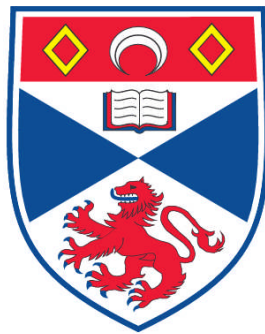


**'SEE SCOT AND SAXON COALESC'D IN ONE': JAMES  
MACPHERSON'S *THE HIGHLANDER* IN ITS INTELLECTUAL AND  
CULTURAL CONTEXTS, WITH AN ANNOTATED TEXT OF THE  
POEM**

**Kristin Lindfield-Ott**

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD  
at the  
University of St. Andrews**



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**‘See SCOT and SAXON coalesc'd in one’: James  
Macpherson's *The Highlander* in Its Intellectual and  
Cultural Contexts, with an Annotated Text of the  
Poem**

Kristin Lindfield-Ott

*A thesis presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy*  
in the School of English  
at the University of St Andrews

August 2011

## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores James Macpherson's *The Highlander* (1758) in relation to originality, Scottish identity and historiography. It also situates the Ossianic Collections in the context of Macpherson's earlier poetical and later historical works. There are three parts to it: a biographical sketch of Macpherson's early life, the annotated edition of *The Highlander*, and discursive commentary chapters. By examining *The Highlander* in detail this thesis questions the emphasis of other Macpherson criticism on the Ossianic Collections, and allows us to see him as a writer who is historically minded, very aware of sources, well versed in established forms of poetry and thoroughly, and positively, British. *The Highlander* stands out among the corpus of his works not because it can give us insights into the Ossianic Collections, which is its usual function in Macpherson criticism, but because it can help us understand what it is that connects Macpherson's earlier and later works with the Ossianic Collections: history, Britishness, tradition.

Macpherson's poetical works are united by a desire to translate Scotland's factual past into sentimental British poetry. In the Ossianic Collections he does so without particular faithfulness to his sources, but in *The Highlander* he converts historical sources directly into neo-classic verse. This is where Macpherson's originality lies: his ability to adapt history. In different styles and genres, and based on different sources, Macpherson's works are early examples of Scotland's great literary achievement: historical fiction. Instead of accusing him of forgery or trying to trace his knowledge of Gaelic ballads, this thesis presents Macpherson as a genuine historian who happened to write in a variety of genres.

**1. Candidate's declarations:**

I, Marie Kristin Ott, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 80,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

I was admitted as a research student in September 2006 and as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in September 2007; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2006 and 2011.

Date                                                  Signature of candidate

**2. Supervisor's declaration:**

I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of St Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr Tom Jones, who shaped this project in many ways. He has been a constant source of ideas, inspiration and sound guidance. He has read and commented on my work with remarkable patience, care and insight. He has cheerfully accepted my disinterest in all things theory and -ism (and then delighted in pointing out that a lot of my thesis does, in fact, deal with theory) and ventured into Scottish Studies with me, without complaint or protest at the prospect of having to read yet another North British work. Also thanks to Prof. Nick Roe who encouraged me to undertake a PhD on Macpherson and to edit *The Highlander* as part of this.

A number of scholars have helped me by responding to queries, reading particular chapters (or, indeed, *The Highlander*), by listening to and discussing my ideas, or simply by cheering me on: Robert Crawford, Howard Gaskill, David Higgins, Mel Kersey, Thomas Keymer, Susan Manly, Dafydd Moore, Jane Stabler, Charles Withers and Paul Wood. I would also like to thank Rolf Lessenich and Norbert Lennartz who introduced me to Ossian when I was an undergraduate, and who have continued to take an interest in my work. Allan Macpherson-Fletcher kindly invited me and my husband up to Balavil for tea and a tour of the house, and dug out some exciting Macpherson memorabilia.

I could not have written this thesis without the support of my friends and family. I thank my parents Klaus-Dieter and Monika Ott, my grandparents Günter and Ruth Rössel, my aunt and ‘wee’ cousins Heidi Brinkmann and Katalina and Anna Frenkel, and our friends Ata and Lothar Brose. My friends both in St Andrews and abroad have been fantastically encouraging and caring throughout my thesis. I particularly wish to thank Christina Chandler Andrews, Jake (James Allen) Andrews (III), Polly Atkin, Ian Blyth, Ciara Brewer, Jim Byatt, Rebecca Domke, Lexi Drayton, Nicola Healey, David Higgins, Barbara Kettel, Peter Lindfield-Ott, Christie Margrave, Lena Oetzel, Rose Pimentel, Ros(alind) Powell, Ashley Stevens, Joseph Tandler (JT), Laura Walters, Margaux Whiskin and Kerstin Ziegler. My colleagues at the University Library and St Mary’s Library in St Andrews, particularly Colin Bovaird, Lynda Kinloch and Fiona Seenan, have been my surrogate family in St Andrews, and for that I adore them. Peter Lindfield and Laura Walters have kindly proofread the whole thesis, and for that I thank them. Much of this thesis has been discussed, written and edited in the

Central, Aikman's, the Whey Pat and the Ladyhead Cafe, over a pint of Ossian, a slice of cake or a bowl of nachos.

I would like to thank the staff at the following libraries and archives for helping me with my research: Aberdeen University Library (particularly Michelle Gait), the Bodleian Library, the British Library, the Clan Macpherson Museum at Newtonmore, Glasgow University Library, Lancaster University Library, the National Archives of Scotland, the National Library of Scotland, St Deiniol's Library, Westminster Abbey, and most of all St Andrews University Library (particularly ILL, St Mary's and Special Collections). The secretaries in the School of English have been stellar, particularly Sandra McDevitt.

I gratefully acknowledge financial support from the University of St Andrews for granting me a University Scholarship, and from the Canadian Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies for awarding me a bursary to attend their 2009 conference. I am grateful to Pickering & Chatto for allowing me to use my essay from *Romantic Localities* (London: 2010) as the basis for chapter 7.

Finally I would like to thank Peter Lindfield-Ott for believing in me. I dedicate this thesis to him, with love.

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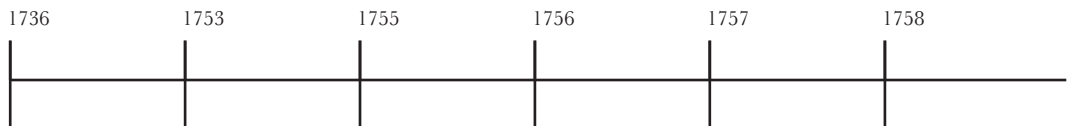
## ABBREVIATIONS

All references to Macpherson's *The Highlander* are taken from my edition of the poem (chapter 3 of this thesis).

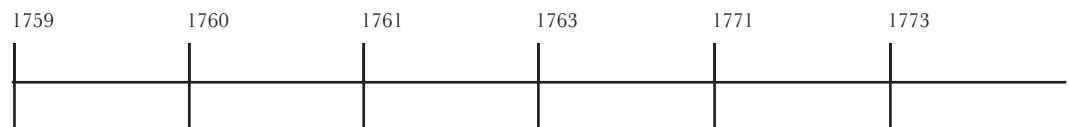
OC            Ossianic Collections

*PoO*           James Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian and Related Works*, ed. by  
Howard Gaskill, Fiona Stafford (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University  
Press, 1996)

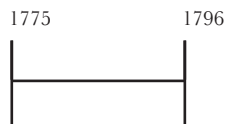
## TIMELINE OF MACPHERSON'S EARLY LIFE



<p>27 Oct: Born at Invertromie</p> <p>1 Nov: Baptism</p>	<p>Feb: Matriculates at King's College, Aberdeen</p>	<p>Matriculates at Marischal College, Aberdeen</p> <p>May: 'To a Friend, Mourning the Death of Miss...' published in the <i>Scots Magazine</i></p>	<p>Leaves Aberdeen and returns to Ruthven; teaches at the parish school</p> <p>Nov/Dec: writes 'The Hunter'</p>	<p>Moves to Edinburgh</p>	<p><b>Apr: <i>The Highlander</i> published</b></p> <p>Works as private tutor to Thomas Graham at Balgowan</p> <p>Oct: 'On the Death of Marshal Keith' published in the <i>Scots Magazine</i></p> <p>Oct: 'To the Memory of an Officer killed before Quebec' published in the <i>Edinburgh Magazine</i></p>
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<p>May: 'On the Death of a Young Lady' published in the <i>Scots Magazine</i></p> <p>2 Oct: meets John Home in Moffat</p>	<p><i>Fragments of Ancient Poetry Collected in the Highlands of Scotland</i> published</p> <p>Tours the Highlands</p> <p>Sep: 'The Earl Marischal's Welcome to his Native Country' published in the <i>Scots Magazine</i></p>	<p>Dec: <i>Fingal</i> published</p>	<p>Temora published</p>	<p><i>An Introduction to the History of Great Britain and Ireland</i> published</p>	<p><i>The Iliad of Homer, translated by James Macpherson</i> published</p>
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<p><i>Original Papers</i> published</p> <p><i>The History of Great Britain from the Restoration to the Accession of the House of Hannover</i> published</p>	<p>17 Feb. Dies at Belleville</p>
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## CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCING MACPHERSON’S VISION OF SCOTLAND

The final product [Macpherson’s poetical works] in some ways resembles the well documented imaginary world of J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*. Directly or indirectly, Tolkien owes a great deal to Macpherson.<sup>1</sup>

(John MacQueen)

John MacQueen here alludes to the interweaving of fact and fiction that characterises Macpherson’s writings. Both the OC and his relatively obscure early works demonstrate a blend of invention and imitation, of myth and tradition, of history and fiction.<sup>2</sup> These dichotomies are reflected in his character: seemingly Jacobite and Whig, Enlightenment thinker and proto-Romantic, Scottish nationalist and pro-Union imperialist. Much criticism devoted to Macpherson and his works has focused on aspects of authenticity and Scottishness. Yet this has mostly been restricted to just one aspect of his works: the OC. They are often seen as an effort to ‘rehabilitate the Celt in terms of broadly Anglo-Saxon values’; a political approach, and not one that this thesis is overly concerned with.<sup>3</sup> Instead it focuses on *The Highlander* (1758) and explores the poem in relation to originality, Scottish identity and historiography. It situates the OC in the context of Macpherson’s earlier poetical and later historical works, and thus offers a new interpretation of the OC phenomenon: one that, unlike other criticism, does not insist on discussing issues of authenticity and Celticism but is more concerned with questions of adaptation and sources, and of Scottish cultural nationalism and Anglo-British imperialism.

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<sup>1</sup> John MacQueen, *The Enlightenment and Scottish Literature. Volume 1: Progress and Poetry* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1982), p. 91.

<sup>2</sup> This thesis uses ‘Ossianic Collections’ to refer to Macpherson’s three Ossianic publications: *Fragments of Ancient Poetry Collected in the Highlands of Scotland* (1760), *Fingal* (1761/62) and *Temora* (1763). The phrase is abbreviated as ‘OC’ throughout this thesis.

<sup>3</sup> Dafydd Moore, ‘James Macpherson and “Celtic Whiggism”’, in *Eighteenth-Century Life* 30:1 (2005), 1–24 (p. 3).

A brief note on the genesis and general argument of the thesis seems appropriate here. The project began with *The Highlander* itself, and the lack of critical attention it has received. The poem has never been edited, and prior to the the launch of *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online* (2003) and Dafydd Moore's *Ossian and Ossianism* (London: Routledge, 2004) was only available in three printed editions (1758, 1802, 1805) as well as John MacQueen's limited-edition reprint of the 1805 edition (Edinburgh: Thin, 1971). The thesis has three parts to it: a biographical sketch of Macpherson's early life, the annotated edition of *The Highlander*, and discursive commentary chapters. The parts allow the reader to understand the little-known poem better, and simultaneously to access it in a convenient modern edition. As such the thesis is an exercise in all three kinds of academic writing — biography, editing, commentary — and thus an academic apprentice-piece.

By examining *The Highlander* in detail this thesis questions the emphasis on the OC of other Macpherson criticism, and allows us to see him as a writer who is historically minded, very aware of sources, well versed in established forms of poetry and thoroughly, and positively, British. This thesis focuses on *The Highlander* in an attempt to situate Macpherson in the context of other mid-eighteenth-century writers and as a poet in his own right. Because of the popularity of the OC, and the debates about their authenticity, Macpherson criticism has always focused on them and disregarded his other works, although his role in the Collections has never been settled satisfactorily (and, one might add, will likely never be settled). *The Highlander* is not only entirely his own, but also his longest and most public poetical undertaking; his other poems were either unpublished or short magazine pieces. It stands out among the corpus of his works not because it can give us insights into the OC, which is its usual function in

Macpherson criticism, but because it can help us understand what it is that connects Macpherson's earlier and later works with the OC: history, Britishness, tradition.

In other words, instead of approaching the poem retrospectively from the 1760s as a harbinger of the OC, this thesis uses *The Highlander* — and *not* the OC — as the basis for its examination of both the pre- and the post-OC Macpherson. Although much has been written on Macpherson's role in the OC controversy, and on his attempts to revitalise — or bring about the downfall of — Gaelic culture, most studies do not engage with his actual poetic output, or indeed with his overarching achievement as an eighteenth-century man of letters. By bringing together his early poetry and his later histories this thesis has achieved just that: a wider character sketch that acknowledges the importance of the OC without focusing on them exclusively, and allowing scope for a novel and innovative approach to James Macpherson, and his original works.

Macpherson's poetical works are united by a desire to translate Scotland's factual past into sentimental poetry. In the OC he does so without particular faithfulness to his sources, but in *The Highlander* he converts historical sources directly into neo-classic verse. This is where Macpherson's originality lies: his ability to adapt history. In different styles and genres, and based on different sources, Macpherson's works are early examples of Scotland's great literary achievement: historical fiction. Instead of accusing him of forgery or trying to trace his knowledge of Gaelic ballads, this thesis presents Macpherson as a genuine historian who happened to write in a variety of genres.

Throughout his life Macpherson sought inspiration in the past: all his works are reworkings of history. Unlike other works of the period though — and, of course, unlike the OC — *The Highlander* was published without a commentary

or advertisement to establish its historical veracity. While other historical works frequently contain ‘pleas for some kind of historical faith’, as Everett Zimmerman observes, *The Highlander* bypasses this authenticating device.<sup>4</sup> This does not diminish its historicity but instead strengthens it: with no (spurious) authenticating apparatus the faithfulness of the text is never questioned. Indeed, *The Highlander* is in many ways more historical than works that have such an apparatus: it is based on clearly traceable sources, particularly Buchanan’s *Rerum Scotticarum Historia* (1582).<sup>5</sup> It is this historicalness that sets the poem apart from other poetical works of the period: the fact that the poem is almost a history in verse (apart from the love story between Duffus and Culena, which Macpherson adds). The plot of *The Highlander* is so close to the events recounted in the chronicles that Macpherson does not need to reference them as the source. The OC, on the other hand, were of course published with a large pseudo-scholarly apparatus that was supposed to aid their authentication and establish their veracity.

History was an important part of the Scottish Enlightenment: historiography flourished, and Macpherson was no exception.<sup>6</sup> As Hayden White has pointed out, this preoccupation of Enlightenment historians with ‘data from

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<sup>4</sup> Everett Zimmerman, *The Boundaries of Fiction: History and the Eighteenth-Century British Novel* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> See the brief note on sources in chapter 2, and a more extensive discussion in chapter 4.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Fry explores the Scottish interest in history in the eighteenth century. While in England, he argues, ‘notions of history remained largely mythological’, the Scottish approach, especially in the Whig interpretation that the title of his essay indicates, was ‘consuming’ and ‘fruitful’, and ‘generate[d] in consequence most of today’s social sciences’ (‘The Whig Interpretation of Scottish History’, in *The Manufacture of Scottish History*, ed. by Ian Donnachie, Christopher Whatley (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1992), 72–89 (pp. 72–73). Alexander Broadie discusses the Enlightenment interest in historiography: ‘One key discipline of the Scottish Enlightenment is historiography, the writing of history, and to avoid the distorted view that it was in the eighteenth century that Scottish historiography came into its own, it has to be stressed that that century was the second of the two great periods of Scottish historiography, the first being the sixteenth century during the decades on either side of the Scottish Reformation’ (*The Scottish Enlightenment: The Historical Age of the Historical Nation* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2001), p. 43). James Basker also addresses the historicity of eighteenth-century Scotland: ‘submerged in the record of great intellectual and cultural achievement in the Scottish Enlightenment is a history of conflict between cultures, a history of marginalisation and difficulty for those such as the Scots who did not come from the dominant English culture’ (‘Scotticisms and the Problem of Cultural Identity in Eighteenth-Century Britain’, in *Sociability and Society in Eighteenth-Century Scotland*, ed. by John Dwyer, Richard B. Sher (Edinburgh: Mercat, 1993), 81–95 (p. 81).

the past' was not restricted to actual historical documents, but instead included 'everything contained in legend, myth, fable'.<sup>7</sup> White's emphasis is on narrative: in his later book on narrative discourse and historical representation he introduces the concept of 'mythic narrative', which, unlike historical narrative (my distinction), 'is under no obligation to keep the two orders of events, real and imaginary, distinct from one another'.<sup>8</sup> The distinction between historical works and mythical works is not situated in their sources but instead in the way events are told: historical works possess a chronological structure which mythical works lack. In the case of Macpherson this difference is manifested in his poetical works: *The Highlander* not only takes its plot from histories but also adheres to their order of events, while the OC frequently interrupt the chronology of the plot with digressions and tales.

