself, not to [Hong Kong](#). Hong Kong is not something which was created as of 1842 by an agreement between England and [China](#). It is something that would be created later by English people whose energies were liberated from the control of England by great distance and by the presence of Chinese people, and by Chinese people whose energies were liberated from the control of China by the presence of English people.

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The final page of the Chinese version of the treaty document



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as another. It is time to have done with these follies. I confess to more sympathy with the Druidical and Scandinavian, as handed down to us, than with the actual creeds of any church in Christendom. They have been reproached for worshipping the ghosts of their fathers rather than any unsubstantial forms; but do we not worship the ghosts of our fathers?

It is the characteristic of all religion and wisdom to substitute being for seeming, and to detect the anima or soul in everything. It is merely an evidence of inner faith when God is practically believed to be omnipresent. None of the heathen are too heathenish for me but those who hold no intercourse with their god. I love the vigorous faith of those heathen who sternly believed something. I say to these modern believers, "Don't interrupt those men's prayers." How much more do the moderns know about God and human life than the ancients? the English than the Chaldeans, or than the Tartars? Does English theology contain the recent discoveries?

Ossian feels and asserts the dignity of the bard. His province is to record the deeds of heroes.

I straightway seize the unfruitful tales
And send them down in faithful verse.

An heroic deed is his star in the night. The simple, impressive majesty of human life as seen through his mists, is that Ossian we know and remember. Who has discovered any higher morality than this? any truer philosophy? — a simple, brave, persevering life adorned with heroic deeds.

The reserved strength of Ossian, and moral superiority to most poets of what is styled a barbarous era, appears in the fact that he can afford to pass over the details of the battle, leaving the heroism to be imagined &om what has already been described of the character of the hero, while he hastens to hint at the result. Most heroic poets of a rude period delight mainly in the mere sound of blows and the flowing of blood. But Ossian has already described the result of the battle when he has minted the character of the heroes.

See an example in Callon and Colvala:

When I heard who the damsel was
Frequent dropped the warrior's tears.
I blessed the radiant barn of youth,
And bade the bard advance.
Dweller of the mountain cave,
Why should Ossian speak of the dead?
They are now forgot in their land,
And their tombs are seen no more, etc.;

or in Ca-lodin:

We engaged, and the enemy won;

Or in Cromra:

We fought down the narrow vale;
The enemy fled; Romarr fell by my sword.

No poet has done such justice to the island of foggy fame.

What a contrast between the stern and desolate poetry of Ossian and that of [Chaucer](#) and the early English bards! The bard indeed seems to have lost much of his dignity and the sacredness of his profession. He does not impose upon us. He has lost all his sternness and bardic fun, and but conceives the deed which the other has prepared to perform. It is a step from the forest and crag to the fireside, — from the hut of the Gael or Stonehenge with its circles of stones to the house of the Englishman. No hero — stands at the door, prepared to break forth into song or heroic actions, but a homely Englishman who has begun to cultivate the comforts of a roof; or a studious gentleman who practises the art of song. He possibly may not receive us. There is not room for all mankind about his hearth. He does not love all things, but a few.

I see there a yellow fireside blaze, and hear the crackling fuel, and expect such heroism as consists with a comfortable life.

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. We see the circles of stone, and the upright shafts of the man; we cannot tell whether this was civilized or savage; truly it was neither. For these simple, necessary traits are before and after civilization and are superior to it. All the culture that had a beginning must in the world's history have an end. It is like the fashions of France; like the tricks taught to a few tame bears and monkeys. How wise we are! how ignorant the savage! we with our penknife with a hundred blades, he with his gnarled club. Ask his senses if they are not well fed, if his life is not well earned.

When we come to the pleasant English verse it seems as if the storm had all cleared away, and it were never to thunder and lighten any more. These stern events are traditional.

We darkly behold (in the poetry of the obscurest eras) the forms of men, — such as can be seen afar through the mist, — no costume, no dialect, but for language you have a tongue itself. As for costume — we can dispense with that, — the skins of beasts or bark of trees are always to be had, — what if the man is naked?

The figurative parts of Ossian are like Isaiah and the Psalms, — the same use is made of gaunt Nature. He uses but few and simple images; but they are drawn from such objects as are familiar to men in all ages. To the poet who can use them greatly in his song, and make them convey his thoughts, the elements and stars seem to be nearer and more friendly. And other men involuntarily relinquish to him somewhat of their claim on Nature.



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The sun and the sea and the mists are his more than ours.

Let two stand on the highway, and — it shall be known that the sun belongs to one rather than to the other; the one will be found to claim, while the other simply retains, possession. The winds blow for one more than another; and on numerous occasions the uncertain or unworthy possessors silently relinquish their right in them. The most doubtful claimants have paid their money and taken a deed of their birthright, but the real owner is forever known to all men wherever he goes, and no one disputes his claim. For he cannot help using and deriving the profit, while to the dishonest possessor an estate is as idle as his parchment deed of it, and that is all he has purchased. Wherever the owner goes, inanimate things will fly to him and adhere.

What a fame was it that these Ossianic bards and heroes sought? To Fingal, Swaran says:

The hunter coming from the hills,
As he rests on a tomb, will say:
Here the mighties, Fingal and Swaran,
Joined battle, with their hundred bands.
Thus will the weary hunter speak
And our fame will abide forever.

November 9, Friday: Convention for the surrender of criminals between the United States and France.

READ THE FULL TEXT

A 4-acre site had been selected in Cincinnati for the erection of an observatory and a 12-inch objective lens of the highest quality had been ordered from Munich. On this day, atop 400-foot Mount Ida, former President John Quincy Adams had the honor of laying the cornerstone. Adams had journeyed to [Ohio](#) for the occasion despite illness and the address he delivered afterward would be his final public speech. Subsequent to this event Mt. Ida would be known as Mt. Adams.



Thursday, November 9.

In Pindar the same importance is attached to fame. Next to the performance of noble deeds is the renown which springs from them. [Ossian](#) is like Homer and like the Indian. His duans are like the seasons of the year in northern latitudes.

Who are the inhabitants of London and New York but savages who have built cities, and forsaken for a season hunting and war? Who are the Blackfeet and the Tartars but citizens roaming the plains and dwelling in wigwams and tents?

When it comes to poetry, the most polished era finds nothing wanting or that offends its taste in the real poetry of the rudest.

I must confess I fear that the Muse has stooped in a flight when I come to the literature of civilized nations and eras. We then first hear of different ages of poetry; of Augustan and Elizabethan ages; but the poetry of runic monuments is for every age. The whole difference stem to be that the poet has come within doors. The old bard



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stood without. How different are Homer and Ossian from Dryden and Pope and Gray, and even Milton and Shakespeare! Hosts of warriors earnest for battle could not mistake nor dispense with the ancient bards. There was no danger of their being overlooked by their generations. They spoke but as they acted. Take one of our modern, well arranged poems, and expose it to the elements, as Stonehenge has been exposed. Let the rains beat on it and the winds shake it, and how will its timbers look at the end of a few centuries? I like to hear, when they dig beneath some mysterious flat stone fir under the mould, of the few huge bones they find and the sword which modern men cannot wield.

When the stern old bard makes his heroes weep, they seem to weep from excess of very strength and not from weakness. It is the perspiration of a monument in the heat of summer; it is as a sacrifice — a libation — of fertile natures. We hardly know that tears have been shed. Only babes and heroes may weep.

Their pleasure and their sorrow are made of the same stuff as are the rain and the snow, the rainbow and the mist.

November 20, Monday: Mary R. Brown reported to her husband John Stillman Brown that Charles Anderson Dana while digging the cellar for what would come to be known as the Margaret Fuller Cottage had omitted to underpin the existing chimney stack, hence it had collapsed and there would be considerable expense. This would “cost us as much to rebuild it as it did to alter the dining room” of the Hive.



November 20.

When I remember the tumultuous popular joy of our cattle-show mobs, how they rushed hither and thither, with license and without license, with appetite for the huge delights of the day; now hastening with boisterous speed after the inspired negro, from whose larynx there issued a strain which made the very streets vibrate and curl like a banner, and the sky throb and palpitate with sympathy; as if the melodies of all Congo and the Guinea Coast had irrupted into our streets; now to see the procession of a hundred yoke of oxen, all as august and grave as Osiris; now to gaze at the droves of neat cattle and milch cows, all as unspotted and πότνια as Isis or Io, — I cannot help thinking of the feast of Adonis at sestos and Abydos.

Such as had no loves at all, —

Went lovers home from this great festival.