While the historical novel is the genre most often associated with Scotland, historical genres — verse *and* prose — were popular throughout the eighteenth century. The genres' popularity goes hand-in-hand with the interest in origins, founding myths and sources, as well as the changing notions of originality in the period. The works examined in this thesis — particularly Macpherson's own and John Home's *Douglas* — share a common historicalness. As Paul Ricoeur reminded us, 'history is a form of knowledge only through the relation it establishes between the lived experience of people of other times and today's historian'.<sup>9</sup> *The Highlander* and 'The Hunter', this thesis argues, establish just that kind of connection, while the OC are too remote and too invented — too fictional — to qualify as history proper.

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<sup>7</sup> Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), p. 52.

<sup>8</sup> Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 3 vols, trans. by Kathleen McLaughlin, David Pellauer (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1984), I.2, p. 99.

Despite the commonplace that all fiction is, at least to an extent, history, there is a literary element inherent in all history; without stories there is no history. ‘History’, as Ricoeur proclaimed, ‘is intrinsically histori-graphy — [...] a literary artefact’.<sup>10</sup> And a ‘historical event is not what happens but what can be narrated, or what has already been narrated in chronicles or legends’.<sup>11</sup> This is not a post-modern or contemporary notion; it is one found in eighteenth-century writing on the topic, such as William Godwin’s ‘Of History and Romance’ (1797).<sup>12</sup> In this essay Godwin argues for a similar connection between fiction and history: ‘all history bears too near a resemblance to fable’, and while ‘the history which comes nearest to truth, is the mere chronicle of facts, places and dates [...] this is in reality no history’.<sup>13</sup> ‘Real’ history, Godwin continues, is fiction: facts embellished by invention, which makes ‘romance one of the species of history’.<sup>14</sup> There is, though, a further difference between straightforward history and romance-history:

the historian is confined to individual incident and individual man, and must hang upon that his invention or conjecture as he can. The writer collects his materials from all sources, experience, report, and the records of human affairs; then generalises them; and finally selects, from their elements and the various combinations they afford, those instances which he is best qualified to portray, and which he judges most calculated to impress the heart and improve the faculties of his reader.<sup>15</sup>

Romance-, or fiction-history, provides an opportunity that straightforward historical writings lack: a large number of sources that do, presumably, not need to be explicitly acknowledged in the finished piece, and an element of generalisation that enables the writer to add and subtract in such a way as to appeal to the

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., I.2, p. 162.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., I.2, p. 169.

<sup>12</sup> This essay was not actually published until Maurice Hindle included it in the 1988 Penguin Classics edition of *Caleb Williams*.

<sup>13</sup> William Godwin, ‘Of History and Romance’, in *Caleb Williams*, ed. by Maurice Hindle (London: Penguin, 2005), 359–74 (p. 367).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 368.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 370.



reader's emotions and thus encourage his learning.<sup>16</sup> With this in mind literature becomes, as Ruth Mack points out, 'a means of thinking about the reality that we all attach to the past'.<sup>17</sup> And when this literature portrays the past — fictional or otherwise — of a nation that has only recently become just that, then it becomes an important marker of identity.

It is often pointed out that the Highlands are crucial to the formation of Scottish identity.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, the OC are often linked to Enlightenment patriotism. John Dwyer, for example, argues that the literati 'wanted to shape a new vision of harmonious, if hegemonic, British community not merely in order to belong to it. Their programme was decidedly propagandistic, for they wished to proselytise their polite gospel of virtue and sentiment to a rapidly growing reading public'.<sup>19</sup> And more importantly, 'as critics and authors, they sought to cultivate the taste of this new [...] readership in the interest of social sympathy and virtue'.<sup>20</sup> The OC were one way of cultivating this taste; supported (at least initially) by most literati, and championed by Hugh Blair, Macpherson's efforts presented a text at once polite and wild. This dichotomy lies at the heart of Colin Kidd's 'Celtic Whiggism', the term he favours for the ideology current in Scotland, and originating from Scotland (though practised, largely, in London) for much of this

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<sup>16</sup> This is echoed by Ruth Mack in her recent study on literary historicity. She reminds us that 'debates within the philosophy of history — as well as within history and literary studies — have long been stuck on the question of whether or not history can tell the truth about past worlds'. (*Literary Historicity: Literature and Historical Experience in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 1). Literature, she continues, 'when it has entered these debates, has generally been taken to offer an answer in the negative: if history is or is like fiction, it cannot also be truth' (ibid.).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Cf., for example, Charles Withers, 'The Historical Creation of the Scottish Highlands', in *The Manufacture of Scottish History*, ed. by Ian Donnachie, Christopher Whatley (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1992), 143–56 (p. 143).

<sup>19</sup> John Dwyer, 'Introduction — A 'Peculiar Blessing': Social Converse in Scotland from Hutcheson to Burns', in *Sociability and Society in Eighteenth-Century Scotland*, ed. by John Dwyer, Richard B. Sher (Edinburgh: Mercat, 1993), 1–22 (p. 6).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

period.<sup>21</sup> What links these terms (and what is, ultimately, the focus of his enquiry) is the search for, or failure to deliver, a ‘comprehensive[...] “British” conception of national identity’, and not one that is Anglo- or Scottish-centred.<sup>22</sup>

One of the ways that Scottishness was upheld in the period was in the context of intellectual achievement: the Scottish (emphatically not the British) Enlightenment became a focal point of the mid-eighteenth century, and one that provided a positive image instead of the more tainted Jacobite one. After the Union of 1707 the development of a communal British identity was delayed for some time, aided by the importance of London as commercial, legal and governing capital as well as the failed Jacobite uprisings of 1715 and 1745–46. Yet this is precisely what constitutes ‘Britishness’ in the eighteenth century: the lack of unity, and the assertion of individuality and distinctive national identities in spite of the synthesis of union. As Richard Finlay points out, ‘the period is characterised by cultural confusion’, both within Scotland and in the wider British context.<sup>23</sup> Kidd claims that ‘late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Scotland [...] experienced a crisis of confidence which undermined that cultural potential’ — the potential for nationalism that other nations experienced in the period.<sup>24</sup> Yet Scotland’s position was unique in the period: it was neither that of a conquered nation nor of an independent state. Union meant something in between; something that both ensured a continued separate identity for both Scotland and England as well as a new, united nation encompassing both.

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<sup>21</sup> Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland’s Past: Scottish Whig Historians and the Creation of an Anglo-British Identity, 1689–c.1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 227.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Richard J. Finlay, ‘Caledonia or North Britain? Scottish Identity in the Eighteenth Century’, in *Image and Identity: The Making and Re-making of Scotland Through the Ages*, ed. by Dauvit Broun, R. J. Finlay, Michael Lynch (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1998), 143–56 (p. 143). Also cf. *ibid.*, p. 145, where Finlay argues that ‘not only was there an increasing British dimension in Scottish identity, there were also many (often competing) varieties of Scottish identity’.

<sup>24</sup> Kidd, *Subverting Scotland’s Past*, p. 268.

A number of critics have drawn links between nationalism and its most prevalent literary expression, the epic. As Simon Dentith has pointed out, ‘nationalism [...] seized upon epics [...] and made them an expression of the national spirit’ — which is just what Macpherson’s works did. Both the earlier poems and the OC, in different ways but nonetheless distinctly so, are endowed with an inherent Scottish- and Britishness that highlights this connection.<sup>25</sup> Dentith further notes that ‘for those nations struggling to define themselves as such, like Scotland or Finland, the rediscovery of a candidate for national epic was naturally of inestimable value in the process of nation building’.<sup>26</sup> That is, of course, why the OC were so eagerly anticipated and mostly well received in Scotland. *The Highlander* and ‘The Hunter’, as we shall see, are even more explicit attempts to do this: written in Augustan diction and heroic couplets, the poems share a thorough Scottishness — that very blend of intellectualism and martialness — that many contemporary pieces lack. David McCrone points out that Scottish nationalism, unlike that of other peripheries, ‘is less ready to call up the ancient ghosts of the nation, its symbols and motifs, in its quest for independence’.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, in Scotland the ghosts were called up after independence had been relinquished: by the OC in the 1760s.

In 1727 Voltaire observed, in an *Essay upon the Epick Poetry of the European Nations*, written in English, that ‘the best modern Writers have mix’d the Taste of their Country, with that of the Ancients’.<sup>28</sup> That they have, in other words, given ‘those Poems which relate some great Action’ a local flavouring — such as

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<sup>25</sup> Simon Dentith, *Epic and Empire in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 67.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> David McCrone, ‘Representing Scotland: Culture and Nationalism’, in *The Making of Scotland: Nation, Culture and Social Change*, ed. by David McCrone, Stephen Kendrick, Pat Straw (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989), 161–74 (p. 161).

<sup>28</sup> Voltaire, *An Essay upon the Civil Wars of France, Extracted from curious Manuscripts. And also upon the Epick Poetry of the European Nations from Homer down to Milton* (London: S. Jallason, 1727), p. 41.

Macpherson did in the OC and *The Highlander*.<sup>29</sup> He went on to argue, in the section on Milton, that ‘every Language has its own particular Genius, flowing chiefly from the Genius of the Nation, and partly from its own Nature’.<sup>30</sup> This anticipates Blackwell’s *Enquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer* (1735), which, of course, argued for the importance of circumstance and conditions for the production of art.<sup>31</sup> Although Voltaire here limits himself to language over content, he does admit a connection between national characteristics and linguistic, and poetic, qualities:

the Freedom of Society in *France*, and the Turns of the Phrases, which, as they admit of no Transposition, are the more perspicuous, qualify exceedingly the *French* tongue for Conversation. The former Roughness of the *English* Language, now improv’d into Strength and Energy, its Copiousness, its admitting of many Inversions, fit it for more sublime Performances. [...] To this happy Freedom, that the *British* Nation enjoys in every Thing, are owing many excellent poetical versions of the ancient Poets.<sup>32</sup>

‘Freedom’ is the key here: freedom in society is linked to freedom in expression, and freedom in expression in turn to freedom to imitate, poeticise and produce ‘sublime Performances’.

In an article on French Resistance poetry, Ian Higgins observes the different ways poets used myth(s) and tradition(s) when their freedom is threatened by war. Analysing Benjamin Péret’s *Le déshonneur des poètes* (1945) as ‘a violent attack on a sample of Resistance poetry’, he distinguishes ‘myth in the “exalted” collected urge of a whole people, to which the writer should give voice’ as *mythe* from the ‘religious myth, for which nationalism and the myths of *patrie* and leader are just modern substitutes’.<sup>33</sup> However, as becomes clear from Higgins’s own

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Blackwell, *An Enquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer* (London: [no publisher], 1735).

<sup>32</sup> Voltaire, *Essay upon the Civil Wars*, pp. 122, 125.

<sup>33</sup> Ian Higgins, ‘Tradition and Myth in French Resistance Poetry’, in *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 21:1 (Jan 1985), 45–58 (p. 45).

argument, Péret's *mythe* and myth overlap somewhat in the context of nationalism: both invoke the concept of *patrie* (if not necessarily that of *nation*). The *patrie*, we learn, is more 'a state of mind': the ideal that exile, for example, looks to.<sup>34</sup> Legend — Higgins carefully avoids 'tradition' here — is a related concept; one where 'the very mention of a name [...] is enough to signify the values which the original story conveyed'.<sup>35</sup> Poems, Higgins concludes, 'are acts which deliberately contribute both to the making of history and to its transformation into proverbial myth'.<sup>36</sup> Britain was at war for much of the eighteenth century, and the resultant literature, as Thomas Keymer has recently pointed out, was often martial.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, Macpherson's poetical works were all products of the Seven Years' War.<sup>38</sup>

The thesis is divided into the following chapters:

Chapter 2 is a preface to the edition of *The Highlander* (chapter 3). It offers the fullest possible account of Macpherson's early life, as well as an overview of the sources of the poem. It reviews the sparse extant criticism of *The Highlander* and remarks on its publication history and reception. It also includes a brief editorial note on this particular text of the poem.

Chapter 3 is the annotated text of *The Highlander*. The annotations attempt to give scholarly clarification of names, places and poetic parallels, and

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 45–47.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>37</sup> 'Paper Wars' at 1759: *An Interdisciplinary Conference* (Belfast, 15–17 April 2009), and 'British Poetry and Global War in 1759: Smart and Macpherson' at 1759: *Making and Unmaking Empires* (Ottawa, 5–8 November 2009).

<sup>38</sup> John Dwyer also recognises the connection between epic and military valour, pointing out that 'during the early 1760s, when Macpherson's Ossianic epics were published, the Moderates were actively campaigning for a Scottish militia in order to revive those same classical values of 'manly' independence and pugnacious patriotism that seemed to them to provide a virtuous antidote to the mean-spirited and 'effeminate' values of a luxurious modern society' ('Enlightened Spectators and Classical Moralists: Sympathetic Relations in Eighteenth-Century Scotland', in *Sociability and Society in Eighteenth-Century Scotland*, ed. by John Dwyer, Richard B. Sher (Edinburgh: Mercat, 1993), 93–118 (p. 109).

where possible indicate the sources that Macpherson is likely to have used. It also contains some clarifications of vocabulary more for the non-specialist or undergraduate reader.

Chapter 4 explores originality — notions of invention, imitation and authenticity — in the 1750s and 60s. It examines a group of mid-eighteenth-century philosophers, Alexander Gerard, Edward Young and Richard Hurd, and compares their notions of originality with Macpherson's. The chapter argues for a tripartite concept of originality: firstly, source originality; secondly, creative originality; thirdly, characteristic originality. While most other studies focus on the second kind of originality and are preoccupied with discussions about imitation and invention, this chapter explores all three aspects of originality. *The Highlander*, it will be seen, is original in the way it adapts historical sources. It is temporally-authentically original because it is a new kind of epic poem: one that, unlike the OC and unlike other more famous epics, such as the *Iliad*, the *Aeneid* or *Paradise Lost*, is thoroughly grounded in traceable history. It is creatively original because it is a blend of actual historical sources and added embellishments; a translation of history into neo-classic verse. It is definingly original because of its curious Britishness: a pro-Union Highland celebration of military exploits.

Chapter 5 discusses Scottish identity in mid-eighteenth-century Britain, when Scottish identity was redefined and reinvented in the wake of the 1745 Jacobite uprising. From the 1750s Scottish writing often explored Scottish identity within the new British nation, and Macpherson's works formed part of this. Modern criticism frequently focuses on the 'myth of the Highlands' and the 'invention of tradition', but while previous criticism has used the terms 'myth' and 'tradition' interchangeably, this chapter teases their meanings apart and analyses Macpherson's poetical works — 'The Hunter', *The Highlander* and the OC — as

manifestations of them. *The Highlander*, it will be seen, builds on traceable, historic traditions, while the OC famously launched the Romantic idea of Scotland based on fictitious, legendary myths. Macpherson's Scotland is more than just Ossianic grandeur and joy of grief: he transformed the past into an idea of Scotland that is both mythical and traditional. This chapter also briefly considers other Scottish works of the period — David Mallett's *Britannia* (1755), John Home's *Douglas* (1756), William Wilkie's *Epigoniad* (1757) — to emphasise Macpherson's unique blend of myth and tradition.

Chapter 6 examines Macpherson's later histories — the *Introduction to the History of Great Britain and Ireland* (1771), the *Original Papers Containing the Secret History of Great Britain* (1775) and *The History of Great Britain from the Restoration to the Accession of the House of Hanover* (1775) — in relation to eighteenth-century historiography. It places Macpherson in the context of Bolingbroke, Hume, Robertson, Blair, Smith and Stewart: based mainly on letters, prefaces and essays, this chapter examines these writers' theories of history and history writing. Macpherson is shown as a traditional historian: although his histories were all produced during the great era of Scottish history writing, they differ in character from those of philosophical historians as they are neither progressivist, nor conjectural, nor stadial. Even though scholars frequently allude to the OC as evidence of Macpherson's interest in sentimental, stadial or primitivist views of the past, he is, in fact, a rather more unphilosophical historian, concerned with documenting the deeds of great men.

Finally, the Epilogue focuses on the OC and literary tourism. It argues that Scottish tourism, like the Romantic idea of Scotland, was a product of the 1760s. Before the OC travellers rarely ventured north of the Tweed for reasons other than business or politics, but from the appearance of the OC the Highlands

were firmly put on the tourists' map. But unlike the localised popularity of Burns's, Scott's and Hogg's Scotland(s) (Ayrshire and Dumfriesshire, the Trossachs and the Borders respectively), the OC had no such local appeal: because of their ubiquitous Highland setting they transformed the whole of the Highlands into Ossianised Scotland. The Epilogue closes with a few remarks on how the OC have been picked up as cultural references in modern Scotland and elsewhere.

Overall, this thesis encourages a revisionist view of Macpherson's career and works; one that might, perhaps, re-orient the public perception of Scottish literary culture in the 1750s. The 1750s were brimming with works that re-interpreted, re-valued and re-constructed Scottish identity in the wake of the Jacobite rising, and Macpherson's pre-OC works promoted a thorough Britishness based on historical tradition and traceable sources. The following chapters seek to counterbalance modern critical works on Scottish culture and identity that situate Macpherson at the beginning of the 'romantick' image of Scotland. Similarly, this thesis cultivates an understanding of eighteenth-century historiography that removes Macpherson's histories far from those of philosophical historians of the Enlightenment and instead establishes him as a biographical historian in the tradition of earlier historians.



## CHAPTER 2 — PROLOGUE

Impostor or poet, few lives have glided on more successfully than that of Macpherson.<sup>1</sup>

(Eugene Lawrence)

## MACPHERSON'S EARLY LIFE

The major events in Macpherson's life is well documented: from the meeting with John Home at Moffat in 1759 and the resulting publication of the OC, throughout his time in America and his career in London, to his retirement and death in the Highlands in 1796. But his early, pre-OC life has never been adequately recorded. Even the two most recent biographies — Fiona Stafford's *The Sublime Savage* (1988) and Paul J. deGatigno's *James Macpherson* (1989) — focus on the OC years, using Macpherson's early life and works as a mere prequel to the OC. Moreover, both contain factual errors regarding his early life and works.<sup>2</sup> This section seeks to redress this limitation, and provides the first thorough look at Macpherson's early life. Unfortunately records pertaining to Macpherson's early life are scarce: the only extant examples are his baptism record and the

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<sup>1</sup> Eugene Lawrence, *The Lives of the British Historians*, 2 vols (New York, NY: Scribner, 1855), II, p. 236.

<sup>2</sup> James deGatigno, for example, claims that Macpherson's family was 'indigent' (*James Macpherson* (Boston: Twayne, 1989), p. 2) yet also able to send him to school, possibly 'thirty miles to the north in Inverness'. He also contends that Macpherson 'transferred [...] to the University of Edinburgh, where he was a student in divinity' (*ibid.*, p. 3). There is simply no proof for these claims: it had been suggested as a possibility by Bailey Saunders in his 1894 biography of Macpherson, but, unlike Macpherson's time at Aberdeen of which the matriculation records survive, no records can be found at Edinburgh. Fiona Stafford argues that 'Macpherson's arrival at King's College in 1752 coincided with a major revision of the traditional Arts course' (*The Sublime Savage: James Macpherson and the Poems of Ossian* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988), p. 26). There are two mistakes here: Macpherson did not matriculate until February 1753, and King's did not change their curriculum till 1753–54; it was Marischal College, which Macpherson attended from 1755–56, that changed its curriculum in 1752 (cf. Colin A. McLaren, *Aberdeen Students 1600–1860* (Aberdeen: University of Aberdeen Press, 2005), p. 66); *Scots Magazine* (Dec 1752, p. 606) details the changes to the curriculum at the college). Also, in the section on 'The Hunter' and *The Highlander* in *The Sublime Savage* (pp. 52–58) Stafford fails to note the differences in the story lines of both poems and pays no attention to the poems' different political outlooks.

matriculation rolls of the University of Aberdeen.<sup>3</sup> While this section of the thesis is, of course, focused on *The Highlander* and the months prior to its publication in April 1758, it also includes Macpherson's childhood, his time at Aberdeen, his years as schoolmaster and private tutor, and his first poetical efforts. To date there has been no detailed study of his early life and work, but this is important for understanding his early compositions and thus, in turn, for contextualising his best-known work, the OC.

James Macpherson was born in Invertromie, near Ruthven, in Badenoch. His parents, Andrew and Helen Macpherson, owned a farm at Invertromie, just outside the hamlet of Ruthven. This was traditional Macpherson territory, and his family was closely related to the clan chief: his father was an illegitimate nephew of the then Macpherson of Cluny, and first cousin to his son Ewan, who was the clan chief during the 1745 Jacobite uprising.<sup>4</sup> Elsewhere two sisters are also mentioned.<sup>5</sup> Macpherson's date of birth has been subject to speculation, although the Kingussie baptismal register records his birth on the 27 October 1736, and his baptism on the 1 November 1736.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This thesis will take contemporary and near-contemporary accounts of Macpherson's early life and career because first-hand sources are not extant, while every effort is made to ensure their correctness. Incidents and circumstances referred to in later nineteenth-century and more modern critical accounts will be examined, and, if possible, traced to their sources. However, a certain amount of guesswork and gauging of plausibilities cannot be altogether avoided when manuscripts are wanting. There are four modern biographies of Macpherson: T. Bailey Saunders, *The Life and Letters of James Macpherson: Containing a Particular Account of his famous Quarrel with Dr. Johnson, and a Sketch of the Origin and Influence of the Ossianic Poems* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1894), John S. Smart, *James Macpherson: An Episode in Literature* (London: David Nutt, 1905), Stafford, *Sublime Savage*, DeGategno, *James Macpherson*.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Stafford, *Sublime Savage*, p. 11, taken from National Library of Scotland, MS 73.2.13, Letter 26, f. 52: 'His Father's name was Andrew Macpherson – Son to Ewan Macpherson, brother to the then Macpherson of Cluny. – His Mother's name was Helen Macpherson, Daughter of a respectable Tacksman – of the Second Branch of the Clan'. This letter is part of the Highland Society of Scotland's materials that were used to fashion the *Report of the Committee of the Highland Society of Scotland Appointed to Inquire into the Nature and Authenticity of the Poems of Ossian* (Edinburgh: Constable, 1805). For a more in-depth analysis of Macpherson's ancestry see Alan G. Macpherson, 'James "Ossian" Macpherson's Ancestry', in *The Scottish Genealogist* 11:3 (1964), 15–20 (reprinted from *Creag Dhubh* 16 (1964), 20–24).

<sup>5</sup> Saunders, *Life and Letters*, p. 32.

<sup>6</sup> Extracts from the Old Parish Registers are available online from *Scotlands People*, a partnership between the General Register Office for Scotland, the National Archives of Scotland and the Court of the Lord Lyon <<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk>> [accessed 17.10.2010].

Early biographies claimed Macpherson was born in 1738.<sup>7</sup> Bailey Saunders, Macpherson's earliest dedicated biographer, traces the confusion to two sources: firstly, 'the account published in his lifetime', presumably the anonymous 'Literary Anecdotes' article of 1776 that lists 1738 as his year of birth; secondly, a remark by Macpherson in the Preface of the 1773 edition of *Fingal*, where Macpherson claimed that he was twenty-four when it was first published in 1762.<sup>8</sup> This would indeed appear to make the year of his birth 1738.<sup>9</sup> However, *Fingal* was published in December 1761/January 1762, which, if we accept that he was twenty-four at the time, would set the date back to 1737 as his birthday is the 27<sup>th</sup> of October. And indeed, Macpherson's remark could just as likely refer to the period prior to the publication of *Fingal*, after the publication of the *Fragments* (1760) and during his Highland tours in 1760: the way the claim was phrased — 'errors of diction might have been committed at twenty-four', points towards the collection/editing/translation rather than the publication process, and thus the previous year (which puts the year of his birth back to 1736).

The inscription on Macpherson's grave in Westminster Abbey, however, lists 1736, and a document identified by Saunders as 'a memorandum sent by a notary at Ruthven to one of Macpherson's executors, the minister at Kingussie'

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<sup>7</sup> The works that insist on 1738 are the anonymous 'Literary Anecdotes' of the *Weekly Magazine, or Edinburgh Amusement* (18 January 1776), Malcolm Laing's *The History of Scotland, from the Union of the Crowns on the Accession of James VI to the Throne of England, to the Union of the Kingdoms in the Reign of Queen Anne, with An Historical and Critical Dissertation on the Supposed Authenticity of Ossian's Poems*, 4 Vols (London: 1800) and *The Poems of Ossian, &c. Containing the Poetical Works of James Macpherson, Esq. in Prose and Rhyme. With Notes and Illustrations*, 2 vols (London: T. Cadell Jr, W. Davies, 1805), the anonymous 'Life of the Author' in the 1802 *Poetical Works of James Macpherson* (Edinburgh: P. Hill, 1802), and William Anderson's *The Scottish Nation; or the Surnames, Families, Literature, Honours, and Biographical History of the People of Scotland*, 3 vols (Edinburgh: A. Fullarton, 1863).

<sup>8</sup> Saunders, *Life and Letters*, p. 33.

<sup>9</sup> 'Without encreasing his genius, the Author may have improved his language, in the eleven years, that the following poems have been in the hands of the public. Errors in diction might have been committed at twenty-four, which the experience of a riper age may remove'. Signed 'London, Aug. 15, 1773'. James Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian. Translated by James Macpherson, Esq.*, 2 vols (London: W. Strahan, T. Becket, 1773), I, p. 1.

confirms this.<sup>10</sup> This document is very likely Letter 26 of the Highland Society of Scotland papers, now kept in the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh (MS 73.2.13).<sup>11</sup> It is entitled ‘Notes, For the Rev. Mr John Anderson’, which, signed ‘Ruthven 25<sup>th</sup> October 1797’, informs the reader that ‘the late James Macpherson of Balville Esquire was born 27<sup>th</sup> October 1736 and Dyed in February 1796, in the 59<sup>th</sup> year of his age’. Saunders concludes from the document that ‘the information which it supplies is the source of the date given on the tomb in the Abbey, and that this date is correct’.<sup>12</sup> In his will, Macpherson stipulates that his ‘remains [...] be carried in the most decent manner from Scotland to the Abby of Westminster being the City where I lived and passed the greatest and best part of my life’.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately Westminster Abbey does not have any records that show when the stone was laid — either before or after Anderson’s letter.<sup>14</sup> Curiously, neither *The Times*’s notice of Macpherson’s death (2<sup>nd</sup> March 1796), nor their obituary (4<sup>th</sup> March 1796), the longest eulogy published in the papers and magazines after Macpherson’s death, refers to either his age or his year of birth. This emphasises the importance of Letter 26.

Whatever the cause, the inaccuracy was held up for almost a century after Macpherson’s death.<sup>15</sup> Saunders is the only scholar to date to have commented on this problem. He alone remarks that ‘among the various charges

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<sup>10</sup> He has a simple floor stone, with an inscription reading ‘JAMES MACPHERSON Esqr. M.P. Born at Ruthven County of Inverness, the 27<sup>th</sup> October 1736 died 17<sup>th</sup> February 1796’ (Poets’ Corner, Westminster Abbey, London; Saunders, *Life and Letters*, p. 34 n1).

<sup>11</sup> Saunders’s description matches the letter in terms of addressee, date and contents. Addressee: John Anderson was minister of Kingussie from 1782–1809 and one of the executors of Macpherson’s will; date: the letter is dated 1797, ‘the year following that of his death’ (Saunders, *Life and Letters*, p. 34 n1); contents: 1736 is given as the year of Macpherson’s birth.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Macpherson’s will, dated 10 September 1793, National Record Office, London, Prob 11/1272, f. 318v.

<sup>14</sup> Private correspondence between the author of this thesis and Richard Mortimer, Keeper of the Muniments at Westminster Abbey (16 May 2008).

<sup>15</sup> George Eyre Todd maintains 1738 as late as 1888 (‘Introduction’ to *Poems of Ossian*, (London: Walter Scott, 1888), p. xii).

brought against Macpherson, no one accused him of falsifying his age'.<sup>16</sup> This is surprising as 'falsifying' was, of course, a charge often levelled at Macpherson. Furthermore, had Macpherson deliberately made himself younger than he was, then 'his early achievements would be rendered still more remarkable than they are', and his genius would be even greater.<sup>17</sup> The later date of 1738 would also impact on his university years and early poetry. He would have been only sixteen when he entered university and only twenty when *The Highlander* was published. It has been shown convincingly that at the time university entrants were usually 17 or 18, and only very rarely younger than that.<sup>18</sup> This, of course, only confirms the earlier date of 1736.

Macpherson's schooldays are not documented, but the biographers agree that he attended the parochial school in his hometown of Ruthven.<sup>19</sup> Some argue that he was also sent to Inverness grammar school before he went to university.<sup>20</sup> The grammar school at Inverness, now Inverness Royal Academy, has no pupil

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. ch. 3 of McLaren's *Aberdeen Students*, 'A great deal of useful knowledge, 1718–1825', and cf. the ages of the individual student portrayed therein.

<sup>19</sup> Anon. 'Literary Anecdotes' (1776): he 'received the rudiments of education at home'; anon. *Poetical Works of James Macpherson* (1802) agrees (p. 1); Saunders, *Life and Letters*, p. 36: 'young Macpherson was sent to the parochial school'; DeGategno, *James Macpherson*, p. 2: 'for the next six years he received an excellent education in the Badenoch parochial school'.

<sup>20</sup> Anon. 'Literary Anecdotes' (1776): 'he was sent to the grammar-school at Inverness'; anon. *Poetical Works of James Macpherson* (1802) agrees (p. 1); Anderson, *The Scottish Nation* (1863) agrees (p. 63); Saunders, *Life and Letters*, mentions it as a possibility, p. 37: 'one authority states that he remained on in the parochial school in Badenoch until he proceeded to college; another, that he spent some time previously at the grammar school in Inverness'; DeGategno, *James Macpherson*, also admits it as a possibility, p. 2: he 'may have finished his secondary schooling thirty miles to the north in Inverness'.

records from the eighteenth century, so this fact cannot be directly verified.<sup>21</sup> The matriculation records for King's College, Aberdeen, where Macpherson enrolled in February 1753, list the homes of the students; Macpherson has 'Invernessensis', which could, of course, point to the county instead of the town (and would thus include Ruthven), but his proficiency in Greek and Latin points towards Inverness itself.<sup>22</sup>

Macpherson spent three and a half years in Aberdeen, first matriculating at King's College in February 1753, half-way through the session of 1752–53.<sup>23</sup> In the eighteenth century there were two colleges at Aberdeen: King's College in the Old Town, and Marischal College in the New Town. King's had been founded in 1495, Marischal followed in 1593.<sup>24</sup> The two colleges remained separate institutions until the mid-nineteenth century, when they were joined together as 'The University of Aberdeen' in 1860.<sup>25</sup> Macpherson signed his name as 'Jacobus MacPherson, Invernessensis' in the roll for the Greek class under Daniel Bradfut.<sup>26</sup> In 1755 Macpherson moved to Marischal College and signed the matriculation

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<sup>21</sup> This is according to Robert Preece, the Honorary Archivist of Inverness Royal Academy (personal correspondence with the author of this thesis (2.10.2007)), and the section entitled 'Historical Note' of the Academy's current (2009–10) prospectus, p. 6: 'Inverness Royal Academy was founded in 1792, when it replaced the town Grammar School. The Grammar School, which had been located since about 1668 in the building now known as the Dunbar Centre, appears to have developed directly from an earlier school which began with the founding of a Dominican Priory in the Friars Street area of the town in about 1223. Thus the Academy stands at the modern end of an educational development which reaches back over more than seven centuries. In 1793 a Royal Charter was obtained from King George III and, as Inverness Royal Academy, the school operated on the Academy Street site until 1895'. The prospectus is available online at <<http://www.invernessroyal.highland.sch.uk/docs/Prospectus%2009-10.pdf>> [accessed 17.10.2010]

<sup>22</sup> Charles Withers details the curriculum: parish schools 'taught only the Presbyterian religion, reading writing, church music and arithmetic', with English being 'the only language permitted, both as the medium of instruction and in the conversation of the scholars' ('Education and Anglicisation: the Policy of the SSPCK toward the Education of the Highlander, 1709–1825', in *Scottish Studies* 26 (1982), 37–56 (p. 38).

<sup>23</sup> Stafford thinks he spent only three years at Aberdeen (*Sublime Savage*, p. 40).

<sup>24</sup> King's College is thus the third-oldest institution of higher education in Scotland, after St Andrews (founded 1413) and Glasgow (1451). Edinburgh was not founded until 1582.

<sup>25</sup> For a brief history of the University of Aberdeen, the most concise yet comprehensive publication is Jennifer J. Carter and Colin A. McLaren's *Crown and Gown 1495–1995. An Illustrated History of the University of Aberdeen* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1994).

<sup>26</sup> Aberdeen University MS K 14 Album D. Entrants 1718–1821, f. 60. No other Macphersons are found in the records of either King's College or Marischal College in the decade surrounding James's stay there, so it seems likely that this is indeed him.

roll ‘Jac Macpherson’, this time without a location.<sup>27</sup> The most likely reason for his move is the fact that the annual session was lengthened, so a number of students from mostly rural backgrounds were forced to change colleges, as the session had not been extended at Marischal.<sup>28</sup>

Not all students paid for tuition and accommodation; students either entered the colleges as bursars or as libertines. Libertines paid for classes as well as lodgings and board, whereas bursars, depending on their bursary, paid no fees and were sometimes entitled to reduced boarding fees in the colleges. Competition for bursaries was relatively fierce and varied from year to year: Macpherson’s class of 1752 consisted of 17 bursars and eight libertines.<sup>29</sup> It has been suggested that Macpherson entered King’s College as a bursar, but there is no evidence to support this.<sup>30</sup> His name is not on the (apparently complete) bursar records from either King’s College or Marischal College, which means he must have been self-funded, probably living in town as opposed to inside the college.<sup>31</sup> It is also clear from the records that he never applied for a bursary: he never sat the bursar exams.

Macpherson left Aberdeen in 1756. He did not take a degree. This might seem surprising, considering that he and his family funded him for three years to pursue his studies, but eighteenth-century attitudes to the purpose and outcome of a university education were different from our own. ‘Graduation’, Colin McLaren argues, ‘was still seen by students as an optional extra’ — not the desired climax to

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<sup>27</sup> ABDN MS M 3 Album 2. Entrants 1698–1831.

<sup>28</sup> McLaren, *Aberdeen Students*, pp. 67–68.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. ABDN MS K 14 Album D. Entrants 1718–1821, f. 60.

<sup>30</sup> For example by John Ramsay of Ochtertyre, *Scotland and Scotsmen in the Eighteenth Century*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1888), I, p. 544.

<sup>31</sup> There was a ‘trend towards non-residence’, which was terminated in 1754 when King’s College re-introduced compulsory residence (McLaren, *Aberdeen Students*, p. 79).

one's studies. In the 1750s only about 40% of a given class graduated, while the rest left the Colleges with three or four years' experience, but no actual degree.<sup>32</sup>

From the time he left Aberdeen until his meeting with John Home at Moffat in September 1759 Macpherson's life is once again but sparsely documented. It has been suggested that Macpherson spent part of 1756 in Edinburgh, possibly at the University, but there is no evidence to support this. Saunders thinks it probable that it was in the winter of 1755–56, which seems unlikely because Macpherson matriculated at Marischal in the autumn of 1755, which would have only given him two to three months there.<sup>33</sup> DeGategno, Macpherson's most recent biographer, seems confused over a number of issues regarding Macpherson's time at Aberdeen: his leaving King's for Marischal, his not graduating altogether, and the dates of those events. He correctly observes that Macpherson arrived at King's in February 1753, but then observes that 'in 1755 he was forced to leave without a degree since he could not afford the increase that year in tuition. He transferred for a time to Marischal College, and then to the University of Edinburgh [...]. Unable to secure a degree, he returned to Ruthven in 1756'.<sup>34</sup> Of course, as we have seen, there are several misconceptions in this statement: Macpherson was not forced to leave King's due to an increase in tuition, but due to the lengthening of the session and the resulting increase in board and lodgings. He would not have been eligible to graduate from King's in 1755 even if it had been a matter of fees: Scottish degrees took four years to complete and 1755–56 would only have been his fourth year. Consequently, he was not 'unable to secure a degree' from either Marischal or Edinburgh as he never spent enough time at Marischal to graduate, and did not

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 75–76.