So enriched and reinforced did men go home from this our fair.

My life is far among those clouds yonder, as if they hung over the land where I would fain dwell. I see its atmosphere through the distant boughs of the elms.

The grandeur of the similes is another feature which characterizes great poetry. The poet seems to speak a gigantic and universal language. Its images and pictures ever occupy much space in the landscape as if they could only be seen from mountains and plains with a wide horizon, or across arms of the sea. They were not slight and transient like the stains on a whitewashed wall. [Ossian](#) says to the spirit of her father, “gray-haired Torkil of Torne,” seen in the skies:

Thou glidest away like receding ships.

So when the hosts of Fingal and Starne joined battle, the bard thus describes the approach of the enemy, —

With murmurs, loud like rivers far,

The race of Torne hither moved.

Ossian expresses his wonder simply. His wonder is as simple and strictly said as his life is single and of few elements.

When his hero dies he allows us a short misty glance into futurity, yet into as clear and unclouded a life as his first. When in Carbochia, MacRoine is slain, —

The hero fell lifeless, etc.

There are but few objects to distract these heroes’ sight. Their life is as uncluttered as the course of the stars, which they gaze after.

The wrathful kings on cairns apart, etc.

Through the grim nights and the cloudy days, with stern hope, the bard and warrior wait for but one heroic deed. The earth is a vast arena, — a sand plain or heath for heroic actions. The bard is sufficiently great and true to himself to make his thought take place of everything else. There is for the time no other philosophy, no other poetry.



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November 21, Wednesday: In 1825 Thomas Hancock had produced the first toy balloons in Britain, consisting of a bottle of rubber solution and a condensing syringe. On this date he managed to secure a British patent on rubber vulcanized with sulfur some two months before Charles Goodyear would secure his Patent #3,633 in the United States of America (Hancock had previously inspected some samples of rubber treated with sulfur from America, but claimed to have developed his own process by independent experiments).



November 21. The philosophy of [Ossian](#) is contained in the opening of the third duan of Ca-Lodin, —
Whence have sprung the things that are, etc.
The only vicious and immoral is an unsuccessful and ignoble warrior. He dies and is forgotten, —
Strangers come to build a tower, etc.
Again the philosophy of life and the simple forcible statement of the thought, —
Why shouldst thou build a hall of pomp,
Son of many-winged time? etc.
The size and grandeur of the machinery is again illustrated by, —
A thousand orators inclined,
To hear the lay of Fingal.
Even Ossian, the hero-bard, seems to regret the strength of his race, —
How beauteous, mighty man, was thy mind, etc.
The Death of the Sun combines many of the peculiarities of Ossian.
Their tears remind us of a weeping sinew. Crodar, blind and old, receives Ossian, son of Fingal, who comes to aid him in war, —
My eyes have failed, etc.,
says he. Here are more of Ossian's natural and vigorous similes. Cudulin is fighting, —
As rills that gush, etc.
And again Cudulin retires from fight, —
Dragging his spear behind, etc.
When a hero dies the bard utters a short biblical sentence, which will serve for epitaph or biography, —
The weak will find, etc.
And so of Fillan's tears. He weeps like a hero, —
Fillan was no veteran in war, etc.
The ancient blinded heroes passed the remainder of their days listening to the lays of the bards, and feeling the weapons which laid their enemies low.
The reward of the hero is to be remembered, —
A generation comes like a rapid flood, etc.
They move by vast strides, —
Islands dart out of our way,
And hide them behind our fleet.
When the hero falls, it is still in the midst of peaceful Nature, —
Stretched across a purling rill, etc.
I have heard a painter, who complained of the difficulty of separating the reflection in still water truly, advised to make ripples where he did not want reflections!



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November 29, Wednesday evening: This had appeared as an advertisement in the Concord Freeman for November 10, 17, and 24:

Concord Lyceum.

The Curators are enabled to announce the following Lectures:

Wednesday Evening, Nov. 8, introductory lecture by Dr. Chs. Jackson, of Boston. Agricultural Chemistry.

Thursday Evening, Nov. 16, R. W. Emerson, of Concord. New England Character.

Thursday Evening, Nov. 23, O. A. Brownson, of Boston. On Demagogues.

Wednesday Evening, Nov. 29, H. D. Thoreau, of New York city.

Thursday Evening, Dec. 7, Rev. Henry Giles, of England. Daniel O'Connell and Irish agitation.

Thursday Evening, Dec. 14, Rev. Henry Giles, of England.

Wednesday Evening, Dec. 20, John S. Keyes, Esq., of Concord.

The lectures will commence precisely at 7 o'clock.
— All interested are invited to attend.

SAMUEL HOAR,

Curators, R. W. EMERSON,

CHAS. W. GOODNOW.

Concord, Nov. 8, '43.

A review of THE DIAL in the January 25, 1844 New-York Daily Tribune selected [Henry Thoreau](#)'s essay for praise and took the occasion to make a back-handed compliment to Emerson: "We deeply desire to quote many pages, by different writers, from this number, but must be content for to-day with the following extracts from a Lecture on Poetry, by HENRY D. THOREAU, a young disciple and companion of Emerson, in whom the true spirit of the author's philosophy is reproduced, without the egotism and indifference to practical life we have regretted to see it cherish in less genial natures." Evidently the manuscript leaves Thoreau read from are lost to us either in consequence of their use as printers copy for The Dial or of his recycling them into an early draft of [A WEEK ON THE CONCORD AND MERRIMACK RIVERS](#). We can see in the title used in The Dial that at least three of the ancient poets Thoreau lectured on were [Homer](#), [Ossian](#), and [Geoffrey Chaucer](#); there is no evidence that he lectured on other poets. It is likely that what we now see as "Homer. Ossian. [Chaucer](#)." in EARLY ESSAYS AND MISCELLANIES, since it takes 35 to 40 minutes to read this aloud, would represent more than half of Thoreau's actual oral presentation.

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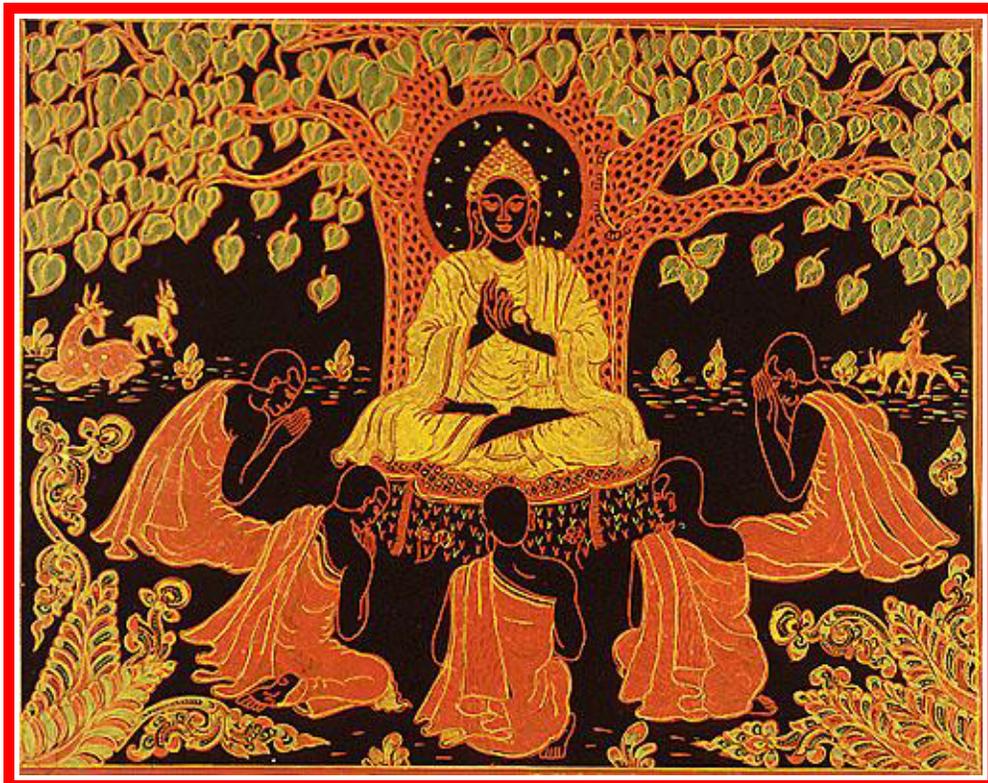
1844

January: [Henry Thoreau](#)'s translations from the odes of [Pindar](#) and his "[Homer](#). [Ossian](#). [Chaucer](#)." appeared in this current issue of [THE DIAL](#).