<sup>33</sup> Saunders, *Life and Letters*, p. 43.

<sup>34</sup> DeGategno, *James Macpherson*, pp. 2–3.



matriculate at Edinburgh. All these accounts seem to rest on Donald Macpherson's letter to the Highland Society of Scotland (NLS ADV MS 73.2.13, letter 23) where Donald states that 'some time thereafter [1754, when Donald married], [James] was at Edinburgh Collidge'.<sup>35</sup> However, this likely refers to a later time, 1758, as it also mentions the publication of *The Highlander*, which took place in April 1758. I would therefore suggest that Macpherson returned to Ruthven after he left Aberdeen in 1756, and that he moved to Edinburgh sometime before April 1758.

Macpherson returned to Ruthven at some point in 1756, where, his biographers agree, he taught at the parish school.<sup>36</sup> Donald Macpherson is very clear about this: 'He taught the Gramar Schooll of Ruthven near his fathers & my father's Dwellings'.<sup>37</sup> However, Macpherson is not listed as schoolmaster in any SSPCK records. There are several possible reasons for his absence from the

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<sup>35</sup> Donald Macpherson to the Rev. John Anderson, Laggan October 1779, NLS ADV MS 73.2.13, letter 23, f. 47. Donald was James's relative and friend, and James lodged with him in Edinburgh.

<sup>36</sup> In 1755, the parish school of Kingussie and Insh in Ruthven had 23 scholars (Withers, 'Education and Anglicisation', p. 49). It was the same parish school that Macpherson attended as a child, founded sometime before 1720 (*Accounts of the Rise, Constitution and Management of the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge* (Edinburgh: William Brown, 1820, p. 41). The school in Ruthven is listed as no. 48 (Cf. Fig. 1, 'Parishes with SSPCK schools in 1719 and 1731, from Withers, 'Education and Anglicisation', p. 48). Along with most other schools in Scotland, and especially in the Highlands, the school at Ruthven was run by the SSPCK. The Society had been founded in 1709 as a response to the Education Act of 1696, which had ordered church-supervised schools to be established in every parish. Withers calls it 'that institution [...] that was most concerned with the education and civilisation of the inhabitants of those parts of Scotland', and observes its 'strictly Presbyterian [...] outlook' (Withers, 'Education and Anglicisation', p. 38). According to the map there was no SSPCK school in Kingussie and Insh in 1719, but one with 23 pupils in 1731.

<sup>37</sup> Donald Macpherson to Rev. John Anderson, NLS ADV MS 73.2.13, f. 47. There was never a grammar school at Ruthven – presumably Donald Macpherson means the parish school. There seems to be some confusion surrounding the terms 'parish school', 'grammar school' and 'legal school': some argue they are different institutions, some maintain they are all the same. A.S. Cowper, for example, upholds the difference: 'Society schools did not compete with parish schools' (*SSPCK Schoolmasters 1709–1872* (Edinburgh: Scottish Record Society, 1997), p. ii); Donald J. Withrington sees parish schools as the same as Society schools ('The S.P.C.K and Highland Schools in the Mid-Eighteenth Century', in *The Scottish Historical Review* 41:132 (1962), 89–99); Withers agrees with Withrington ('Education and Anglicisation'); John L. Campbell distinguishes between 'charity schools', run by the SSPCK, and other schools (*Gaelic in Scottish Education and Life* (Edinburgh: Saltire Society, 1945), p. 50); Alexander Bain sees parish schools as 'legal schools' and thus Society schools (*The Life and Time of the Schoolmaster in Central Scotland in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Callendar Park College of Education: Department of Educational Studies, 1977).

records: they could be incomplete; it is possible that Macpherson only taught at the school for a short time, and was never added to the official records; he could have acted as a substitute for the de facto schoolmaster, during an illness or some such; he could have been a private tutor for richer parish children and used the schoolhouse to teach. Withrington implies another possible explanation: the only schools and schoolmasters listed were those with an income of at least 100 merks per annum.<sup>38</sup>

School teaching, however, evidently did not satisfy Macpherson. Donald Macpherson observes that he quickly became ‘quite wearied of teaching a school’ and instead devoted his time to ‘compos[ing] several ludicrous poems and catches upon Country emergencies and men’, and ‘published in newspapers or magazines’.<sup>39</sup> It is at this time that we find his first publications in the magazines. In fact, he had already published a poem in *The Scots Magazine* the year before. ‘To a Friend, mourning the Death of Miss...’, an imitation of Horace’s Ode 24, appeared on 17 May 1755, and is signed ‘J. McP. R\_\_v\_\_n’. This implies that he was back at home for at least parts of that summer after the session at King’s had ended in May.<sup>40</sup> It was thought that he was quite apt at composing, as Donald Macpherson remarks: ‘I told him he was bless’d with several talents, singular good memory, particularly poetry, did he hit right, he had no reason to scrink so soon’.<sup>41</sup> Macpherson did not scrink: he published four more poems in the magazines from

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<sup>38</sup> The Annual Report of the SSPCK for 1758 (and thus quasi-contemporary with Macpherson’s time there) announced ‘no fewer than 175 parishes within the bounds of 39 presbyteries [...] have no parochial schools’ (Withrington, ‘S.P.C.K. and the Highland Schools’, p. 89). This number hinged on the definition of ‘parochial school’, which was often interpreted differently, but generally revolved around the schoolmaster’s salary: ‘the Society’s declaration that 175 parishes were without parochial schools in 1758 almost certainly does not mean that these parishes were devoid of all means of education but rather that they did not pay those schoolmasters [...] at least 100 merks per annum’ (ibid., p. 95).

<sup>39</sup> Donald Macpherson to Rev. Anderson, NLS ADV MS 73.2.13, f. 47.

<sup>40</sup> McLaren details the length of the session in *Aberdeen Students*, pp. 67–68.

<sup>41</sup> Donald Macpherson to Rev. Anderson, NLS ADV MS 73.2.13, f. 47. ‘Scrink’ is a Scots word, meaning ‘to shrink away’ or ‘to withdraw unobtrusively’. (*Scots-English, English-Scots Dictionary*, comp. by David Ross, Gavin D. Smith (New Lanark: Lomond Books, 1998). Stafford quotes this letter but misreads ‘scrink’ as ‘perish (?)’ (*Sublime Savage*, p. 41).

1758–60: ‘On the Death of Marshal Keith’ (*Scots Magazine*, Oct 1758), ‘To the Memory of an Officer killed before Quebec’ (*Edinburgh Magazine*, Oct 1758; repr. *Scots Magazine*, Oct 1759, and *Gentleman’s Magazine*, Apr 1762), ‘On the Death of a Young Lady’ (*Scots Magazine*, May 1759), and ‘The Earl Marischal’s Welcome to his Native Country’ (*Scots Magazine*, Sep 1760). Unfortunately none of his humorous compositions have survived: in fact, none of Macpherson’s manuscript verse remains.

Three of these poems are not now considered to have been written by Macpherson, despite their inclusion by Laing in *The Poems of Ossian* (1805). They are ‘On the Death of a Young Lady’, ‘To the Memory of an Officer Killed before Quebec’ and ‘The Earl Marischal’s Welcome to his Native Country’. The first two are signed ‘J. M’P’, the last one ‘J. M.’, and only the third concedes the place of composition: ‘Scotland’. While the initials themselves point towards Macpherson as their author, their inclusion in Blacklock’s *Collection of Original Poems. By Scotch Gentlemen* (1760) under Macpherson’s name reiterates this.

Volume 1 of *A Collection of Original Poems* prints no poems by Macpherson under his name, but it includes the three contested poems as well as ‘On the death of Marshal Keith’. This poem is now generally accepted to have been written by Macpherson.<sup>42</sup> When the second volume was published in 1762, a curious note appeared in the *Scots Magazine*:

The public are desired to take notice of three Erratas, being three pieces insert in pages 134–70 and 176. These, by mistake, are said to be written by *James Macpherson*, whom some have supposed to be the same person who translated *Fingal*. We are now certainly informed they are not composed by him. [...] It is hoped the real author of these poems will excuse this oversight.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Stafford: Macpherson ‘had to wait three years before having the satisfaction of seeing his name in the *Scots Magazine* again. ‘On the Death of Marshal Keith’, published in October 1758 [...]’ (*Sublime Savage*, p. 46); DeGategno: ‘In November 1758 the *Scots Magazine* published the “Death of Marshall Keith”’ (*James Macpherson*, p. 17).

<sup>43</sup> *Scots Magazine* (Apr 1762), p. 204.

The three poems in question are, of course, the three mentioned above that had appeared in the *Scots Magazine* in 1759 and 1760. This note is significant in two respects: firstly, Macpherson is named as the translator of *Fingal*, not its author or editor. Secondly, the apology to and search for the ‘real author’: this remained fruitless, as no one came forward to claim the poems — none of the magazines printed anything of that nature. Stafford sees this as proof that the poems were not written by Macpherson, because ‘considering Macpherson’s poetic ambitions, it seems highly improbable that he would have denied the authorship of poems selected to appear beside the foremost Scottish poets of the day had they been his own work’.<sup>44</sup> This may well have been true for the 1760 volume, published before the *Fragments*, but by 1762 Macpherson was trying hard to appear as merely a translator and editor, and not a poet in his own right. The writer of the note may well have been ‘informed’ by Macpherson himself to ensure his continued poetic anonymity. The fact that he did not contradict the note by no means rules him out as the author of these poems, but instead emphasises his ability to assume different roles when needed — something which he would keep up for the rest of his life.

In 1802 the anonymous *Poetical Works of James Macpherson* published a number of the shorter poems along with *The Highlander*, without printing any Ossianic poetry. It was the first collection to do so, and anticipated Malcolm Laing’s later collection efforts. Oddly, it did not print the two poems now believed to be by Macpherson, ‘To a Friend’ and ‘Marshal Keith’, opting instead for ‘The Earl Marischal’s Welcome to his Native Country’, ‘To the Memory of an Officer killed before Quebec’, and ‘On the Death of a Young Lady’, the authorship of which is now disputed. This could be because by that point these poems had

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<sup>44</sup> Stafford, *Sublime Savage*, p. 43.

entered the accepted corpus of Macpherson's works, who could, after all, no longer complain as he had died in 1796. More likely, though, is that it was compiled by Malcolm Laing, 'testing out the waters', so to speak, for his complete *Poems of Ossian*. It seems unlikely that between Laing's 'Dissertation' (1800), in which he unearths three of Macpherson's early poems, and his *Poems of Ossian*, which prints all of the poems published in the *Poetical Works*, another book came along that consisted of the same material and evidently pursued the same goal as Laing's, but which was edited by someone entirely different who chose to remain anonymous.

At the same time as he wrote and published the shorter poems, Macpherson also composed at least three longer poems, only one of which was published: 'Death', 'The Hunter' and *The Highlander*.<sup>45</sup> The two unpublished ones were preserved by Malcolm Laing in *The Poems of Ossian*, where he prints them in full.<sup>46</sup> Laing apparently found them 'in a manuscript in Macpherson's handwriting, discovered in the Highlands many years ago, and most liberally communicated to [him] by the Rev. Mr Anderson, minister of Kingussie'.<sup>47</sup> Anderson confirms this in a letter sent to Henry Mackenzie as part of the Highland Society of Scotland's enquiries, dated 1797. He refers to a 'Memorandum Book of the late Mr Macpherson [...] filled for the most part with his first Essays in English Verse'.<sup>48</sup> According to this letter these 'Essays' are 'Draughts which [Macpherson] never finished for poetic Inspection'.<sup>49</sup> Laing of

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<sup>45</sup> This thesis distinguishes between Macpherson's published and unpublished works typographically: *The Highlander* is always rendered in italics, but 'Death' and 'The Hunter' are given in single quotation marks.

<sup>46</sup> Laing also reprinted *The Highlander*, but he was not the only one to do so. It was first published in 1758 and then reprinted in 1802 as part of *The Poetical Works of James Macpherson*. 'Death' and 'The Hunter', on the other hand, are only printed by Laing.

<sup>47</sup> *Poems of Ossian*, ed. by Laing, II, p. 446 n1.

<sup>48</sup> NLS MS ADV 72.2.13, Letter 28, f. 55v.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. NLS MS ADV 73.2.13, Letter 28, f. 55v.

course paid no attention to this and published them anyway — something for which we must be grateful as the memorandum book remains untraceable after it came into his possession. Both poems can be dated relatively securely. Laing notes that parts of ‘The Hunter’ are dated November and December 1756, and that ‘Death’ was written before, presumable because it comes first in the memorandum book.<sup>50</sup> *The Highlander* was most likely written in 1757, after Macpherson abandoned ‘The Hunter’.<sup>51</sup>

*The Highlander* was published anonymously in April 1758. It is mentioned in the ‘New Books, Edinburgh’ section of the April issue of the *Scots Magazine*: ‘The Highlander; a poem, in six Cantos. 1s. *Crawfurd, Gordon, &c*’.<sup>52</sup> Despite its apparent anonymity, however, its authorship is certain: it was never questioned by Macpherson’s contemporaries and biographers, and both Donald Macpherson’s letter and a contemporary example in Malcolm Laing’s ‘Critical Dissertation’ confirm this. Laing traces the history of his copy of *The Highlander*: ‘A copy presented by the author, soon after its publication, to Mr Colin Campbell, now collector of customs at Fort William, was communicated by him to Mr Alexander Campbell, author of an introduction to the History of Scottish Poetry [...] by whose favour it is now in my possession’.<sup>53</sup>

Macpherson left Ruthven for Edinburgh sometime in 1757/58.<sup>54</sup> He lived with Donald Macpherson and possibly attended lectures at the University of Edinburgh, although it is not entirely certain what exactly Macpherson did while he was in Edinburgh. He certainly did not matriculate as a law, arts or medicine student as his name does not appear on the matriculation lists. Saunders suggests

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. *Poems of Ossian*, ed. by Laing, II, p. 445 n1 and 500 n1.

<sup>51</sup> ‘The Hunter’ was never finished and the version Laing prints has two different endings.

<sup>52</sup> *Scots Magazine* (Apr 1758), p. 224.

<sup>53</sup> *Poems of Ossian*, ed. by Laing, II, p. 399.

<sup>54</sup> DeGategno places this in spring (*James Macpherson*, p. 3).

that he might have matriculated as a divinity student, because ‘there is some possibility that students of divinity alone, especially if they came from another university, were not then required to matriculate’.<sup>55</sup> Fortunately, the University Archives at Edinburgh have been able to shed some light on this: no divinity records survive from the 1750s. Additionally, ‘after 1735 no new students of Divinity were enrolled without a degree in Arts’, and, as we have seen already, Macpherson was lacking a degree in Arts (from Edinburgh or elsewhere).<sup>56</sup> He could, of course, have attended lectures at the University without matriculating, as many other townfolk did.<sup>57</sup> While in Edinburgh, Macpherson began his career of ‘literary hackwork’ by working for Balfour the publisher and, of course, wrote *The Highlander*.<sup>58</sup>

After the publication of *The Highlander*, Macpherson found work as private tutor to Thomas Graham, later 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Lynedoch, of Balgowan in Perthshire. The accepted dating for this is the latter half of 1758.<sup>59</sup> Graham’s biographer, Cecil F. Aspinall-Oglander, however, is fairly certain that Macpherson only arrived at Balgowan in the winter of 1759–60: ‘When Tom was eleven years

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<sup>55</sup> Saunders, *Life and Letters*, p. 42. DeGategno seconds this idea, but unlike Saunders he offers this as fact, not as a possibility.

<sup>56</sup> Private correspondence between Irene Ferguson, Assistant to the University Archivist, and the author of this thesis (9.10.2007): ‘The only Divinity student records we have in the archives which have survived date from 1709–1724 (a list of theologues in the college), 1709–1727 (students who attended the Divinity Hall) a Roll of Divinity students, 1831–1886. After 1735 no new students of Divinity were enrolled without a degree in Arts. I checked the arts matriculation indexes relating to your first enquiry but found nothing for James in the 1750s. We cannot say for certain that he did not attend E[dinburgh] U[niversity]. He could have attended classes and simply did not matriculate’.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Arthur Herman, *The Scottish Enlightenment: The Scots’ Invention of the Modern World* (London: Harper Perennial, 2006), p. 26: ‘Auditing university classes became a favourite hobby among Edinburgh and Aberdeen townspeople, just as professors regularly engaged in a ‘community outreach’ to offer classes to students outside the academic setting’. This is echoed by Derrick S. Thomson in his *DNB* article on Macpherson, where he is careful not to use the term ‘matriculate’: ‘he is thought to have attended classes at the University of Edinburgh as a divinity student in 1755–56’ (Derick S. Thomson, ‘Macpherson, James (1736–1796)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004, online edition, May 2006 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/17728>>[accessed 13.6.2007]).

<sup>58</sup> Saunders, *Life and Letters*, p. 63, DeGategno, *James Macpherson*, p. 3; Thomson, ‘Macpherson, James’s’.

<sup>59</sup> Saunders, *Life and Letters*, p. 63.

old, a resident tutor called James Macpherson, aged twenty-three, arrived at Balgowan to supervise his lessons'.<sup>60</sup> Graham was born in October 1748, so for him to be eleven and Macpherson to be twenty-three, Macpherson's employment there must have started after their birthdays in 1759. This is echoed by Antony Brett-James, Graham's other biographer, who also places Macpherson's arrival after Graham's eleventh birthday.<sup>61</sup> There are reasonable objections to this dating: on 2 October 1759 we find Macpherson in Moffat, a fashionable spa town in Dumfriesshire, together with his pupil. The date is preserved in Alexander Carlyle's autobiography, where he describes his first meeting with Macpherson: 'on Tuesday morning, October 2 [...] I got to Moffat, where I knew John Home was, as he usually passed two or three weeks every season there. He introduced me to M'Pherson in the bowling-green'.<sup>62</sup> Without this infamous meeting Macpherson might well have remained a tutor for much longer, 'no very agreeable occupation to the proud young Highlander'.<sup>63</sup>

From that October day Macpherson's biography is well documented and a condensed version will suffice.<sup>64</sup> John Home, whose tragedy *Douglas* (1756) we will encounter again in chapter 5 of this thesis, had been a minister of the Kirk of Scotland at Athelstaneford in West Lothian, where Robert Blair, the poet, had been minister before his death in 1746. He wrote plays in his spare time, and in 1756 *Douglas* was performed in Edinburgh, and in London the following year. The play caused a sensation in Scotland: the presbytery was enraged, and clergymen

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<sup>60</sup> Cecil F. Aspinall-Oglander, *Freshly Remembered: the Story of Thomas Graham, Lord Lynedoch* (London: Hogarth Press, 1956), p. 2.

<sup>61</sup> Antony Brett-James, *General Graham, Lord Lynedoch* (London: Macmillan, 1959), p. 6. By what appears to be a typographical error, Brett-James gives the year as 1756, but still maintains that Graham was born in 1748.

<sup>62</sup> Alexander Carlyle, *The Autobiography of Dr. Alexander Carlyle of Inveresk 1722–1805*, ed. by John H. Burton (Bristol: Thoemmes, 1990), p. 417.

<sup>63</sup> Saunders, *Life and Letters*, p. 63.

<sup>64</sup> The following section is based primarily on the four biographies mentioned above: Smart's *James Macpherson*, Saunders's *Life and Letters*, Stafford's *Sublime Savage*, DeGategno's *James Macpherson*. A good short overview is Thomson's entry on Macpherson in the *DNB*.



who attended the performance were suspended from their positions. Home himself resigned his charge in May 1757.<sup>65</sup> When he met Macpherson in 1759 Home was private secretary to John Stuart, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Bute (who was then Secretary of State and would become Prime Minister in 1762) — a connection that would be beneficial for Macpherson when Bute became his patron. Home himself described the meeting with Macpherson in detail; suffice it to say that Home asked Macpherson to translate a sample of Gaelic poetry.<sup>66</sup> Macpherson obliged, Home took the translations back to Edinburgh and showed them to his friends, among whom were David Hume, Lord Kames, Lord Monboddo, and perhaps most importantly, Hugh Blair.

Blair inquired after Macpherson, and invited him to Edinburgh. He urged Macpherson to translate more poems, the result of which were the *Fragments of Ancient Poetry Collected in the Highlands of Scotland*, published in Edinburgh in 1760. They immediately caused a stir and filled the magazines over the summer, but, like *The Highlander* before, they were published anonymously and did not have Macpherson's name attached.<sup>67</sup>

The *Fragments* were so successful that Blair proposed a subscription to enable Macpherson to tour the Highlands to collect more Gaelic poetry — possibly even to ‘recover [...] *our epic*’.<sup>68</sup> After ‘express[ing] extreme reluctance’, Macpherson finally set out on his first Highland tour in the late summer of 1760,

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<sup>65</sup> For a more detailed account of the *Douglas* controversy, see Henry Mackenzie's *An Account of the Life and Writings of John Home*, ed. by Susan Manning (Bristol: Thoemmes, 1997), Carlyle's *Autobiography*, esp. pp. 325–41 and Richard B. Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985).

<sup>66</sup> See the *Highland Society Report*, App. IV, p. 68

<sup>67</sup> The *Scots Magazine*'s treatment is typical and exemplary for the other magazines as well. In the *Scots Magazine* for June 1760 the *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* was the only new book advertised in the Contents. This issue printed not only the advertisement itself, but also the Preface and two of the *Fragments*, V and VI. Another *Fragment* (XII) was printed in the next issue. While the *Fragments* were not reviewed and merely given to the public as specimen of the larger work, the reaction they inspired is significant.

<sup>68</sup> Hugh Blair to Lord Hailes, 23 June 1760; quoted in *Poems of Ossian*, ed. by Laing, I, p. xvi–xvii, n10 (Blair's italics).

accompanied, at least for part of the tour, by his relative and friend Lachlan Macpherson of Strathmashie, also in Badenoch, the Gaelic poet and musician.<sup>69</sup> They travelled far and wide, calling most notably on Dr John Macpherson in Sleat and Clanranald in Benbecula, and ending in Macpherson's native region of Badenoch. While on his journey Macpherson also wrote to several Highland gentlemen whose houses did not lie on his route. Before returning to Edinburgh, however, Macpherson undertook a second Highland tour that took him to Argyllshire and the Isle of Mull. He finally returned to Edinburgh at the beginning of January 1761, having spent just over four months in the Highlands. He moved to Blackfriars Wynd, off the High Street, next to Blair's house.

For most of 1761 Macpherson worked on his collection and supervised the printing of it in London. *Fingal* was published at the end of December in London, and a few days later in Edinburgh. *Temora* followed in 1763. Both were published 'after the fashion of the times' by subscription, under the patronage of the Earl of Bute.<sup>70</sup> With the publication of *Fingal* the authenticity of the poems came into question, and the ensuing debate overshadowed the poems' poetical merit, or any discussion thereof.<sup>71</sup>

In 1763, Macpherson was settled in London. He received an appointment as secretary to the governor of newly-ceded West Florida, which was to be the first step in his political career and offered a brief respite from the OC dispute. The new governor, George Johnstone, was a fellow Scot and an associate of Bute. Macpherson accepted, and set out for Pensacola. His duties there also included that of president of the council of Pensacola and surveyor-general, and later justice of the peace. He quarrelled with Johnstone, and Macpherson left

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<sup>69</sup> Saunders, *Life and Letters*, p. 91.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

<sup>71</sup> For a detailed presentation of the authenticity debate, see Saunders, *Life and Letters*.

Pensacola to visit some of the other provinces and to tour the West Indies. He finally returned to London in 1766. He had been paid £200 a year as surveyor-general, and, as Bailey Saunders points out, ‘in a day when pensions formed a larger part of the machinery of the State than at present, Macpherson was allowed to retain it for life, on the condition [...] that he should devote himself henceforth to political writing’.<sup>72</sup> And that is just what he did.

Soon versions of the OC appeared all over Europe.<sup>73</sup> In 1765 *The Works of Ossian* was published, encompassing *Fingal*, *Temora* and the poems published with them, and in 1773 *The Poems of Ossian* followed. This was a revised edition in which Macpherson attempted to answer at least some of the authenticity charges, for example by re-arranging the order of the poems. He also added a Preface explaining his translation methods. Those were the only two collected OC editions that Macpherson was personally involved in. When Samuel Johnson’s *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* was published in 1775, the authenticity debate once again flared up and continued to be heated until the *Highland Society Report* more or less settled it in 1803.

Macpherson continued his career as a writer by publishing a number of political and historical works, including pamphlets and contributions to journals.<sup>74</sup> The first was *An Introduction to the History of Great Britain and Ireland* (1771), a treatise on Scotland’s Celtic past. It was followed in 1775 first by *Original Papers, containing*

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>73</sup> For the European reception of the poems see *The Reception of Ossian in Europe*, ed. by Howard Gaskill (London: Thoemmes, 2004), Wolfgang G. Schmidt, “Homer des Nordens” und “Mutter der Romantik: James Macpherson und seine Rezeption in der deutschsprachigen Literatur” (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2003) and *Ossian and Ossianism*, ed. by Dafydd Moore (London: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>74</sup> The only literary work published by Macpherson after the Ossian poems was his translation of the *Iliad* into measured prose, published in 1773. It was not particularly commercially successful, with most critics claiming that Macpherson had ‘parad[ed] Homer in a plaid and a kilt’ (Saunders, *Life and Letters*, p. 223). At the same time, however, Macpherson’s *Iliad* shows his continued interest in the classics as well as translation. Unlike his earlier poetry, the translation is inspired and influenced by the OC while simultaneously embracing Macpherson’s other interests.

*the Secret History of Great Britain from the Restoration to the Accession of the House of Hannover, with Memoirs of James II* (1775). The Stuart section of this was taken from the diary and correspondence of Sir David Nairne, courtier at the courts of James II and James III (the Old Pretender), which had come into the hands of Thomas Carte. The Hanoverian section is taken from both Carte and from papers at the Scots College in Paris, which Macpherson had visited in 1774. In the same year Macpherson published *The History of Great Britain from the Restoration to the Accession of the House of Hannover*, a continuation of Hume's *History of Great Britain*.

During the American Revolution Macpherson was employed as superintendent of the ministerial newspapers, and in 1776 he drafted a reply to the Declaration of Independence.<sup>75</sup> It was published anonymously as *The Rights of Britain asserted against the Claims of America* in the same year. It fully backed the government's stand concerning the affair across the Atlantic, and was supported by most of the prominent Scots in London.<sup>76</sup> From 1777 Macpherson turned his interests, business and otherwise, further afield. He involved himself in Indian politics, through his kinsman John Macpherson of Sleat, whom he had met on his Highland tour in 1760. John Macpherson had been employed by the nabob of Arcot for some time and eventually became governor-general of Bengal in 1781.<sup>77</sup> This involvement led first to the publication of the *History and Management of the East India Company, from its Origin in 1600 to the Present Times* in 1779 and later to Macpherson's appointment as the nabob's agent in London. In the same year appeared *A Short History of the Opposition during the last Session*, a review of the Whig

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<sup>75</sup> Cf. *Poems of Ossian*, ed. by Laing, I, p. liii.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Saunders, *Life and Letters*, p. 260.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. John N.M. Maclean's unpublished doctoral thesis 'The Early Political Careers of James 'Fingal' Macpherson (1736–1796) and Sir John Macpherson, Bart. (1744–1821)' (University of Edinburgh, 1967) for a comparison of the two Macphersons.

conduct during the American War of Independence. Macpherson's pamphlet was well received, and it was for a while ascribed to Edward Gibbon.<sup>78</sup>

In 1780 Macpherson became MP for Camelford in Cornwall, a seat 'at that time usually in the nomination of the Government'.<sup>79</sup> He was to retain the seat for the rest of his life. In 1785 he was a candidate for the office of poet laureate, but he was not chosen: Thomas Warton was selected instead. In the mid-1780s Macpherson was offered the annexed Macpherson lands near Ruthven, his home-town, by the crown. He turned them down and bought three smaller estates instead, and built a late-Palladian villa on them, designed by the fashionable Adam brothers. This he named Belleville; this is still in possession of a Macpherson and today is known as 'Balavil House'. Towards the end of his life he usually spent six months in London and six months at Belleville. He remained active in politics in general, and Indian affairs in particular, and devoted increasingly more time to arranging a Gaelic version of Ossian. He was encouraged in this by Henry Mackenzie, and in his will left £1000 for the publication of this. He died in Belleville in February 1796, surrounded by Scottish friends and family.



Balavil House (© Kristin Ott, 2010)

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Saunders, *Life and Letters*, p. 265, *Poetical Works of James Macpherson*, p. 10.

<sup>79</sup> Saunders, *Life and Letters*, p. 273.

*THE HIGHLANDER* (1758)

*The Highlander* is an epic poem in heroic couplets, written in English by a classically trained Scot. It tells the story of the Viking invasion of Scotland. Its main character Alpin, a simple Highlander, single-handedly defeats the Vikings. He falls in love with Culena, the daughter of the Scottish king, Indulph. Eventually Alpin is discovered to be the rightful heir to the throne, Duffus — Indulph's nephew. He marries Culena, Indulph dies, and Duffus is crowned king of Scotland.

Despite Fiona Stafford's coy acknowledgment that 'The Highlander owes something to historical and literary sources', the poem is based almost entirely on clearly traceable material: with the exception of the love story involving Duffus and Culena the basic plot of *The Highlander* is taken from John of Fordun's *Chronicle* (c. 1360; the precursor of Walter Bower's *Scotichronicon* (1440s)) and George Buchanan's *Rerum Scotticarum Historia* (1582).<sup>80</sup> Macpherson had access to at least Buchanan's history at Aberdeen.<sup>81</sup> The story of *The Highlander* is that of King Indulf, the 77<sup>th</sup> Scottish king (reigned c. 954-962) and of King Dubh, the 78<sup>th</sup> Scottish king (c. 962-967). Buchanan records not only the basic plot but also most of the characters' names and very specific details, much more extensively than Fordun and Bower. Apart from combining Indulf's and Dubh's stories, Macpherson introduces Duffus's obscure upbringing and the love story involving Culena, Indulph's daughter. Culena, however, is not as fictional as she might appear: Indulf's son, Culen, reigned after Dubh. Another source for *The Highlander* is the 'Magnus' ballad. It was popular throughout the Highlands in the period and

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<sup>80</sup> Stafford, *Sublime Savage*, p. 68 (her lack of italics for *Highlander*).

<sup>81</sup> pi(41) Buc 1 (000401939) has the inscription 'Liber Academiae Marischallanaea', which, according to Michelle Gait from Aberdeen University Library Special Collections, makes it likely that the volume was in the library when Macpherson was a student at Marischal (in an email to the author of this thesis, dated 8 July 2011).

told the story of Fingal's battle with Magnus, a Danish invader.<sup>82</sup> Additionally, the topos of the unknown nobleman discovering his true parentage and atoning for the death of his father is familiar from the Fingal (or Finn MacCumhail) legends.<sup>83</sup>

Criticism on *The Highlander* is sparse. Commentary on the poem can be found in only a handful of works. This section functions as a brief chronological literature review of criticism devoted to *The Highlander*. The page numbers indicate the sections of the works that discuss the poem.

Campbell, Alexander. *An Introduction to the History of Poetry in Scotland, from the Beginning of the Thirteenth Century to the Present Time* (Edinburgh: Andrew Foulis, 1798), pp. 36–41. Campbell notes *The Highlander* as a 'juvenile' example of Macpherson's works (p. 36). He compares it to the OC by giving extracts from both that he deems similar.

Laing, Malcolm. *The History of Scotland, from the Union of the Crowns on the Accession of James VI to the Throne of England, to the Union of the Kingdoms in the Reign of Queen Anne, with An Historical and Critical Dissertation on the Supposed Authenticity of Ossian's Poems*, 2 vols (London: T. Cadell Jr, W. Davies, 1800), II, pp. 399–406. Laing discusses *The Highlander* in detail and, like Campbell, argues that the poem is an early exercise for the later Ossian poems, displaying 'the same plot and inflated phraseology, the same imagery and incidents' (p. 400). *The Highlander* is, however, inferior to the Ossian poems, because, Laing argues among other things, 'Macpherson was unequal to rhyme' (p. 404).

Anon. 'Ossian Redivivus'. *The Times* 14 October 1869, p. 4, column 10. This *Times* article also uses *The Highlander* as a companion piece to the OC, and compares it to *Fingal*, the Magnus ballad and Virgil. It finds fault with

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<sup>82</sup> Stafford thinks it 'plausible' that the ballad provided Macpherson with material for *The Highlander* (*Sublime Savage*, p. 69).

<sup>83</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

Macpherson's poetic abilities, noting that the poem is 'heroic and Ossianic, more ambitious than excellent' and that 'the poetry is generally bad, but the ideas are often good'. Like Laing it also focuses on Macpherson's clumsy rhymes, which 'betray the author's dialect'.

Macbain, Alexander. 'Macpherson's Ossian', in *The Celtic Magazine* 137:12 (1887), 145–54, 193–201, 240–54 (p. 193). Macbain summarises *The Highlander* and notes that Macpherson was unsuccessful as a neo-classical epic poet, but that by turning the Fingalian story into measured prose he manages to portray his deficiencies as 'barbaric' idiosyncrasies.

Saunders, T. Bailey. *The Life and Letters of James Macpherson* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1894), pp. 44–48. Saunders singles out a few passages from *The Highlander* to show Macpherson's poetic abilities, particularly to highlight his penchants for 'descriptions of battle, and the character of his feeling for nature' (p. 44). He also notes the indifferent reception of the poem (p. 47).

Dunn, John J. 'James Macpherson's First Epic'. *Studies in Scottish Literature* 9:1 (1971), 48–54 (pp. 48–54). Dunn attributes the public's un-interest in *The Highlander* to its 'conventionality [...] despite its patriotic appeal' (p. 49) and summarises the poem at length. He also points out the similarities between the poem and *Fingal*.

MacQueen, John. *The Enlightenment and Scottish Literature. Volume One: Progress and Poetry* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1982), pp. 89–92. MacQueen focuses on the similarities between *The Highlander* and Macpherson's other works: 'The Hunter' and the OC. He points out the shared enthusiasm for 'natural man and the expression of natural feelings' (p. 89) and also notes the 'semi-historical framework' of *The Highlander*: its indebtedness to Buchanan's *Historia* (p. 91).



Sher, Richard B. *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985), pp. 243, 259. Sher notes similarities between *The Highlander* and Home's *Douglas* (p. 243), and the theme of 'proud and warlike Scots successfully defending the British Isles against invading armies of fearsome Scandinavians' that underlie those two works as well as the OC (p. 259).