READ PINDAR'S ODES

[THE DIAL](#), JANUARY 1844

So, who then was the translator from French into English of the piece "The Preaching of [Buddha](#)" that also appeared? This amounts to the first English version of Chapter V of what we now know as THE LOTUS SUTRA. The piece was based upon two articles by [Professor Eugène Burnouf](#) that had appeared in French in the magazine *La Revue Indépendante* for April/May 1843 ([Professor Burnouf](#) having been the first to translate the LOTUS SUTRA from Sanskrit into a European language). In 1885, George Willis Cooke would finger Miss [Elizabeth Palmer Peabody](#), who not only knew French but also presumably carried the French magazine in question at her bookstore, as the English translator for this part of Thoreau's ethnical scriptures series, but there seems to be no document trail. (According to Sattelmeyer's THOREAU'S READING, item 1202 on page 264, Thoreau eventually would possess Burnouf's *LE LOTUS DE LA BONNE LOI*..., but since this book was not published until 1852 it does not bear upon the issue here.)



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15 WEST STREET

NOVELIST NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE ONCE DESCRIBED 15 WEST STREET AS "MRS. PEABODY'S GARAVANSARY." IN REFERENCE TO THE DIVERSE ACTIVITIES OF THE PEABODY FAMILY WHO FROM 1840 TO 1854 MADE THEIR HOME IN THIS BUILDING. IN THE FRONT PARLOR, DAUGHTER, ELIZABETH OPENED A BOOKSTORE, THE FIRST IN BOSTON TO OFFER WORKS BY FOREIGN AUTHORS. HERE SHE AND RALPH WALDO EMERSON PUBLISHED *THE DIAL*, THE QUARTERLY PERIODICAL OF THE TRANSCENDENTALIST POETS. HERE ALSO, JOURNALIST—CRITIC MARGARET FULLER HELD HER FAMOUS "CONVERSATIONS" WHICH TODAY ARE CONSIDERED LANDMARK TRACTS IN THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN FEMINISM. IN THE PRIVATE, REAR PARLOR, DAUGHTER SOPHIA IN 1842 MARRIED HAWTHORNE, AND DAUGHTER MARY IN 1843 MARRIED HORACE MANN, THE FATHER OF PUBLIC EDUCATION IN AMERICA. DURING THE YEARS THE PEABODY FAMILY LIVED ON WEST STREET, THEY WERE HOSTS — AND FRIEND — TO MANY WHO HELPED BROADEN AMERICAN THOUGHT AND LITERATURE.



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January 25, Thursday: A review of [THE DIAL](#) in the New-York [Daily Tribune](#) selected [Henry Thoreau](#)'s essay for praise and took the occasion to make a back-handed compliment to Emerson: "We deeply desire to quote many pages, by different writers, from this number, but must be content for to-day with the following extracts from a Lecture on Poetry, by HENRY D. THOREAU, a young disciple and companion of Emerson, in whom the true spirit of the author's philosophy is reproduced, without the egotism and indifference to practical life we have regretted to see it cherish in less genial natures." Evidently the manuscript leaves Thoreau read from are lost to us either in consequence of their use as printers copy for THE DIAL or of his recycling them into an early draft of [A WEEK ON THE CONCORD AND MERRIMACK RIVERS](#). We can see in the title used in [THE DIAL](#) that at least three of the ancient poets Thoreau lectured on were [Homer](#), [Ossian](#), and [Geoffrey Chaucer](#); there is no evidence that he lectured on other poets. It is likely that what we now see as "Homer. Ossian. Chaucer." in EARLY ESSAYS AND MISCELLANIES, since it takes 35 to 40 minutes to read this aloud, would represent more than half of Thoreau's actual oral presentation.⁷

7. Edward E. Salisbury, "Memoir on the History of Buddhism," [Journal of the American Oriental Society](#) 1 (1843-49): 81-135. [Henry David Thoreau, ed.], "The Preaching of the Buddha," [The Dial](#) 4 (Jan. 1844): 391-401. On that piece see Roger C. Mueller, "A Significant Buddhist Translation by Thoreau," [The Thoreau Society Bulletin](#) (Winter 1977): 1-2. Mueller corrects earlier misunderstandings about the source of the selection in [The Dial](#): Thoreau translated the passages not from Eugène Burnouf's 1844 book but from two articles by that French scholar which were published in Paris the year before in [La revue indépendante](#).



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1846

At this point [Henry Thoreau](#) was working on drafts of both [A WEEK ON THE CONCORD AND MERRIMACK RIVERS](#) and [WALDEN; OR, LIFE IN THE WOODS](#), using recent journal passages on memory, history, fable, and religion and probably inserting revised versions of “Dark Ages” and “[Homer](#). [Ossian](#). [Chaucer](#).” from his articles in [THE DIAL](#). By February, the 2d draft of WEEK had expanded to nearly twice the length of the 1st draft.



PEOPLE OF WALDEN, CAPE COD, AND A WEEK:

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1847

[Henry Thoreau](#) worked on drafts of both [A WEEK ON THE CONCORD AND MERRIMACK RIVERS](#) and [WALDEN: OR, LIFE IN THE WOODS](#), using recent Journal passages on memory, history, fable, and religion. He probably inserted revised versions of “Dark Ages” and “Homer. [Ossian](#). [Chaucer](#).” from [THE DIAL](#).

[The Manchester Times and Gazette](#) of Manchester, England, in their edition for December 28, Tuesday, 1847, presented a miscellaneous series of extracts from books. They had mixed among these extracts a paragraph from [Thoreau](#)’s “THE POETRY OF [OSSIAN](#)”:

In his poetry, as in Homer’s, only the simplest and most enduring features of humanity are seen, such essential parts of a man as Stonehenge exhibits of a temple; we see the circles of stone, and the upright shaft alone. The phenomena of life acquired almost an unreal and gigantic size, seen through his mists. Like all older and grander poetry, it is distinguished by the few elements in the lives of its heroes. They stand on the heath, between the stars and the earth, shrunk to the bones and sinews. The earth is a boundless plain for their deeds. They lead such a simple, dry, and everlasting life, as hardly needs depart with the flesh, but is transmitted entire from age to age. There are but few objects to distract their sight, and their life is as unincumbered [*sic*] as the course of the stars they gaze at. Compared with this simple, fibrous life, our civilised history appears the chronicle of debility, of fashion, and the arts of luxury. But the civilised man misses no real refinement in the poetry of the rudest era. It reminds him that civilization does but dress men. It makes shoes, but it does not toughen the soles of the feet. It makes cloth of finer texture, but it does not touch the skin. Inside the civilised man stands the savage still in the place of honour. We are those blue-eyed, yellow-haired Saxons, these slender, dark-haired Normans.



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A WEEK: The genuine remains of Ossian, or those ancient poems which bear his name, though of less fame and extent, are, in many respects, of the same stamp with the Iliad itself. He asserts the dignity of the bard no less than Homer, and in his era we hear of no other priest than he. It will not avail to call him a heathen, because he personifies the sun and addresses it; and what if his heroes did "worship the ghosts of their fathers," their thin, airy, and unsubstantial forms? we worship but the ghosts of our fathers in more substantial forms. We cannot but respect the vigorous faith of those heathen, who sternly believed somewhat, and are inclined to say to the critics, who are offended by their superstitious rites, — Don't interrupt these men's prayers. As if we knew more about human life and a God, than the heathen and ancients. Does English theology contain the recent discoveries? Ossian reminds us of the most refined and rudest eras, of Homer, Pindar, Isaiah, and the American Indian. In his poetry, as in Homer's, only the simplest and most enduring features of humanity are seen, such essential parts of a man as Stonehenge exhibits of a temple; we see the circles of stone, and the upright shaft alone. The phenomena of life acquire almost an unreal and gigantic size seen through his mists. Like all older and grander poetry, it is distinguished by the few elements in the lives of its heroes. They stand on the heath, between the stars and the earth, shrunk to the bones and sinews. The earth is a boundless plain for their deeds. They lead such a simple, dry, and everlasting life, as hardly needs depart with the flesh, but is transmitted entire from age to age. There are but few objects to distract their sight, and their life is as unencumbered as the course of the stars they gaze at.

...

The profession of the bard attracted more respect in those days from the importance attached to fame. It was his province to record the deeds of heroes. When Ossian hears the traditions of inferior bards, he exclaims, —

"I straightway seize the unfruitful tales,
And send them down in faithful verse."