Simpson, Kenneth. *The Protean Scot: The Crisis of Identity in Eighteenth Century Scottish Literature* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988), pp. 49–50. Simpson dislikes *The Highlander* for its 'bombast, bathos, and repetitive diction' (p. 49). He also misreads the poem as pro-Jacobite.

Stafford, Fiona. *The Sublime Savage: James Macpherson and the Poems of Ossian* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989), pp. 67–76. Stafford's account is the most detailed (indeed, she devotes a chapter to *The Highlander*). She traces its influences: Homer and Virgil, Buchanan, Gaelic heroic verse and the 'Magnus' ballads and compares it to 'The Hunter'. She also notes the nationalism and patriotism inherent in the poem.

DeGategno, Paul J. *James Macpherson* (Boston: Twayne, 1989), pp. 3, 15–17. DeGategno perpetuates the legend that Macpherson asked his publisher to destroy all copies of *The Highlander* after its publication (p. 3) but recognises the poem's originality: its indebtedness to history (p. 15). He views it as anticipating the OC in its use of nature and its depiction of bards (p. 17).

Weinbrot, Howard. *Britannia's Issue: The Rise of British Literature from Dryden to Ossian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 540. Weinbrot recognises that *The Highlander* is not just a Scottish, but a more generally British poem that appeals to 'British pride'.

Kidd, Colin. ‘Macpherson, Burns and the Politics of Sentiment’, *Scottlands* 4:1 (1997), 25–43 (p. 29). Kidd comments on the hermit’s prophecy (Canto V) of *The Highlander* and argues that it emphasises Macpherson’s ‘British allegiance’.

Thomson, Derick. ‘James Macpherson: The Gaelic Dimension’, in *From Gaelic to Romantic: Ossianic Translations*, ed. by Howard Gaskill, Fiona Stafford (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), 17–26 (pp. 18–19). Thomson notes that in *The Highlander* Macpherson portrays his battles ‘against backgrounds of storms on sea and land, howling winds that shatter forests, and tempestuous skies’, much like he would later in the OC.

Kersey, Melvin. “‘Where are the originals?’ Britishness and problems of authenticity in post-Union literature from Addison to Macpherson’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leeds, 2001), pp. 234–46. Kersey focuses part of his last thesis chapter on *The Highlander* and reads the poem as an affirmation of Whiggish Britishness. He offers a detailed reading of the hermit’s prophecy (Canto V) and applies Kidd’s ‘Celtic Whiggism’ to *The Highlander*.

Moore, Dafydd. *Enlightenment and Romance in James Macpherson’s Poems of Ossian: Myth, Genre and Cultural Change* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 27, 151. Moore finds a ‘Highland and potentially Jacobite inflection’ in *The Highlander*, which, he argues, is ‘amenable to readings as Stuart wish fulfilment’ (p. 27).

Kersey, Melvin. ‘The Pre-Ossianic Politics of James Macpherson’, in *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 27 (2004), 51–75 (pp. 65–71.) Kersey reiterates his Whig reading of *The Highlander* in this article and repeats the argument from his thesis.

Curley, Thomas M. *Samuel Johnson, The Ossian Fraud, and the Celtic Revival in Great Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 27.

Despite Curley's bias towards Johnson, he recognises the pro-British outlook of *The Highlander* and notes similarities between the poem and the OC.

#### A NOTE ON THE TEXT

The text of *The Highlander* in this edition is based on the April 1758 version published by Walter Ruddiman Jr. in Edinburgh. All previous published versions of the poem — 1758, 1802 (edited anonymously), 1805, 1971 (ed. by John MacQueen; facsimile reprint of 1805) and 2004 (ed. by Dafydd Moore; also a facsimile reprint of 1805) — are unedited, and do not provide notes. No manuscript of the poem is known to exist. The 1758 version is thus, by default, Macpherson's preferred version: it is the only version published in Macpherson's lifetime.<sup>84</sup> This text is the first attempt at a modern scholarly edition of the poem and includes extensive annotations. As mentioned above, the annotations elucidate names, places and poetic parallels, and where possible also indicate the sources that Macpherson is likely to have used. There are also some clarifications of vocabulary, particularly of eighteenth-century usage.

The present edition is a reading version that regularises the capitalisation and the use of small caps for place and proper names. It also silently corrects obvious typographical errors (II.187: 'Swell' instead of 'swell'; III.180: 'cattle' instead of 'catt e'). Quotation marks have been employed consistently throughout the text to mark direct speeches. Other than that it preserves the spelling, punctuation and emphases of the original text, with the exception that multiples of short dashes have been rendered into em dashes, colons and semi-colons are no longer preceded by a space, and that 'f' has been printed as 's' throughout to ease and aid the reader's comprehension of the poem. Line numbers have been added

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<sup>84</sup> As the other two versions (1802, 1805) were published after Macpherson's death the variants cannot be intentional, and are thus not listed.

for easier reference; they recommence at the beginning of each canto.

Macpherson's early poetry does not survive in manuscript: *The Highlander* is no exception. Published anonymously in April 1758 in Edinburgh by Walter Ruddiman Jr, only seven known copies of it exist now.<sup>85</sup> An advertisement in the 'New Books, Edinburgh' section of the *Scots Magazine* confirms this date.<sup>86</sup> The print run is unknown, and the only two recorded purchasers are Colin Campbell, customs officer at Fort William (whose copy Laing obtained) and Isaac Reed, the editor and book collector (who inscribed the NLS copy).<sup>87</sup> The poem has been included in two editions of Macpherson's works: the *Poetical Works of James Macpherson* (Edinburgh: Hill, 1802) and Laing's *The Poems of Ossian, &c. containing the Poetical Works of James Macpherson, Esq. in Prose and Rhyme* (Edinburgh: Ballantyne, 1805). It is available in facsimile in two modern collections (as well as on *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online*): John MacQueen's 1971 reprint of Laing's edition, and Dafydd Moore's 2004 *Ossian and Ossianism*, also a reprint of Laing's edition.

According to the 'Literary Anecdotes' in Ruddiman's *Weekly Magazine*, the poem 'had a very rapid sale'.<sup>88</sup> This is the only comment on its sale. It has been claimed that Macpherson tried to suppress *The Highlander* after its publication, but no evidence is given for this.<sup>89</sup> The 'Literary Anecdotes' mention is the only notice

<sup>85</sup> The *ESTC* lists copies in Aberdeen University Library, British Library, Inverness Public Library, National Library of Scotland, Columbia University Library, New York Public Library, University of Michigan Library.

<sup>86</sup> 'The Highlander; a poem, in six Cantos. 1s. *Crawfurd, Gordon, &c.*' (*Scots Magazine* (Apr 1758), p. 224).

<sup>87</sup> The inscription is by Isaac Reed and reads 'This Poem is a Curiosity being the first production of James Macpherson Esq Author of Ossian, Historian, & Translator of Homer. I am told this Poem was suppressed by the Author. See Dissertation at the end of "The History of Scotland from the accession of James VI to the Union by Malcolm Laing Esq 2 vols 8<sup>vo</sup> 1800 where the Author without hesitation attributes and proves the poems of Ossian to be productions of Macpherson. Among other proofs the strong resemblance discoverable between this Poem *The Highlander* & Fingal both in sentiment and expression is adduced. June 1764 James Macpherson Esq was appointed Secretary General to the province of West Florida and immediately embarked with Governor Johnstone'.

<sup>88</sup> Anon., 'Literary Anecdotes', p. 97.

<sup>89</sup> Saunders: 'it is also said that he was conscious himself of the defects of the poem, and tried to suppress it' (*Life and Letters*, p. 47); DeGategno: 'he soon recognized the poem as a failure, and asked the publisher to destroy any remaining copies' (*James Macpherson*, p.3).

of the poem until Donald Macpherson's letter of 1797 (Letter 26). Laing insists that 'the Highlander fell still-born from the press', which, for him, is the reason why Macpherson 'transferred his pen from poetry, professedly original, to the more profitable task of translation from the Erse'.<sup>90</sup> He elaborates a little on the commercial failure of *The Highlander*: 'the miscarriage of his first Epic, the Highlander, was secretly ascribed to the envy and meanness which affect to despise contemporary genius', but unfortunately he gives no indication as to who ascribed it thus.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Laing, *History of Scotland II*, p. 406.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 448.

T H E  
HIGHLANDER:

A  
P O E M:

I N

Six CANTOS:

*By James Macpherson author of the  
"Poems of Ossian"*

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*Cætera quæ vacuas tendissent carmina mentes,  
Omnia jam vulgata. — VIRG.*

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EDINBURGH:

Printed by WAL. RUDDIMAN jun. and COMPANY;  
M DCC LVIII.

(© *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online*; this is the British Library copy)

<sup>1</sup> The Latin motto is from Virgil, *Georgics* III, and translates as 'All themes beside, which else had charmed the vacant mind with song, are now grown common'. Walter Ruddiman Jr., the publisher of *The Highlander*, was the nephew of Thomas (1674–1757) and Walter Ruddiman (1687–1770). He began publishing the *Edinburgh Magazine* in July 1757, and, from July 1768, the *Weekly Magazine, or, Edinburgh Amusement* (which printed the anonymous 'Literary Anecdotes' of on 8 January 1776). See Hamish Mathison's entry on Ruddiman in the *DNB* for more information.

## CANTO I.

THE youth I sing, who, to himself unknown,  
 Lost to the world and CALEDONIA's<sup>1</sup> throne,  
 Sprung o'er his mountains to the arms of Fame,  
 And, wing'd by Fate, his sire's<sup>2</sup> avenger, came;  
 5 That knowledge learn'd,<sup>3</sup> so long deny'd by fate,  
 And found that blood, as merit, made him great.<sup>4 5</sup>

The aged chieftain<sup>6</sup> on the bier<sup>7</sup> is laid,  
 And grac'd with all the honours of the dead;  
 The youthful warriors, as the corse<sup>8</sup> they bear,  
 10 Droop the sad head, and shed the gen'rous tear.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> CALEDONIA's] the Latin name for the Highlands. It is used by Tacitus in his *Agricola* to refer to the region north of the firths of Clyde and Forth. The name is actually that of a Pictish tribe, the Caledonii, one amongst several in the region.

<sup>2</sup> sire's] father's.

<sup>3</sup> That knowledge learn'd] the knowledge of his noble parentage: as this opening passage explains, Duffus, the hero of the poem, is the rightful heir to the throne of Scotland, even though he is unaware of this for most of the poem. This is why he is known as both 'Alpin' and 'Duffus'.

<sup>4</sup> The youth I sing ... made him great] this passage emphasises the poem's genre: epic. Like the *Aeneid*, the poem opens with a statement of its theme and a summary of its plot (*Aeneid*: 'arma virumque cano' (I.1). Similar phrases occur in Pope's *Iliad* II. 585 ('Their names, their numbers, and their chiefs I sing'), and *Paradise Lost* I. 1ff ('Of MAN's first disobedience ... Sing heavenly muse') and III. 18('I sung of Chaos and Eternal Night'). The lines are also reminiscent of John Home's *Douglas*, II. 28–30: 'to this noble youth, who, all unknown/To you and yours, deliberated not,/Nor paus'd at peril'. The hero in *Douglas* is the son of a nobleman, while Duffus in *The Highlander* is the heir to the throne. As Fiona Stafford points out, the story of the nobleman of obscure parentage who discovers his true birth and avenges his father's death is similar to the legend of Finn MacCumhail, that is Fingal (*The Sublime Savage: James Macpherson and the Poems of Ossian* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988), p. 69). Kenneth Simpson reads this as an allusion to Charles Edward Stuart, but this is problematic as it does not tie in with the rest of the poem, particularly the hermit's prophecy in Canto V (*The Protean Scot: The Crisis of Identity in Eighteenth Century Scottish Literature* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988), p. 49).

<sup>5</sup> blood, as merit, made him great] this line hints at the dual nature of heroism in Macpherson: on the one hand, it is determined by blood and heritage, on the other by actions, fame and valour; cf. IV. 300–03: 'Nobler the youth, who, tho' before unknown,/From merit mounts to virtue and renown,/Than he, set up by an illustrious race,/Totters aloft, and scarce can keep his place!'.  
<sup>6</sup> The aged chieftain] this is Rynold, Duffus's step-father. He is fictional, and thus, unlike most characters in *The Highlander*, not based on historical sources.

<sup>7</sup> bier] a movable frame on which a coffin or a corpse is placed before burial or cremation or on which it is carried to the grave.

<sup>8</sup> corse] corpse.

<sup>9</sup> Droop ... gen'rous tear] this is a first hint at the sentimentality of the poem — a trait which Duffus is shown to exhibit several times later on. The warriors are emotional and sensitive, not bloodthirsty and savage. Cf., for example, Duffus's 'filial tears' (I.13) and 'rainy eyes' (I. 16), as well as his two encounters with Haco (I. 225ff, III. 207ff).

For ABRIA's<sup>10</sup> shore, TAY's<sup>11</sup> winding banks they leave,  
And bring the Hero to his father's grave.

His filial tears the godlike<sup>12</sup> ALPIN<sup>13</sup> sheds,  
And tow'rds the foe his gallant warriors leads.<sup>14</sup>

15 The chief<sup>15</sup> along his silent journey wound,  
And fix'd his rainy eyes upon the ground;  
Behind advanc'd his followers sad and slow,  
In all the dark solemnity of woe.  
Mean time fierce SCANDINAVIA's<sup>16</sup> hostile pow'r,  
20 Its squadrons spread along the murm'ring shore;

<sup>10</sup> ABRIA's] the Latin name of Lochaber, in the south-western Highlands. The use of this term is unusual and not generally found in eighteenth-century texts. It is used by Joan Blaeu in his *Atlas of Scotland* (1654), in a passage quoted from Andrew Melville's *Topography of Scotland*. The *Topography* is a poem addressed to Prince Henry, oldest son of James VI and I, which is not found in any source other than the *Atlas*. It mentions Abria only once: 'Lorna hic Argatheliae adjacet imam Abriam ad usque, ferax frugum Regioque jacentes qua Juga demittens in campos Grampius & mons Pervius atque humilis magis haec Braid dicitur Albin' (f. 8r). ('Lorne here adjoins Argyll as far as the foot of Lochaber, productive of crops, and where the Grampian mountain drops its ridges into flat plains and is passable and lower, this region is called Breadalbane, for it is the broadest part of Albion', trans. by Ian C. Cunningham). From the *National Library of Scotland's* digital library <<http://www.nls.uk/maps/early/blaeu/index.html>> [accessed 15.02.2008].

<sup>11</sup> TAY's] a river that starts in the Highlands of Scotland and flows into the North Sea via Perth and Dundee.

<sup>12</sup> godlike] often used to describe the heroes, both Scottish and Danish, in *The Highlander*. It is a standard epic term and can be found, for example, in Pope's *Iliad*, I. 3, or I. 431–32. Thomas Blackwell explain this: 'the *Man* who had bravely defended his City, enlarged its Dominion, or died in its Cause, was revered like a God' (*An Enquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer* (London: [no publisher], 1735), p. 53).

<sup>13</sup> ALPIN] the name that Duffus, the hero of the poem, is given by his step-father Rynold. He only finds out his real name later on in the poem. Historically, he is based on Dub mac Maíl Coluim (Duff Mac Malcolm), King of Alba (961–67), the son of Malcolm I (943–54). Duff became Lord of Cumbria (or the Kingdom of Strathclyde, which had been given to his father Malcolm by the English King Edmund in 946) in 952, and afterwards King of Alba in 961. The historical Duffus was not Indulph's nephew, or direct heir to the throne. He died in 965, and is described as 'a man of dove-like simplicity towards those who loved quiet and peace; but a cruel, terrible, and bloody avenger towards rebels, plunderers, and thieves'. No mention is made of his participation in battles against the Vikings. The name 'Alpin' is very likely a reference to the royal house of Alpin, Kenneth MacAlpin's line. (John of Fordun, *John of Fordun's Chronicle of the Scottish Nation*, ed. by William F. Skene, 2 vols (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1872), I, pp. 160–61. Also the introduction by William F. Skene, I, p. xxxi).

<sup>14</sup> The aged chieftain ... warriors leads] cf. the London prologue of Home's *Douglas* for the tradition of sons assuming their father's role upon their death in battle: 'When powerful fate decreed one warrior's doom,/Up sprung the phoenix from his father's tomb' (ll. 9–10). Historically, though, Duffus was not involved in the coming battle, or Indulph's death.

<sup>15</sup> chief] Duffus has already taken the first step in his path towards fame: he is now the clan chief, leading his men into battle and caring for them.

<sup>16</sup> SCANDINAVIA's] used synonymously with 'Denmark' and 'Norway' in the poem to signify what we now think of as Vikings ('Viking', though derived from Old Norse and Icelandic and known in Old English as 'wicing', is not commonly used before the nineteenth century). Fiona Stafford notes that the choice of Vikings is significant: 'the choice of setting suggests that Macpherson was already drawing on traditional Highland tales to inspire his own poetry, because many of the heroic ballads current in the eighteenth century dealt with the raids of the 'Lochlinners', or Vikings' (*Sublime Savage*, p. 68).