His philosophy of life is expressed in the opening of the third Duan of Ca-Lodin.

"Whence have sprung the things that are?
And whither roll the passing years?
Where does Time conceal its two heads,
In dense impenetrable gloom,
Its surface marked with heroes' deeds alone?
I view the generations gone;
The past appears but dim;
As objects by the moon's faint beams,
Reflected from a distant lake.
I see, indeed, the thunderbolts of war,
But there the unmighty joyless dwell,
All those who send not down their deeds
To far, succeeding times."...

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A WEEK: There are other, savager, and more primeval aspects of nature than our poets have sung. It is only white man's poetry. Homer and Ossian even can never revive in London or Boston. And yet behold how these cities are refreshed by the mere tradition, or the imperfectly transmitted fragrance and flavor of these wild fruits. If we could listen but for an instant to the chant of the Indian muse, we should understand why he will not exchange his savageness for civilization. Nations are not whimsical. Steel and blankets are strong temptations; but the Indian does well to continue Indian. After sitting in my chamber many days, reading the poets, I have been out early on a foggy morning, and heard the cry of an owl in a neighboring wood as from a nature behind the common, unexplored by science or by literature. None of the feathered race has yet realized my youthful conceptions of the woodland depths. I had seen the red Election-bird brought from their recesses on my comrades' string, and fancied that their plumage would assume stranger and more dazzling colors, like the tints of evening, in proportion as I advanced farther into the darkness and solitude of the forest. Still less have I seen such strong and wilderness tints on any poet's string. These modern ingenious sciences and arts do not affect me as those more venerable arts of hunting and fishing, and even of husbandry in its primitive and simple form; as ancient and honorable trades as the sun and moon and winds pursue, coeval with the faculties of man, and invented when these were invented. We do not know their John Gutenberg, or Richard Arkwright, though the poets would fain make them to have been gradually learned and taught. According to Gower, —

“And Iadabel, as saith the boke,
Firste made nette, and fishes toke.
Of huntyng eke he fond the chace,
Whiche nowe is knowe in many place;
A tent of clothe, with corde and stake,
He sette up first, and did it make.”

Also, Lydgate says: —

“Jason first sayled, in story it is tolde,
Toward Colchos, to wynne the flees of golde.
Ceres the Goddess fond first the tilthe of londe;
Also, Aristeus fonde first the usage
Of mylke, and cruddis, and of honey swote;
Peryodes, for grete avauntage,
From flyntes smote fuyre, daryng in the roote.”

**PEOPLE OF
A WEEK****OSSIAN**

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PEOPLE OF WALDEN, CAPE COD, AND A WEEK:

OSSIAN

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN CAPE COD

1851

May 1, Thursday: While he was reacting to the fervor about support for [Lajos Kossuth](#), [Henry Thoreau](#) entered a poem in his journal, and also on page 96 of his Commonplace Book (now in the Berg Collection at the New York Public Library):

OSSIAN

The Spirit of Lodin
I look down from my height on nations,
And they become ashes before me;
Calm is my dwelling in the clouds;
Pleasant are the great fields of my rest.

Thoreau's source for this poem was [Patrick MacGregor](#). A prose version of it had indeed appeared in the 1790 edition by [James Macpherson](#) of THE POEMS OF [OSSIAN](#) in Book I, "Carric-Thura" — but the spelling there had been "Loda" rather than "Lodin":



May 1, 1851: Observed the Nuphar Advena Yellow Water Lily in blossom Also the Laurus Benzoin or Fever Bush Spice wood near Wm Wheeler's in Lincoln —resembling the Witch Hazel. It is remarkable that this aromatic shrub —though it grows by the road side —& does not hide itself may be as it were effectually concealed —though it blossoms every spring— It may be observed only once in many years.

The blossom buds of the peach have expanded just enough to give a slight peach tint to the orchards.

In regard to purity, I do not know whether I am much worse or better than my acquaintances. If I confine my thought to myself —I appear —whether by constitution or by education, irrevocably impure, as if I should be shunned by my fellow men, if they knew me better —as if I were of two inconsistent natures —but again when I observe how the mass of men speak of woman and of chastity —with how little love and reverence —I feel that so far I am unaccountably better than they. I think that none of my acquaintances has a greater love and admiration for chastity than I have. Perhaps it is necessary that one should actually stand low himself in order to reverence what is high in others

All distant landscapes —seen from hill tops are veritable pictures —which will be found to have no actual existence to him who travels to them— "Tis distance lends enchantment to the view." It is the bare *land*-scape without this depth of atmosphere to glass it. The distant river reach seen in the north from the Lincoln Hill, high in the horizon —like the ocean stream flowing round Homer's shield —the rippling waves reflecting the light —is unlike the same seen near at hand. Heaven intervenes between me and the object —by what license do I call it Concord River. It redeems the character of rivers to see them thus— They were worthy then of a place on Homer's shield—

As I looked today from mt Tabor in Lincoln to the Waltham Hill I saw the same deceptive slope —the near hill melting into the further —inseparably indistinguishably —it was one gradual slope from the base of the near hill to the summit of the further one —a succession of copsewoods —but I knew that there intervened a valley 2 or 3 miles wide studded with houses & orchards & drained by a considerable stream. When the shadow of a cloud passed over the nearer hill —I could distinguish its shaded summit against the side of the other.

I had in my mind's eye a silent grey tarn which I had seen the summer before? high up on the side of a *mt Bald* Mt where the half dead spruce trees stood far in the water draped with wreathy mist as with esnea moss —made of dews —where the Mt spirit bathed. Whose bottom was high above the surface of other lakes Spruces whose dead limbs were more in harmony with the mists which draped them.

The forenoon that I moved to my house —a poor old lame fellow who had formerly frozen his feet —hobbled off the road —came & stood before my door with one hand on each door post looking into the house & asked for a drink of water. I knew that rum or something like it was the only drink he loved but I gave him a dish of warm pond water which was all I had, nevertheless, which to my astonishment he drank, being used to drinking.

Nations! what are nations?— Tartars! and Huns! and Chinamen —like insects they swarm— The historian strives in vain to make them memorable. It is for want of a man that there are so many men— It is individuals that populate the world.



PEOPLE OF WALDEN, CAPE COD, AND A WEEK:

OSSIAN

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

The Spirit of Lodin

“I look down from my height on nations,
And they become ashes before me; — —
Calm is my dwelling in the clouds;
Pleasant are the great fields of my rest.”⁸

Man is as singular as god.

There is a certain class of unbelievers who sometimes ask me such questions as –if I think that I can live on vegetable food alone, and to strike at the root of the matter at once I am accustomed to answer such “Yes, I can live on board nails” If they cannot understand that they cannot understand much that I have to say. That cuts the matter short with them.⁹ For my own part I am glad to hear of experiments of this kind being tried –as that a young man tried for a fortnight to see if he could live on hard raw corn on the ear –using his tooth for his only mortar– The squirrel tribe tried the same (experiment) and succeeded. The human race is interested in these experiments –though a few old women may be alarmed –who own their thirds in mills.

Khaled would have his weary soldiers vigilant still; apprehending a mid night sally from the enemy “Let no man sleep,” said he, We shall have rest enough after death.”–

Would such an exhortation be understood by Yankee soldiers?

Omar answered the dying Abu Beker “Oh successor to the apostle of God! spare me from this burden. I have no need of the Caliphate.” But the Caliphate has need of you!” replied the dying Abu Beker

“Heraclius had heard of the mean attire of the Caliph Omar, and asked them why, having gained so much wealth by his conquests, he did not go richly clad like other princes? They replied, that he cared not for this world, but for the world to come, and sought favor in the eyes of God alone. “In what kind of a palace does he reside?” asked the emperor. “In a house built of mud” “Who are his attendants?” “Beggars and the poor”. “What tapestry does he sit upon?” “Justice and equity”. “What is his throne?” “Abstinence and true knowledge” “What is his treasure?” “Trust in God” “And who are his guard?” “The bravest of the Unitarians”.

It was the custom of Ziyad once governor of Bassora, “wherever he held sway, to order the inhabitants to leave their doors open at night, with merely a hurdle at the entrance to exclude cattle, engaging to replace any thing that should be stolen: and so effective was his police, that no robberies were committed.”

Abdallah was “so fixed and immovable in prayer, that a pigeon once perched upon his head mistaking him for a statue.”

8. [Thoreau](#) would later extrapolate from this for his early lecture “WHAT SHALL IT PROFIT”, combining it with an entry made on January 20, 1852 and an entry made on April 3, 1853 to form the following:

[Paragraph 78] All summer, and far into the autumn, I unconsciously went by the newspapers and the news, and now I find it was because the morning and the evening were full of news to me. My walks were full of incidents. I attended, not to the affairs of Europe, but to my own affairs in Massachusetts fields. If you chance to live and move and have your being [ACTS 17:28] in that thin stratum in which the events that make the news transpire,—thinner than the paper on which it is printed,—then these things will fill the world for you; but if you soar above or dive below that plane, you cannot remember nor be reminded of them. Really to see the sun rise or go down every day, so to relate ourselves to a universal fact, would preserve us sane forever. Nations! What are nations? Tartars, and Huns, and Chinamen! Like insects, they swarm. The historian strives in vain to make them memorable. It is for want of a man that there are so many men. It is individuals that populate the world. Any man thinking may say with the Spirit of Lodin,—“I look down from my height on nations, And they become ashes before me; —Calm is my dwelling in the clouds; Pleasant are the great fields of my rest.”

Bradley P. Dean has emended the essay copy-text by dropping ‘perchance,’ from this sentence (after ‘autumn,’), and by changing the six pronouns in this and the following two sentences from second-person singular to first-person singular. Authority for these emendations is derived from the Nantucket [Inquirer](#) summary and from Thoreau’s journal source.



PEOPLE OF WALDEN, CAPE COD, AND A WEEK:

OSSIAN

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN CAPE COD

1853

April 24, Sunday: [Henry Thoreau](#), in Haverhill, again in his journal referred to the figure "[Ossian](#)." He would use this material in "MOONLIGHT":



April 24. Sunday. To and around Creek Pond and back over Parsonage Hill, Haverhill. Field horse-tail in bloom. Marsh (?) hawk, with black tips of wings. Alders about all done. Greed leaves just beginning to expand. Houstonias. How affecting that, annually at this season, as surely as the sun takes a higher course in the heavens, this pure and simple little flower peeps out and spots the great globe with white in our America, its four little white or bluish petals on a slender stalk making a delicate flower about a third of an inch in diameter! What a significant, though faint, utterance of spring through the veins of earth! I see, in a pool by the Creek Brook, pretty chains of toad-spawn in double parallel crenate or serpentine or sometimes corkscrewing lines of black ova, close together, immersed in a light-colored jelly a third of an inch in diameter, appearing as if the two strings were one, like a lace with two scalloped black borders. This is what they were singing about.

Haverhill is remarkably bare of trees. The young ladies cannot tell where is the nearest woods. I saw the moon rise here tonight over great bare hills eastward, and it reminded me of Ossian. Saw a pretty islet iii the Creek

9. [Waldo Emerson](#), when he had heard [Thoreau](#) make this remark during June 1840, had supposed it to be a remark about Diet! This statement, which of course has nothing whatever to do with Diet and everything to do with Faith (how could the Reverend Emerson have been so clueless?), would eventually find its way into [WALDEN](#):

[WALDEN](#): There is a certain class of unbelievers who sometimes ask me such questions as, if I think that I can live on vegetable food alone; and to strike at the root of the matter at once, -for the root is faith,- I am accustomed to answer such, that I can live on board nails. If they cannot understand that, they cannot understand much that I have to say. For my part, I am glad to hear of experiments of this kind being tried; as that a young man tried for a fortnight to live on hard, raw corn on the ear, using his teeth for all mortar. The squirrel tribe tried the same and succeeded. The human race is interested in these experiments, though a few old women who are incapacitated for them, or who own their thirds in mills, may be alarmed.

To grasp that this is indeed a remark about Faith, you need only contemplate the following familiar texts:

Isaiah 7:9 — If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established.
Habakkuk 2:4 — Behold, his soul *which* is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.
Matthew 8:13 — And Jesus said unto the centurion, "Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, *so* be it done unto thee."
Matthew 9:28 — "Believe ye that I am able to do this?" They said unto him, "Yea, Lord."
Matthew 21:21 — "Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done."
Mark 4:40 — And he said unto them, "Why are you so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?"
Mark 10:52 — And Jesus said unto him, "Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole."
Mark 11:22 — And Jesus answering saith unto them, "Have faith in God."



PEOPLE OF WALDEN, CAPE COD, AND A WEEK:

OSSIAN

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Pond on the east side covered with white pine wood, appearing from the south higher than wide and as if the trees grew out of the water. You saw the light-colored trunks six or eight feet beneath, and then the heavy green mass overhung the water a rod, under and beyond which you see the light surface of the pond, which gives the isle a peculiarly light and floating appearance. So much beauty does a wooded islet add to a pond. It is an object sufficiently central and *insular*. Dandelions. How surprising this bright-yellow disk! Why study other hieroglyphics? It is along the east side of this pond that the Indians are said to have taken their way with Hannah Dustin and her nurse in 1697 toward the Merrimack. I walked along it and thought how they might have been ambuscaded.

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PEOPLE OF WALDEN, CAPE COD, AND A WEEK:

OSSIAN

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN CAPE COD

1855

When Osiris had been murdered, his consort [Isis](#) had wept and mourned and, clothed in mourning and with shorn hair, beating her breast, had gone in search of the chest that contained his body. Discovering it to be inside a huge wooden column in the palace of the king of Phoenicia, she gained admittance to the palace veiled and disguised as a servant. This Isis who obtained entrance to this palace with her head veiled is consequently represented in statuary and in poetry as a symbol of mystery. Thus we have in this poem by Tennyson, IV. 8:

For the drift of the Maker is dark, an Isis hid by the veil...

This is part of the background to [Henry Thoreau](#)'s use of the lifting of a corner of the veil from the Goddess of Truth unblemished by time:

WALDEN: With a little more deliberation in the choice of their pursuits, all men would perhaps become students and observers, for certainly their nature and destiny are interesting to all alike. In accumulating property for ourselves or our posterity, in founding a family or a state, or acquiring fame even, we are mortal; but in dealing with truth we are immortal, and need fear no change nor accident. The oldest Egyptian or Hindoo philosopher raised a corner of the veil from the statue of the divinity; and still the trembling robe remains raised, and I gaze upon as fresh a glory as he did, since it was I in him that was then so bold, and it is he in me that now reviews the vision. No dust has settled on that robe; no time has elapsed since that divinity was revealed. That time which we really improve, or which is improvable, is neither past, present, nor future.

**PEOPLE OF
WALDEN****ISIS****EGYPT**

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PEOPLE OF WALDEN, CAPE COD, AND A WEEK:

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The 1st edition of [Thomas Bulfinch's](#) [THE AGE OF FABLE](#) (what we now know as [BULFINCH'S MYTHOLOGY](#)),¹⁰ which sanitized, sterilized, and embalmed the pagan deities of Greece and Rome, the Celts, Scandinavia, and the Orient,¹¹ the author dedicated to the academic poet [Longfellow](#), who seemed to know so very much about the mythologies of the various cultures and about the various uses to which these said mythologies might be turned:

TO

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

THE POET ALIKE OF THE MANY AND OF THE FEW THIS
ATTEMPT TO POPULARIZE MYTHOLOGY AND EXTEND
THE ENJOYMENT OF ELEGANT LITERATURE IS

RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED

10. Sometimes we see this referred to as THE AGE OF FABLE; OR, BEAUTIES OF MYTHOLOGY, published by S.W. Tilton & Co. in Boston and by C.T. Dillingham in New York in 1855, and sometimes we see it referred to as THE AGE OF FABLE; OR, STORIES OF GODS AND HEROS, published by Sanborn, Carter, & Bazin in Boston in 1855. What gives? Might there be two different books?

11. [Thomas Bulfinch](#) would also write about Arthurian and Welsh legends, in 1858 in his AGE OF CHIVALRY.



PEOPLE OF WALDEN, CAPE COD, AND A WEEK:

OSSIAN

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN CAPE COD



In the section on the Druids in Bulfinch's work, originally serialized in a Boston newspaper, Bulfinch commented on the poetry attributed to "Ossian" that "In the poems of [Ossian](#) we have, if not the actual productions of Druidical times, what may be considered faithful representations of the songs of the Bards." Crude line drawings were used as illustrations in this work.