Prepar'd, at once, the city<sup>17</sup> to invade,  
 And conquer CALEDONIA in her head.<sup>18</sup>  
 His camp, for night, the royal SUENO<sup>19</sup> forms,  
 Resolv'd with morn to use his DANISH<sup>20</sup> arms.  
 25           Now in the ocean sunk the flaming day,  
 And streak'd the ruddy west with setting ray;  
 Around great INDULPH,<sup>21</sup> in the senate sat  
 The noble Chiefs of CALEDONIA's state.<sup>22</sup>  
 In mental scales they either forces weigh,  
 30           And act, before, the labours of the day;<sup>23</sup>  
 Arrange in thought their CALEDONIA's might,  
 And bend their little army to the fight.  
                   Thus they consult. Brave ALPIN's martial gait,  
 Approach'd the portals of the dome of state;<sup>24</sup>  
 35           Resolv'd to offer to his King and lord,  
 The gen'rous service of his trusty sword.  
                   Th' unusual sight the gallant chief admires,  
 The bending arches and the lofty spires.  
 On either side the gate, in order stand  
 40           The antient Kings of CALEDONIA's land.  
                   The marble lives, they breathe within the stone,

<sup>17</sup> city] the 'city' in question is no doubt Scone, which had been the seat of royal power at least since the time of Constantine II, King of Alba (900–43). Historically the battle took place at Cullen, near Banff, in the north of Scotland.

<sup>18</sup> conquer CALEDONIA in her head] the implication is two-fold: that the city, home of the senate and King Indulph, is naturally the prime target for the invading Danes, but also that the city, merely by virtue of being a city, is the head of the country. See chapter 5 for a more detailed interpretation of this passage.

<sup>19</sup> SUENO] historically, this is very likely Sveyn I Forkbeard (reigned 986–1014 (Denmark), 999–1014 (Norway), 1013–14 (England), son of Harald Bluetooth Gormson (Harald I of Denmark), father of Canute I (Fordun, I, p. 176). He invaded Scotland in the reign of Malcolm II (George Buchanan, *History of Scotland*, 2 vols (London: J. Bettenham, 1722), I, p. 267).

<sup>20</sup> DANISH] see note 16.

<sup>21</sup> INDULPH] historically, this is Ildulf mac Causantín (Indulf mac Constantine), King of Alba (952–61), the son of Constantine II (903–43). He was Lord of Cumbria (see note 13) during Malcolm I's reign, and succeeded to the Kingdom of Alba on Malcolm's death. He died fighting the Vikings, at the Battle of the Bands at Cullen, near Banff, in the north of Scotland (Fordun, I, p. 160; Buchanan, I, p. 243).

<sup>22</sup> Around ... state] these lines are reminiscent of Pope's *Iliad*, VII. 414–15 ('Meanwhile, conven'd at Priam's palace-gate/The Trojan peers in nightly council sate').

<sup>23</sup> act ... day] they go over the coming day's battle in their minds.

<sup>24</sup> dome of state] the Scottish hall of fame, a decidedly medieval senate.

And still, as once, the royal warriors frown.

The FERGUS's<sup>25</sup> are seen above the gate;

This first created, that restor'd the state.

45 In warlike pomp, the awful<sup>26</sup> forms appear,

And, bending, threaten from the stone the spear;

While to their side young ALBION<sup>27</sup> seems to rise,

And on her fathers turns her smiling eyes.

And next appears GREGORIUS'<sup>28</sup> awful name,

50 HIBERNIA's<sup>29</sup> conqu'ror for a gen'rous fame.

Incass'd in arms, the royal Hero stands,

And gives his captive all his conquer'd lands.

The filial heart of hapless ALPIN's<sup>30</sup> son,

In marble melts and beats within the stone.

55 Revenge still sparkles in the Hero's eye;

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<sup>25</sup> FERGUS's] historically, this is Fergus Mór mac Eirc (Fergus Mor), son of Ferchard (Fordun, I, p. 41), a Dalriadic king of c. 500 AD. He came over to Ireland and 'was created first King of the Scots' (Fordun, I, p. 41; Buchanan, I, p. 136).

<sup>26</sup> awful] awe-inspiring. This meaning of 'awful' is used throughout the poem.

<sup>27</sup> ALBION] Great Britain, thus a personification of the recent, and therefore young, Union. 'Albion' is used by Fordun, with Scotland being its 'north-western end' (I. 139). 'Alba', according to the Reverend John Macpherson, is also a term for the Highlands: 'Alba, the only name by which the Highlanders distinguish Scotland to this day' (*Critical Dissertations on the Origin, Antiquities, Language, Government, Manners, and Religion, of the Antient Caledonians and Their Posterity the Picts, and the British and Irish Scots* (Dublin: Boulter Grierson, 1768)). Thus this line also, of course, refers to the young Highland warriors, as opposed to the older and more experienced ones.

<sup>28</sup> GREGORIUS'] historically, this is Girig, or Grig (Gregory), son of Dúnga(i)l, King of Alba 875–92. Regnal List D (MS ADV 34.7.3 in the National Library of Scotland), describes him: 'Girig mac Dungal xii a. reg. et mortuus est in Dunduin et sepultus est in Iona insual. Hic subjugavit sibi totam Yberniam et fere totam Angliam et hic / primus dedit libertatem ecclesie Scoticanæ qui sub servitute erat usque ad illud tempus ex consuetudi[n]e et more Pictorum' ('Girag mac Dungal reigned for 12 years, died in Dunduin, and was buried on the Isle of Iona. He conquered all of Ireland and almost all of England. He was also the first one to free the Scottish church, which was until that point, on account of custom and habit, under the control of the Picts', trans. James A. Andrews). This is echoed by Fordun, who depicts Gregory as peaceful and devout, and also mentions his rule of Ireland (I, p. 150), as well as Buchanan (I, p. 235–38).

<sup>29</sup> HIBERNIA's] the Latin name for Ireland.

<sup>30</sup> ALPIN's] historically, this is Cináed mac Ailpín (Kenneth mac Alpin), son of Ailpín mac Echdach. The first King of Alba (839–54), reigning over both Scots and Picts, the 'third founder' of Scotland (Buchanan, I, p. 228). His legendary feats include winning seven battles in one day (Fordun, I, p. 139).

Around the PICTS,<sup>31</sup> a nameless slaughter, lye.<sup>32</sup>

The youthful warrior thus reviews, with joy,<sup>33</sup>

The godlike series of his ancestry.<sup>34</sup>

The godlike forms the drooping Hero cheer,

60 And keen ambition half believes the seer:<sup>35</sup>

Eager he shoots into the spacious gate;

His eye commands, without<sup>36</sup> his followers wait.

No frowning spear-man guards the awful door;

No borrow'd terror arms the hand of pow'r:

65 No cringing<sup>37</sup> bands of sycophants appear,

To send false echoes to the monarch's ear.

Merit's soft voice, oppression's mournful groan,

Advanc'd, unstiff'd, to th' attentive throne.<sup>38</sup>

The Hero, ent'ring, took his solemn stand

70 Among the gallant warriors of the land.

His manly port, the staring chiefs admire,

And half-heard whispers blow the soldier's fire.

A while his form engag'd the monarch's eyes,

At length he raised the music of his voice.

75 "Whence is the youth? I see fierce DENMARK warms

Each gen'rous breast, and fires 'em into arms.

A face once known is in that youth exprest,

---

<sup>31</sup> PICTS] a group of late-Iron-Age and early-medieval people living in eastern and northern Scotland. They merged with the Scots, a Gaelic people that had originally come over from Ireland, in the ninth century.

<sup>32</sup> On either side the gate ... slaughter, lye] this passage highlights the historicity that permeates the poem: the ancient heroes are almost alive, 'breathing' and 'threatening [...] the spear'. Kersey sees this passage as indicative of Macpherson's Celtic Whiggism ('The Pre-Ossianic Politics of James Macpherson', in *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 27 (2004), 51-75 (p. 66)).

<sup>33</sup> with joy] Kersey reads this as Alpin joyfully imagining 'the violent obliteration of the Pictish, Jacobite line of kings invented by [Thomas] Innes', when it is in fact the 'series of his ancestry' that gives him joy ('Pre-Ossianic Politics', p. 70).

<sup>34</sup> The godlike forms ... his ancestry] this passage is reminiscent of the London prologue of Home's *Douglas*: 'From age to age bright shone the British fire,/And every hero was a hero sire' (ll. 7-8).

<sup>35</sup> seer] visionary who can see the future.

<sup>36</sup> without] outside.

<sup>37</sup> cringing] bending their head and body in fear or in a servile manner.

<sup>38</sup> No frowning spear-man ... attentive throne] as John J. Dunn points out, 'the Caledonian court is a model of openness based on benevolence, honesty, and trust' ('James Macpherson's First Epic', in *Studies in Scottish Literature* 9:1 (1971), 48-54 (p. 50)).

And mends a dying image in my breast.”<sup>39</sup>

He said: And thus the Youth; “’midst rocks afar,  
80 I heard of DENMARK, and of SUENO’s war.

My country’s safety in my bosom rose;  
For CALEDONIA’s sons should meet her foes.<sup>40</sup>

We ought not meanly wait the storm at home,  
But rush afar, and break it ’ere it come.<sup>41</sup>

85 Few are my foll’wers, but these few are true;  
We come to serve our country, fame, and you!”

He said: The King retorts; “thy form, thy mind,  
Declare the scion<sup>42</sup> of a gen’rous kind;

With SCOTIA’s<sup>43</sup> foes maintain the stern debate,  
90 And spring from valour to the arms of state.<sup>44</sup>

Whoe’er would raise his house in ALBION, shou’d  
Lay the foundation in her en’mies blood.”

Then to the chiefs; “Supporters of my throne,  
Your sires brought oft the ROMAN Eagles<sup>45</sup> down.

95 Yourself, my lords, have caus’d the haughty DANE,

---

<sup>39</sup> A face ... in my breast] no doubt Duffus reminds Indulph of Malcolm, Duffus’s father and Indulph’s brother. Also cf. Home’s *Douglas*:

I thought, that had the son of Douglas liv’d,  
He might have been like this young gallant stranger,  
And pair’d with him in features and in shape.  
In all endowments, as in years, I deem,

My boy with blooming Norval might have number’d (II. 164–68).

Norval is, of course, the long-lost Douglas, much as Alpin is the long-lost Duffus.

<sup>40</sup> ’midst rocks afar ... meet her foes] cf. Home’s *Douglas*: ‘For I had heard of battles, and I long’d/ To follow to the field some warlike lord’ (II. 46–47). Also ‘having heard/That our good king had summon’d his bold peers/To lead their warriors to the Carron side,/I left my father’s house’ (II. 65–68). Douglas, however, lacks Alpin’s underlying patriotism.

<sup>41</sup> wait the storm at home ... ’ere it come] cf. Home’s *Douglas*: ‘Hence with my eyes behold/The storm of war that gathers o’er this land:/If I should perish by the Danish sword...’ (I. 93–95). Although this passage could be read in reference to Macpherson’s latent Jacobitism, with the recent uprising and the Jacobite army’s march to Derby as another instance of the Scots eagerly meeting their foes afar, Macpherson here, as elsewhere, emphasises the Scots’ justification for fighting: their country’s safety. Cf. *Highlander* I. 86, 106, 108.

<sup>42</sup> scion] descendant of a notable family.

<sup>43</sup> SCOTIA’s] originally referred to the Kingdom of Dál Riata on the north-east coast of Ireland, but was extended to the west coast and islands of Scotland in *c.* 500 AD. Subsequently, the Scots were one of the two major tribes in the Highlands, the Picts being the other.

<sup>44</sup> SCOTIA’s foes ... arms of state] cf. Home’s *Douglas*, IV. 447–50: ‘the ancient foe of Caledonia’s land/now waves his banners o’er her frighted fields./Suspend your purpose, till your country’s arms/Repel the bold invader’.

<sup>45</sup> ROMAN Eagles] the eagle was used by the Romans on their standards. The Roman Empire did not extend into Scotland, and the Picts and Scots continually fought back against the threat of invasion.

To curse the land, he try'd so oft in vain.<sup>46</sup>  
 NORVEGIAN<sup>47</sup> firs oft brought them o'er the waves,  
 For ALBION's crown; but ALBION gave 'em graves.  
 Be still the same, exert yourselves like men,  
 100 And of th' invaders wash our rocks again.<sup>48</sup>  
 Tho' few our numbers, these, in arms grown old,  
 In ALBION's and in INDULPH's cause are bold.  
 The brave man looks not, when the clarion<sup>49</sup> sounds,  
 To hostile numbers, but his country's wounds;  
 105 Bold to the last and dauntless he'll go on,  
 At once his country's soldier and her son.”

The monarch thus his royal mind exprest;  
 The patriot kindling in each gen'rous breast.  
 Each chieftain's mind with pleasure goes before,  
 110 Already mingling with the battle's roar.  
 In thought each Hero sweeps the bloody plain,  
 And deals, in fancy, death upon the DANE.

DUMBAR<sup>50</sup> arose, the brave remains of wars,  
 Silver'd with years, o'er-run with honest scars;  
 115 Great in the senate, in the field renown'd;  
 The senior stood: attention hung around.

He thus: “Fierce DENMARK all the North commands,  
 And belches numbers on our neighb'ring lands,  
 ENGLAND's subdu'd, the SAXONS are o'ercome,

---

<sup>46</sup> land, ... in vain] this refers to the Viking raids of Scotland from the late eighth century onwards.

<sup>47</sup> NORVEGIAN] see note 16.

<sup>48</sup> yourselves, my lords ... our rocks again] cf. Home's *Douglas*:

Right from their native land, the stormy north,  
 May the wind blow, till every keel is fix'd  
 Immovable in Caledonia's strand!  
 Then shall our foes repent their bold invasion,  
 And roving armies shun the fatal shore (I.109–13).

<sup>49</sup> clarion] a shrill-sounding trumpet with a narrow tube, used as a signal in war.

<sup>50</sup> DUMBAR] historically, Dumbar is mentioned by Buchanan in his account of Indulf's reign (I, p. 243) as one of Indulf's chieftains. None of the other historical Dumbars fit in with the mid-tenth-century setting of the poem: Gospatric, Earl of Northumberland and first Earl of Dunbar (1040–72), or Gospatric II, Earl of Dunbar (1062–1138), who died in the Battle of the Standard, or the 'Patrick earl of Dunbar' mentioned by Fordun, a thirteenth-century Scottish noble (II, p. 288).

120     And meanly own a DANISH lord at home.<sup>51</sup>  
        Scarce now a blast from SCANDINAVIA roars,  
        But wafts a hostile squadron to our shores.  
        One fleet destroy'd, another crowns the waves,  
        The sons seem anxious for their father's graves:  
 125     Thus war returns in an eternal round,  
        Battles on battles press, and wound on wound.<sup>52</sup>  
        Our numbers thinn'd, our godlike warriors dead,  
        Pale CALEDONIA hangs her sickly head;  
        We must be wise, be frugal of our store,  
 130     Add art to arms, and caution to our pow'r.  
        Beneath the sable<sup>53</sup> mantle of the night,  
        Rush on the foe, and, latent, urge the fight.  
        Conduct with few may foil this mighty pow'r,  
        And DENMARK shun th' inhospitable shore."  
 135             The senior spoke: a gen'ral voice approves;  
        To arm his kindred-bands each chief removes.  
        Night from the east the drousy<sup>54</sup> world invades,  
        And clothes the warriors in her dusky shades:  
        The vassal-throng<sup>55</sup> advance, a manly cloud,  
 140     And with their sable ranks the chieftains shroud.  
        Each chief, now here, now there, in armour shines,  
        Waves thro' the ranks, and draws the lengthen'd lines.

<sup>51</sup> ENGLAND's subdu'd ... own a DANISH lord at home] this refers to the Danelaw (from the Old English 'Dena lagu', Danish 'Danelagen'), an eleventh-century name for an area of northern and eastern England under the administrative control of the Danish Viking empire from the late ninth century until the early eleventh century. The poem does not mention the English, or Saxons, as the enemy of Scotland but instead focuses on the Vikings as a common foe. Indeed, this passage also expresses Scottish superiority: after all, while the English 'own a Danish lord at home', the Scots 'deal ... death upon the Dane' (l. 112). Mel Kersey notes that the fact that *The Highlander* depicts a battle between Scots and Vikings, and not Scots and English, aids in 'removing internal faction from the rhetorical unity of 'Albion'' ('Pre-Ossianic Politics', p. 65).

<sup>52</sup> Battles on battles press, and wound on wound] repetitious phrases such as are typical of epic poetry. See, for example, Milman Parry's oral-formulaic theory in *The Making of Homeric Verse: the Collected Papers of Milman Parry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971). Examples from other epics include Pope's *Iliad*, VIII. 76 ('To lances lances, shield to shields opposed'); Dryden's *Aeneid*, V. 198 ('From Woods to Woods, from Hills to Hills rebound'); *Paradise Lost*, II. 995 ('With ruin upon ruin, rout on rout'). The particular phrase here highlights the inevitability of war: inevitable in the context of the poem, but not in the context of Macpherson's present.

<sup>53</sup> sable] black.

<sup>54</sup> drousy] drowsy.

<sup>55</sup> vassal-throng] a group of feudal landholders, on conditions of homage and allegiance.

Thus, on a night when rattling tempests war,  
 Thro' broken clouds appears a blazing star;  
 145 Now veils its head, now rushes on the sight,  
 And shoots a livid horror thro' the night.<sup>56</sup>

The full form'd columns,<sup>57</sup> in the midnight hour,  
 Begin their silent journey tow'rds the shore:  
 Thro' ev'ry rank the chiefs inciting roam,  
 150 And rousing whispers hiss along the gloom.<sup>58</sup>

A rising hill, whose night-invelop'd brow  
 Hung o'er th' incamped squadrons of the foe,  
 Shoots to the deep its ooze immantled arm,  
 And, steadfast, struggles with the raging storm;  
 155 Here ends the moving host its winding road:  
 And here condenses, like a sable cloud,  
 Which long was gath'ring on the mountain's brow,  
 Then broke in thunder on the vales below.

Again the chiefs, in midnight council met,  
 160 Before the King maintain the calm debate:  
 This waits the equal contest of the day,  
 That rushes, headlong, to the nightly fray.