PEOPLE OF WALDEN, CAPE COD, AND A WEEK:

OSSIAN

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1860

Summer/Fall/Winter: [Henry Thoreau](#) was working at this point on a "[Huckleberries](#)" manuscript which he would eventually need to lay aside for lack of lifetime. In this manuscript we see at one point that he is still paying attention to the "Ossian" bardic materials, in that he wrote of [John Camel Heenan of Benecia, Massachusetts](#) (a local celebrity, 6 feet 2 inches and approximately 190 pounds, who had 15 minutes of fame by sparring for 42 rounds with the British champion [Tom Sayers](#) on April 17, 1860, then another 15 minutes of fame in winning the hand of [Adah Isaacs Menken](#), a well-known actress, and then 15 minutes of notoriety by accusing his bride as a bigamist) as "Mr. Blank, the Ossian Boy."

OSSIAN





PEOPLE OF WALDEN, CAPE COD, AND A WEEK:

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PEOPLE MENTIONED IN CAPE COD

Table of Altitudes



Yoda	2' 0 "
Lavinia Warren	2' 8 "
Tom Thumb, Jr.	3' 4 "
Lucy (Australopithecus Afarensis)	3' 8 "
Hervé Villechaize ("Fantasy Island")	3' 11"
Charles Proteus Steinmetz	4' 0 "
Mary Moody Emerson per FBS (1)	4' 3 "
Alexander Pope	4' 6 "
Benjamin Lay	4' 7 "
Dr. Ruth Westheimer	4' 7 "
Gary Coleman ("Arnold Jackson")	4' 8 "
Edith Piaf	4' 8 "
Queen Victoria with osteoporosis	4' 8 "
Linda Hunt	4' 9 "
Queen Victoria as adult	4' 10 "
Mother Teresa	4' 10 "
Margaret Mitchell	4' 10 "
length of newer military musket	4' 10"
Charlotte Brontë	4' 10-11"
Tammy Faye Bakker	4' 11"
Soviet gymnast Olga Korbut	4' 11"
jockey Willie Shoemaker	4' 11"
Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec	4' 11"
Joan of Arc	4' 11"
Bonnie Parker of "Bonnie & Clyde"	4' 11"
Harriet Beecher Stowe	4' 11"
Laura Ingalls Wilder	4' 11"
a rather tall adult Pygmy male	4' 11"
Gloria Swanson	4' 11"1/2
Clara Barton	5' 0 "
Isambard Kingdom Brunel	5' 0 "
Andrew Carnegie	5' 0 "
Thomas de Quincey	5' 0 "
Stephen A. Douglas	5' 0 "
Danny DeVito	5' 0 "
Immanuel Kant	5' 0 "
William Wilberforce	5' 0 "
Dollie Parton	5' 0 "
Mae West	5' 0 "



PEOPLE OF WALDEN, CAPE COD, AND A WEEK:

OSSIAN

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Pia Zadora	5' 0 "
Deng Xiaoping	5' 0 "
Dred Scott	5' 0 " (±)
Captain William Bligh of HMS <i>Bounty</i>	5' 0 " (±)
Harriet Tubman	5' 0 " (±)
Mary Moody Emerson per FBS (2)	5' 0 " (±)
John Brown of Providence, Rhode Island	5' 0 " (+)
John Keats	5' 3/4 "
Debbie Reynolds (Carrie Fisher's mother)	5' 1 "
Princess Leia (Carrie Fisher)	5' 1 "
Bette Midler	5' 1 "
Dudley Moore	5' 2 "
Paul Simon (of Simon & Garfunkel)	5' 2 "
Honore de Balzac	5' 2 "
Sally Field	5' 2 "
Jemmy Button	5' 2 "
Margaret Mead	5' 2 "
R. Buckminster "Bucky" Fuller	5' 2 "
Yuri Gagarin the astronaut	5' 2 "
William Walker	5' 2 "
Horatio Alger, Jr.	5' 2 "
length of older military musket	5' 2 "
the artist formerly known as Prince	5' 2 1/2 "
typical female of Thoreau's period	5' 2 1/2 "
Francis of Assisi	5' 3 "
Voltaire	5' 3 "
Mohandas Gandhi	5' 3 "
Sammy Davis, Jr.	5' 3 "
Kahlil Gibran	5' 3 "
Friend Daniel Ricketson	5' 3 "
The Reverend Gilbert White	5' 3 "
Nikita Khrushchev	5' 3 "
Sammy Davis, Jr.	5' 3 "
Truman Capote	5' 3 "
Kim Jong Il (North Korea)	5' 3 "
Stephen A. "Little Giant" Douglas	5' 4 "
Francisco Franco	5' 4 "
President James Madison	5' 4 "
Iosef Vissarionovich Dzugashvili "Stalin"	5' 4 "
Alan Ladd	5' 4 "
Pablo Picasso	5' 4 "





PEOPLE OF WALDEN, CAPE COD, AND A WEEK:

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PEOPLE MENTIONED IN CAPE COD

Truman Capote	5' 4 "
Queen Elizabeth	5' 4 "
Ludwig van Beethoven	5' 4 "
Typical Homo Erectus	5' 4 "
typical Neanderthal adult male	5' 4 ¹ / ₂ "
Alan Ladd	5' 4 ¹ / ₂ "
comte de Buffon	5' 5 " (-)
Captain Nathaniel Gordon	5' 5 "
Charles Manson	5' 5 "
Audie Murphy	5' 5 "
Harry Houdini	5' 5 "
Hung Hsiu-ch'üan 洪秀全	5' 5 "
Marilyn Monroe	5' 5 ¹ / ₂ "
T.E. Lawrence "of Arabia"	5' 5 ¹ / ₂ "
average runaway male American slave	5' 5-6 "
Charles Dickens	5' 6? "
President Benjamin Harrison	5' 6 "
President Martin Van Buren	5' 6 "
James Smithson	5' 6 "
Louisa May Alcott	5' 6 "
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe	5' 6 ¹ / ₂ "
Napoleon Bonaparte	5' 6 ¹ / ₂ "
Emily Brontë	5' 6-7 "
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow	5' ? "
average height, seaman of 1812	5' 6.85 "
Oliver Reed Smoot, Jr.	5' 7 "
minimum height, British soldier	5' 7 "
President John Adams	5' 7 "
President John Quincy Adams	5' 7 "
President William McKinley	5' 7 "
"Charley" Parkhurst (a female)	5' 7 "
Ulysses S. Grant	5' 7 "
Henry Thoreau	5' 7 "
the average male of Thoreau's period	5' 7 ¹ / ₂ "
Edgar Allan Poe	5' 8 "
President Ulysses S. Grant	5' 8 "
President William H. Harrison	5' 8 "
President James Polk	5' 8 "
President Zachary Taylor	5' 8 "
average height, soldier of 1812	5' 8.35 "



PEOPLE OF WALDEN, CAPE COD, AND A WEEK:

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PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

President Rutherford B. Hayes	5' 8 ¹ / ₂ "
President Millard Fillmore	5' 9"
President Harry S. Truman	5' 9"
President Jimmy Carter	5' 9 ¹ / ₂ "
Herman Melville	5' 9 ³ / ₄ "
Calvin Coolidge	5' 10"
Andrew Johnson	5' 10"
Theodore Roosevelt	5' 10"
Thomas Paine	5' 10"
Franklin Pierce	5' 10"
Abby May Alcott	5' 10"
Reverend Henry C. Wright	5' 10"
Nathaniel Hawthorne	5' 10 ¹ / ₂ "
Louis "Deerfoot" Bennett	5' 10 ¹ / ₂ "
Friend John Greenleaf Whittier	5' 10 ¹ / ₂ "
President Dwight D. Eisenhower	5' 10 ¹ / ₂ "
Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots	5' 11"
Sojourner Truth	5' 11"
President Grover Cleveland	5' 11"
President Herbert Hoover	5' 11"
President Woodrow Wilson	5' 11"
President Jefferson Davis	5' 11"
President Richard Milhous Nixon	5' 11 ¹ / ₂ "
Robert Voorhis the hermit of Rhode Island	< 6'
Frederick Douglass	6' (-)
Anthony Burns	6' 0"
Waldo Emerson	6' 0"
Joseph Smith, Jr.	6' 0"
David Walker	6' 0"
Sarah F. Wakefield	6' 0"
Thomas Wentworth Higginson	6' 0"
President James Buchanan	6' 0"
President Gerald R. Ford	6' 0"
President James Garfield	6' 0"
President Warren Harding	6' 0"
President John F. Kennedy	6' 0"
President James Monroe	6' 0"
President William H. Taft	6' 0"
President John Tyler	6' 0"
John Brown	6' 0 (+)"
President Andrew Jackson	6' 1"



PEOPLE OF WALDEN, CAPE COD, AND A WEEK:

OSSIAN

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN CAPE COD

Alfred Russel Wallace	6' 1"
President Ronald Reagan	6' 1"
Venture Smith	6' 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
John Camel Heenan	6' 2"
Crispus Attucks	6' 2"
President Chester A. Arthur	6' 2"
President George Bush, Senior	6' 2"
President Franklin D. Roosevelt	6' 2"
President George Washington	6' 2"
Gabriel Prosser	6' 2"
Dangerfield Newby	6' 2"
Charles Augustus Lindbergh	6' 2"
President Bill Clinton	6' 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
President Thomas Jefferson	6' 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
President Lyndon B. Johnson	6' 3"
Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.	6' 3"
Richard "King Dick" Seaver	6' 3 $\frac{1}{4}$ "
President Abraham Lincoln	6' 4"
Marion Morrison (AKA John Wayne)	6' 4"
Elisha Reynolds Potter, Senior	6' 4"
Thomas Cholmondeley	6' 4" (?)
Franklin Benjamin Sanborn	6' 5"
Peter the Great of Russia	6' 7"
Giovanni Battista Belzoni	6' 7"
Thomas Jefferson (the statue)	7' 6"
Jefferson Davis (the statue)	7' 7"
Martin Van Buren Bates	7' 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
M. Bihin, a Belgian exhibited in Boston in 1840	8'
Anna Haining Swan	8' 1"





PEOPLE OF WALDEN, CAPE COD, AND A WEEK:

OSSIAN

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1863

November: [Henry Thoreau](#)'s "Night and Moonlight" appeared in [The Atlantic Monthly](#): Thoreau quoted [Ossian](#)'s address to the sun from *Trathal*, beginning "Where has darkness its dwelling," from page 519 of [Patrick MacGregor](#)'s blank verse retranslation of the material, THE GENUINE REMAINS OF OSSIAN, to illustrate how the light of day reflects "an inward dawn." Thoreau's additions from the journal version for one paragraph are indicated here in our standard markup coding, but note that Thoreau's punctuation has also here obviously been "touched up," at one point or another, by one editor or another:

After I have spent the greater part of a night abroad in the moonlight, I am obliged to sleep enough more the next night[^] *or perhaps the next day*, to make up for it—*Endymionis somnum dormire* (to sleep an Endymion sleep), as the ancients expressed it. And there is something gained still by thus turning the day into night. Endymion is said to have obtained of Jupiter the privilege ~~of sleeping~~^{^to be always young and sleep} as much as he would. Let no man be afraid of sleep, if his weariness comes of obeying his ~~Genius~~^{^genius}. *It depends on how a man has spent his day, whether he has any right to be in his bed even by night. So spend some hours that you may have a right to sleep in the sunshine.* He who has spent the night with the gods sleeps ~~more innocently~~ by day ^{^as innocently as} ~~than the sluggard who has spent the day with the satyrss sleeps by night. He who has travelled to fairy-land in the night sleeps by day more innocently than~~ he who is fatigued by the ~~merely trivial~~^{^ordinary} labors of the day ~~sleeps by night.~~ ^{^Cato says, 'The dogs must be shut up by day that they may be more sharp (acriores), more fierce and vigilant by night.'} *So I might say of a moon- and star-gazer.* That kind of life which sleeping we dream that we live awake, in our walks by night we waking, ~~dream that we live;~~ while our daily life appears as a dream.

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PEOPLE OF WALDEN, CAPE COD, AND A WEEK:

OSSIAN

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN CAPE COD

1881

November: A report from Walt Whitman:

[OSSIAN](#)

“Specimen Days”

AN OSSIANIC NIGHT — DEAREST FRIENDS

Again back in Camden. As I cross the Delaware in long trips to-night, between 9 and 11, the scene overhead is a peculiar one – swift sheets of flitting vapor-gauze, follow'd by dense clouds throwing an inky pall on everything. Then a spell of that transparent steel-gray black sky I have noticed under similar circumstances, on which the moon would beam for a few moments with calm lustre, throwing down a broad dazzle of highway on the waters; then the mists careering again. All silently, yet driven as if by the furies they sweep along, sometimes quite thin, sometimes thicker – a real Ossianic night – amid the whirl, absent or dead friends, the old, the past, somehow tenderly suggested – while the Gaelstrains [Page 916] chant themselves from the mists –

[“Be thy soul blest, O Carril! in the midst of thy eddy winds. O that thou would'st come to my hall when I am alone by night! And thou dost come, my friend. I hear often thy light hand on my harp, when it hangs on the distant wall, and the feeble sound touches my ear. Why dost thou not speak to me in my grief, and tell me when I shall behold my friends? But thou passest away in thy murmuring blast; the wind whistles through the gray hairs of Ossian.”]

But most of all, those changes of moon and sheets of hurrying vapor and black clouds, with the sense of rapid action in weird silence, recall the far-back Erse belief that such above were the preparations for receiving the wraiths of just-slain warriors –

[“We sat that night in Selma, round the strength of the shell. The wind was abroad in the oaks. The spirit of the mountain roar'd. The blast came rustling through the hall, and gently touch'd my harp. The sound was mournful and low, like the song of the tomb. Fingal heard it the first. The crowded sighs of his bosom rose. Some of my heroes are low, said the gray-hair'd king of Morven. I hear the sound of death on the harp. Ossian, touch the trembling string. Bid the sorrow rise, that their spirits may fly with joy to Morven's woody hills. I touch'd the harp before the king; the sound was mournful and low. Bend forward from your clouds, I said, ghosts of my fathers! bend. Lay by the red terror of your course. Receive the falling chief; whether he comes from a distant land, or rises from the rolling sea. Let his robe of mist be near; his spear that is form'd of a cloud. Place a half-extinguish'd meteor by his side, in the form of a hero's sword. And oh! let his countenance be lovely, that his friends may delight in his presence. Bend from your clouds, I said, ghosts of my fathers, bend. Such was my song in Selma, to the lightly trembling harp.”]

How or why I know not, just at the moment, but I too muse and think of my best friends in their distant homes – of William O'Connor, of Maurice Bucke, of John Burroughs, and of Mrs. Gilchrist – friends of my soul – stanchest friends of my other soul, my poems.



PEOPLE OF WALDEN, CAPE COD, AND A WEEK:

OSSIAN

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1895

During [Henry Thoreau](#)'s lifetime there had been a bunch of white people running around loose who had been impressed with the then-available Ossianic materials for all the wrong reasons, having to do with the development of white racial pride (the general overarching mythology of "white is better for various reasons, and not only has triumphed over color but will continue to triumph, and not only will continue to triumph, but will be right and righteous in this triumph.") This was all at the level of Conan-the-Barbarian on TV nowadays. The situation was reminiscent of Africanism today, with people running around suggesting that the ancient Greeks stole everything they ever created from the black Egyptians who actually had been responsible for all cultural and civilizationist materials. Although there had been early exposés such as those by Dr. Johnson (1775), Shaw (1782), and [Malcolm Laing](#) (1805), it really was not until this year that Celtic scholarship itself, through Stern, seriously attacked the pseudo-originals of [Ossian](#) produced by Macpherson, as inventions which had been deceiving various personages such as Thomas Jefferson during the late years of the 18th Century and Thoreau and Emerson during the early years of the 19th. Be aware that during Thoreau's *floruit* there were a number of admirers of Ossian such as Chateaubriand and Lord Byron who were well aware of the attacks by Dr. Johnson, Shaw, and Laing but nevertheless appreciated these materials as reconstructed poetry.¹²

12. Stern also produced evidence that there were some authentic Gaelic traditions embedded in at least the English version of the Ossian materials. Derick Thomson has more recently added to these legitimate historical sources, particularly in 1952 in his *THE GAELIC SOURCES OF MACPHERSON'S OSSIAN*. And even more recently, Donald Meek, Professor of Celtic at Aberdeen, has made himself the acknowledged authority on the authentic Gaelic Ossianic ballad. There is a new edition of [THE BOOK OF THE DEAN OF LISMORE](#) forthcoming from him. This was in fact Macpherson's prize manuscript find, and it does contain ballads attributed to an "Oisean" [*sic*]. This had been compiled between 1512 and 1542 from both manuscript and oral sources and the existence of such materials does demonstrate that the ridicule coming from Johnson was premature and exaggerated. Despite what Johnson says, Macpherson never claimed that more than a small part of his Ossian was derived from manuscript sources. Macpherson's introductory dissertations emphasized his own role in piecing together what had come to him in fragmented form. It was natural therefore that many of the admirers of this took it for granted that the epics were an example of creative reconstruction. Cesarotti for instance used the term "collage." To some extent this is still a tenable view. Shaw credits Macpherson with having written some of the best Gaelic verse he has ever encountered, and [Laing](#) considered Macpherson to be a poetic genius second only to Gray. Even if we could reach a consensus on what Macpherson actually did with his limited sources, there is no prospect of our ever coming to agreement on what to term it, so we have had to move on from these ultimately sterile debates over authenticity. For instance, Robert Crawford is presently encouraging us to consider Macpherson to have been something of a precursor of modernism.



PEOPLE OF WALDEN, CAPE COD, AND A WEEK:

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1945

March: Joseph J. Kwiat's "Thoreau's Philosophical Apprenticeship"
(The New England Quarterly, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 51-69).

JOSEPH J. KWIAT

ABERCROMBIE

JOHN LOCKE

DUG. STEWART

THOS. BROWN

Professor Ernest Erwin Leisy's "Thoreau and Ossian" (The New England Quarterly, Vol. 18, No. 1 (March 1945), pp. 96-98), points out that rather than using James Macpherson's version of the Ossianic poems, Thoreau relied instead on Patrick MacGregor's 1841 blank verse retranslation of the material, THE GENUINE REMAINS OF OSSIAN. Professor Leisy comments gratuitously, however, that "Thoreau in his quotations from Ossian exercised his well-known perversity for selections which suited his particular needs."¹³

Henry Thoreau did not ever make use of Macpherson's fraudulent materials. The quote in WALDEN; OR, LIFE IN THE WOODS, that expresses the kinship of the wild to his nature, is traceable to MacGregor's version of *Croma*, 193. The quote that appears in Thoreau's "Night and Moonlight" is traceable to Ossian's address to the sun from page 519 of MacGregor's version of *Trathal*, beginning "Where has darkness its dwelling," to illustrate how the light of day reflects "an inward dawn." The quotes in "Friday" of A WEEK ON THE CONCORD AND MERRIMACK RIVERS also are traceable to the MacGregor version:

- *Ca-Lodin*, I, 125: "Thou glidest away"
- *Ca-Lodin*, II, 132: "With murmurs loud"
- *Ca-Lodin*, II, 134: "His soul departed"
- *Ca-Lodin*, II, 137: "Whence have sprung"
- *Ca-Lodin*, III, 138: "The wrathful kings"
- *Carric*, 167: "Strangers build a tower"
- *Garon*, 176: "A thousand orators inclined"
- *Garon*, 176: "How beauteous..."
- *Oinamoru*, I, 182: "I straightway seize"
- *Croma*, 195: "My eyes have failed"
- *Fingal*, III, 252: "— dragging his spear"
- *Fingal*, V, 280: "The weak will find"
- *Fingal*, VI, 292: "Thy mother shall find"
- *Timora*, III, 343: "He strode away"
- *Timora*, VI, 391: "Mounds will appear"

13. Uh, selecting quotations that suit your particular needs is perverse? Well, yes, "cherry-picking" the quotations that support your point while disregarding quotations that would refute your point, that would be properly describable as tendentious — but I don't consider that Thoreau in quoting from Ossian had any particular agenda to prove any particular point. His use of these materials was merely evocative.

However, this 3-page article was published in 1945, back in the day when it was considered seemly for academics to mention Thoreau with a subtle sneer — so we may be able to put down this remark about Thoreau's "well-known perversity" as merely Professor Leisy's obeisance to the popular trend.



PEOPLE OF WALDEN, CAPE COD, AND A WEEK:

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1988

Fiona Stafford's *THE SUBLIME SAVAGE* dealt with the [Ossian/James Macpherson](#) controversy.

President [Thomas Jefferson](#) may still have been reading and appreciating Ossian as late as 1789, and commenting upon his continuing admiration as late as 1799, but is that so strange?

- Much later than 1799, as of 1815 even, [Napoleon Bonaparte](#), who was fond of referring to Ossian as “the northern Homer,” had François Gérard paint his palace at Malmaison “in the style of Ossian.” Over his bed in the Quirinale in Rome, instead of a mirror, he had Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres do a “Dream of Ossian” on the ceiling.
- Much later than 1815, in the fall of 1843 even, [Henry Thoreau](#) was appreciating the poetry of Ossian as if there were no challenge to its authenticity. He was, of course, a Harvard graduate who had specialized in literature and languages, and he did, of course, lecture and publish, and it is clear that no challenge was brought forward on this topic from members of his New England audiences. As of 1846, while Thoreau was working simultaneously on drafts of *WEEK* and of *WALDEN*, he was bringing materials forward from his lecture “Homer. Ossian. Chaucer” (upon which he had begun work at the suggestion of [Waldo Emerson](#), another Harvard grad, while he was staying on Staten Island and utilizing the resources of the NY Mercantile Library), without indicating that any concerns had ever been brought to his attention. None of the learned readers of *The Dial* took any exception to these materials. As of May 1, 1851 Thoreau was writing an alleged Ossian excerpt into his Journal.
- Much later than Fall 1843, as of November 1881 even, Walt Whitman was still writing about “an Ossianic night” without any indication of awareness that challenge had been made to the authenticity of the materials!

These instances fall further and further outside the longest of the long 18th Centuries. But [Thoreau](#) was not a person of ill will, not a white supremacist, not one of those period blokes who were running at the mouth about the AngloKeltish stock and suchlike, as [Emerson](#) and Bronson Alcott were being tempted to do, and as Walt Whitman most certainly did for the duration of his exceedingly long *florut*. And this was all despite the existence since 1775 of [Dr. Samuel Johnson's](#) *JOURNEY TO THE WESTERN ISLANDS* and it was all despite the existence since 1782 of Shaw's *AN ENQUIRY INTO THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE POEMS ATTRIBUTED TO OSSIAN*. Clearly what we need is a “reception study” to evaluate how belatedly such correctives spread through the learned community, what the lag cycle is and how it can be shortened, etc. The basic problem is that we have at present a publication system that lets stuff get out there and sit on library shelves where essentially it becomes stand-alone uncorrectable. Some of it, such as this embarrassing white-race-pride wannabelieve nonsense about origins, is relatively benign, at least in encouraging such folks to feel proud of themselves (everybody deserves to feel proud of themselves), but other of it—such as for instance a recipe for cooking fiddlehead ferns in a “nature” book, a recipe which would in fact promptly give a family incurable cancers of the stomach—is while equally innocent not so harmless. We issue recalls for our vehicles but not for our ideas. Which is one of the **many** reasons why I am looking forward to the early date at which all academic publishing is going to be by way of hanging files off of one's WWW homepage. Once we reach that point, we can be in the process of maintaining and correcting and polishing and elaborating our materials for the duration of our respective floruts. —Which should cut down **somewhat** on this lag cycle.



PEOPLE OF WALDEN, CAPE COD, AND A WEEK:

OSSIAN

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN CAPE COD

“MAGISTERIAL HISTORY” IS FANTASIZING: HISTORY IS CHRONOLOGY

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“It’s all now you see. Yesterday won’t be over until tomorrow and tomorrow began ten thousand years ago.”

– Remark by character “Garin Stevens”
in William Faulkner’s INTRUDER IN THE DUST



Prepared: March 21, 2015



PEOPLE OF WALDEN, CAPE COD, AND A WEEK:

OSSIAN

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN CAPE COD

ARRGH AUTOMATED RESearch REPORT

GENERATION HOTLINE



This stuff presumably looks to you as if it were generated by a human. Such is not the case. Instead, someone has requested that we pull it out of the hat of a pirate who has grown out of the shoulder of our pet parrot "Laura" (as above). What these chronological lists are: they are research reports compiled by ARRGH algorithms out of a database of modules which we term the Kouroo Contexture (this is data mining). To respond to such a request for information we merely push a button.



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Commonly, the first output of the algorithm has obvious deficiencies and we need to go back into the modules stored in the contexture and do a minor amount of tweaking, and then we need to punch that button again and recompile the chronology – but there is nothing here that remotely resembles the ordinary “writerly” process you know and love. As the contents of this originating contexture improve, and as the programming improves, and as funding becomes available (to date no funding whatever has been needed in the creation of this facility, the entire operation being run out of pocket change) we expect a diminished need to do such tweaking and recompiling, and we fully expect to achieve a simulation of a generous and untiring robotic research librarian. Onward and upward in this brave new world.

First come first serve. There is no charge.
Place requests with <Kouroo@kouroo.info>. Arrgh.