At length young ALPIN stood, and thus begun,  
 "Great King, supporter of our antient throne!  
 165 Brought up in mountains, and from councils far,

<sup>56</sup> thus, ... thro' the night] long comparisons, known as epic similes, such as this are typical of epic poetry. Blackwell examines them in the first part of Section X of his *Enquiry*. Examples from other epics include Pope's *Iliad*, XVII. 310–15 ('Thus, when a mountain ... rebellow to the roar'); Dryden's *Aeneid*, V. 599–602 ('So falls a hollow Pine ... rend the Skies'); *Paradise Lost*, X. 273–81 ('As when a flock ... from so far'). Malcolm Laing links this particular passage to a section from *Fingal*: 'The wind comes down on the woods; the torrents rush from the rocks; rain gathers round the head of Cromla; the red stars tremble between the flying clouds' (*The History of Scotland, from the Union of the Crowns on the Accession of James VI to the Throne of England, to the Union of the Kingdoms in the Reign of Queen Anne, with An Historical and Critical Dissertation on the Supposed Authenticity of Ossian's Poems*, ed. by Malcolm Laing, 2 vols (London: T. Cadell Jr, W. Davies, 1800), II, p. 401; the *Fingal* reference is from Book II (*PoO*, p. 69)).

<sup>57</sup> columns] this refers to the Scots' battle lines: each clan appears as an individual column. They are mentioned, for example, in John of Fordun's entry on King Duff, I, p. 161: 'when he had as usual sent forth his columns and companies'.

<sup>58</sup> The full form'd columns ... hiss along the gloom] cf. Buchanan: 'when Indulfus heard of [the Danes] landing, he marched towards them, before they could well have any Notice of his coming' (I, p. 243).

I am a novice in the art of war;<sup>59</sup>  
 Yet hear this thought. — Within the womb of night,  
 Confirm the troops, and arm the youth for fight;  
 While softly-treading to yon' camp I go,  
 170 And mark the disposition of the foe:  
 Or, wakeful, arm they for the dismal fight,  
 Or, wrapt within the lethargy of night,<sup>60</sup>  
 Are left abandon'd to our SCOTTISH sword,  
 By sleep's soft hand, in fatal chains secur'd.  
 175 If DENMARK sleeps in night's infolding arms,  
 Expect your spy to point out latent storms;  
 But, they in arms, too long delay'd my speed,  
 Then place the faithful scout among the dead.”  
 A gen'ral voice th' exploring thought approves,  
 180 And ev'ry wish with youthful ALPIN moves.  
 The Hero slides along the gloom of night,  
 The camp-fires send afar their gleaming light;  
 Athwart<sup>61</sup> his side the trusty sabre flies,  
 The various plaid hangs, plaited, down his thighs:<sup>62</sup>  
 185 The crested helm waves, awful, on his head;  
 His manly trunk the mail and corslet<sup>63</sup> shade:  
 The pond'rous spear supports his dusky way;  
 The waving steel reflects the stellar way.<sup>64</sup>  
 Arriv'd, the dauntless youth solemnly slow,  
 190 Observant, mov'd along the silent foe.  
 Some 'brac'd in arms the midnight vigil keep,  
 Some o'er the livid camp-fires nod to sleep:

<sup>59</sup> novice in the art of war] although Duffus claims that he only has limited experience, we later learn that he fought alongside his father, Rynold.

<sup>60</sup> Or ... Or] that is, if.

<sup>61</sup> athwart] across.

<sup>62</sup> The various plaid] plaid was one of the distinctive features of the Highlander, and the wearing of tartan was banned at the time when the poem was published.

<sup>63</sup> mail and corslet] armour made of metal rings or plates, joined to produce a flexible material. Macpherson is not very accurate in his depiction of armour in *The Highlander*, and is unconcerned to mix different period and regions.

<sup>64</sup> stellar way] this becomes 'stellar ray' in the later editions and is thus, possibly, a misprint'.



The feeding courser<sup>65</sup> to the stake is bound,  
 The prostrate horseman stretch'd along the ground:  
 195 Extended here the brawny footman lay,  
 And, dosing, wore the lazy night away.  
 The watchman there, by sleep's soft hand o'erpower'd,  
 Starts at the blast, and half unsheaths his sword.  
 Th' exploring youth, thro' night's involving cloud,  
 200 Circling the foe, their disposition view'd.  
 At length the Hero's dusky journey ends,  
 Where HACO<sup>66</sup> feasted with his DANISH friends;  
 HACO, by more than SUENO's blood, was great;  
 The promis'd monarch to the triple state.<sup>67</sup>  
 205 The SCANDINAVIAN camp the youth secur'd  
 With watchful troops, and not unfaithful sword.  
     Two oaks, from earth by headlong tempests torn,  
 Supply the fire, and in the circle burn;  
 Around with social talk the feast they share,  
 210 And drown in bowls the CALEDONIAN war:  
 O'erpower'd, at length, by slumber's silken hand,  
 They press the beach, and cow'r upon the strand.<sup>68</sup>  
     A gallant deed the Mountain-youth design'd,  
 And nurs'd a growing action in his mind.  
 215 Awful the chief advanc'd: his armour bright  
 Reflects the fire and shines along the night.  
 Hov'ring he stood above the sleeping band,  
 And shone, an awful column, o'er the strand.  
     Thus, often to the midnight traveller,  
 220 The stalking figures of the dead appear:

<sup>65</sup> courser] a battle horse.

<sup>66</sup> HACO] there are several possible historical Hacos: the most likely one is Haakon, son of Harald I of Denmark (Harald Bluetooth Gormsen), brother of Sweyn Forkbeard. This Haakon was born in 961, and is thus contemporary with Dub. It could also be Haakon I of Norway (934–61). Buchanan mentions a Hago as one of two Scandinavian admirals in his entry on Indulf (I, p. 243), which might well be this Haakon (and which is where Macpherson probably found the name).

<sup>67</sup> triple state] Norway, Denmark and Sweden.

<sup>68</sup> They press the beach] they fall down on the beach, overcome by sleep.

Silent the spectre tow'rs before the sight,  
 And shines, an awful image, thro' the night.  
 At length the giant phantom hovers o'er  
 Some grave unhallow'd, stain'd with murder'd gore.

225           Thus ALPIN stood: He exiles to the dead  
 Six warrior-youths; the trembling remnant fled;  
 Young HACO starts, unsheaths his shining sword,  
 And views his friends in iron-chains secur'd.  
 He rushes, headlong, on the daring foe;  
 230 The godlike ALPIN renders blow for blow.  
 Their clatt'ring swords on either armour fell;  
 Fire flashes round, as steel contends with steel.  
 Young ALPIN's sword on HACO's helmet broke,  
 And to the ground the stagg'ring warrior took.  
 235 Leaning on his broad shield the Hero bends;  
 ALPIN, aloft in air, his sword suspends:  
 His arm up-rais'd, he downward bends his brow,  
 But scorn'd to take advantage of the foe.<sup>69</sup>

                  Young HACO from his hand the weapon threw,  
 240 And from his flaming breast these accents drew.  
 "Bravest of men! who cou'd thro' night come on,  
 Who durst attack, and foil an host alone.  
 I see the man high on the warrior plac'd,  
 Both mend each other in your noble breast.  
 245 Accept, brave man, the friendship of a DANE,  
 Who hates the SCOT but yet can love the man."  
 He said: while thus the SCOT; "with joy, I find  
 The man so pow'rful in an en'my's mind;  
 Your forces fled, amidst night's dark alarms,

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<sup>69</sup> Young HACO starts, ... scorn'd to take advantage of the foe] this encounter is reminiscent of that of Glaucus and Diomed in the *Iliad*, Book VI: the only instance in the *Iliad* where foes scorn to kill one another. Also cf. the London prologue of Home's *Douglas*, which describes the enmity between Piercy, an English hero, and Douglas, the Scottish hero: 'But whilst those generous rivals fought and fell, Those generous rivals lov'd each other well' (ll. 11–12). Critics have noted the treatment of vanquished foes as a symptom of the layer of sensibility that alerted Macpherson's contemporaries to the modernity of the OC: Duffus anticipates (Romantic) Men of Feeling. He is rewarded with Haco's respect and Haco's shield; not as spoils of war but instead in order to evade one another in the coming battle.

250 You both cou'd stand, and use your gallant arms:  
 Such valiant deeds thy dauntless soul confess,  
 That I the warrior, tho' the DANE, embrace."<sup>70</sup>  
     His brawny arms he round the Hero flung;  
 As they embrace the clashing corslets rung.<sup>71</sup>

255 The DANE resumes: "With the sun's rising beam,  
 We may, in fields of death, contend for fame;  
 Receive this shield, that, midst to-morrow's storms,  
 HACO may, grateful, shun his well-known arms."<sup>72</sup>  
     He said, and gave the gold-enamel'd round;

260 While, as he reach'd, the studded thongs resound.  
 The amicable colloquy they end,  
 And each a foe, clasp'd in his arms a friend.<sup>73</sup>  
 This to the camp his dusky journey bends;  
 While that to ALBION's chiefs the hill ascends.

265 Th' exploring journey, all, with pleasure, hear,  
 And own the valiant scout their noble care.  
     Dissolv'd the council, the attack declin'd,  
 Each with the gift of sleep indulg'd his mind;  
 And 'midst his kindred-bands, supinely laid,

270 Each softly slumber'd on a mossy bed.  
     His mind to soft repose young ALPIN bends,  
 And seeks the humble circle of his friends:  
 Reclining on a rock the Hero lies,  
 And gradual slumbers steal upon his eyes.

275 Still to his mind the DANISH camp arose,  
 Hung on his dreams, and hagg'd<sup>74</sup> his calm repose;

<sup>70</sup> tho' the DANE, embrace] cf. Home's *Douglas*: 'the man I dread/Is as a Dane to me' (I. 325–26).

<sup>71</sup> Accept, brave man, ... corslets rung] Stafford notes this passage as indicative of Macpherson's 'romantic quality': his insistence on 'eighteenth-century ideas of morality' (*Sublime Savage*, p. 70).

<sup>72</sup> Receive this shield, ... shun his well-known arms] this is an inversion of the classical tradition of the winner acquiring the loser's arms. In the *Iliad*, for example, Hector wears Achilles's arms in Book XVII, after he has won them from Patroclus. However, Aeneas is equally generous when he refuses to take Lausus's arms in book X of the *Aeneid*.

<sup>73</sup> clasp'd in his arms a friend] cf. Home's *Douglas*: 'Ruling fate decreed,/That my brave brother should in battle save/The life of Douglas's son, our house's foe:/The youthful warriors vow'd eternal friendship' (I. 178–181).

<sup>74</sup> hagg'd] troubled as a nightmare.

Once more he mix'd with HACO in the fight  
And urg'd, impending, on the DANISH flight.

*End of Canto first.*

## CANTO II.

HEAV'N'S op'ning portals shot the beam of day;  
 Earth chang'd her sable robe to sprightly grey:  
 To West's dark goal the humid night is fled,  
 The sun, o'er ocean, rears his beamy head:  
 5 The splendid gleam from SCOTTISH steel returns,  
 And all the light reflexive mountains burns.<sup>1</sup>

Deep-sounding bag-pipes, gaining on the air,  
 With lofty voice awake the SCOTTISH war.<sup>2</sup>  
 The gallant chiefs, along the mountain's brow,  
 10 Stand 'cass'd in arms, and low'r<sup>3</sup> upon the foe;  
 Or, awful, thro' the forming squadrons shine,  
 Build up the ranks, and stretch the lengthen'd line.

Each Clan their standards from the beam unbind,  
 They float along, and clap upon the wind;<sup>4</sup>  
 15 The hieroglyphic honours of the brave,<sup>5</sup>  
 Acquire a double horror as they wave.<sup>6</sup>

The Southern warriors stretch the lines of war  
 Full on the right, obedient to DUMBAR.  
 Harden'd to manhood in the school of arms,  
 20 He moves along sedately as he forms:  
 Next deeply stretch their regular array,

<sup>1</sup> The sun, ... mountains burns] cf. Fragment IV (*Fragments of Ancient Poetry*): 'the sun was on their shields: Like a ridge of fire they descended the hill' (*PoO*, p. 11).

<sup>2</sup> Deep-sounding bag-pipes ... SCOTTISH war] these two lines are reminiscent of *Paradise Lost*, I. 551ff: '... of flutes and soft recorders; such as raised/To height of noblest temper heroes old/Arming to battle'. However, the scene is distinctly Scottish, with its 'bagpipes' and 'Scottish war'.

<sup>3</sup> low'r] frown.

<sup>4</sup> Each Clan ... clap upon the wind] cf. note 47. The heroes mentioned here are historical.

<sup>5</sup> hieroglyphic honours of the brave] that is, the pictures on the standards to signify the individual clans. 'Hieroglyphic' evokes mystery and foreignness as Egyptian hieroglyphs were not deciphered until the Rosetta Stone was discovered by Napoleon's troops in 1799. There is an interest in hieroglyphs and pictorial language more generally in William Warburton's *The Divine Legation of Moses* (1737–41), a book cited heavily by Étienne Bonot de Condillac in his *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge* (1756) (which was in turn read by Adam Smith and others).

<sup>6</sup> Each clan ... as they wave] cf. *Fingal*: 'We reared the sun-beam of battle; the standard of the king. Each hero's soul exulted with joy, as, waving, it flew on the wind. It was studded with gold above, as the blue wide shell of the nightly sky. Each hero had standard too; and each his gloomy men' (Book II (*PoO*, p. 87). Derick Thomson links this passage in *Fingal* to the Magnus Ballad in Jerome Stone's collection.

To break the iron tempest of the day,  
 The sons of LENNOX;<sup>7</sup> and their gallant GRAHAME,<sup>8</sup>  
 Oft honour'd with the bloody spoils of fame.  
 25 He tow'rs along with unaffected pride,  
 Whilst they display their blazing arms aside.  
       Great SOMERLED<sup>9</sup> possess the middle space,  
 And rang'd the kindred valour of his race;  
 The dauntless sons of MORCHUAN's<sup>10</sup> rocky soil,<sup>11</sup>  
 30 And the rough manhood of MULL's<sup>12</sup> sea-girt isle.  
       The Mountain-chiefs, in burning arms incass'd,  
 And carrying all their country in their breast,  
 Undaunted rear their useful arms on high;  
 Now fought for food, and now for liberty:  
 35 Now met the sport of hills, now of the main,<sup>13</sup>  
 Here pierc'd a stag, and there transfix'd a DANE.<sup>14</sup>  
 Tho' nature's walls their homely huts inclose,  
 To guard their homely huts tho' mountains rose;  
 Yet feeling ALBION in their breasts, they dare

<sup>7</sup> LENNOX] probably one of the Mormaers, or Gaelic Earls, of Lennox. One of the Earls of Lennox, a contemporary of Robert the Bruce, is mentioned by Fordun (II, p. 335).

<sup>8</sup> Grahame] like Dumbar, Grame is mentioned in Buchanan's entry on Indulf (I, p. 243), and it is likely that Macpherson found the name here. There is, however, a historical Graham, or Gryme, roughly contemporary with the poem: the grandson of King Duf. Both he and Malcolm, son of Kenneth, son of Malcolm II, were crowned King at the same time, and Gryme ruled from 996–1004 (Fordun, I, pp. 165–71; Buchanan, I, pp. 264–67). There is also a legend concerning another Graeme or Gryme, the grandfather of King Eugenius, the chief of Clan Graham, who broke through the Antonine Wall to drive the Romans out of Scotland.

<sup>9</sup> SOMERLED] (Old Norse *Sumarliði*, Scottish Gaelic *Somhairle*) a twelfth-century military and political leader of the Scottish Isles. Fordun mentions 'Sumerled, kinglet of Argyll' as a contemporary of Malcolm IV (II, p. 249) and interestingly describes him as a traitor: 'Sumerled, likewise, King of Argyll, of whom we have spoken above, impiously fought, for twelve years, against King Malcolm, his lord' (II, p. 252). Buchanan echoes this (I, p. 306).

<sup>10</sup> MORCHUAN's] the Gaelic name of Ardnamurchan, a peninsula in Lochaber (Macpherson's Abria).

<sup>11</sup> rocky soil] cf. Home's *Douglas*, 'Prologue Spoken at Edinburgh', l. 4: 'Rugged her soil, and rocky was her shore'.

<sup>12</sup> MULL's] the second largest island of the Inner Hebrides.

<sup>13</sup> main] sea.

<sup>14</sup> Now met the sport .... transfix'd a DANE] hunting and war are seen as complementing each other perfectly. cf. Home's *Douglas*: 'No sportive war; no tournament essay' (IV. 6).

40 From rocks to rush and meet the distant war.<sup>15</sup>  
     The full-form'd lines now crown the mountain's brow,<sup>16</sup>  
 And wave a blazing forest o'er the foe.  
 The King commands; down, in array, they creep,  
 Their clanking arms beat time to ev'ry step;  
 45 As they descend they stretch along the strand,  
 Restore the ranks, and make a solemn stand.  
     Before the camp the DANISH columns rise,  
 And stretch the battle to the clarion's voice.  
 Majestic SUENO kept the higher place,  
 50 Great in the war, as in his noble race;  
 And, when the sword to milder peace shall yield,  
 In council great, as in the thund'ring field.<sup>17</sup>  
     Behind their King, to either hand afar,  
 Rough NORWAY's sons extend the front of war.  
 55 He moves, incass'd in steel and majesty,  
 Along the ranks, and plans them with his eye:  
 Speaks his commands with unaffected ease,  
 And, unconcern'd, the coming battle sees;  
 Bent on his purpose, obstinately brave,  
 60 To win a kingdom or an honest grave;  
 He seem'd to look tow'rds NORWAY's rocky shore,  
 And say, — I'll conquer, or return no more.

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<sup>15</sup> Tho' nature's walls ... meet the distant war] although they prefer the play and humble peasant life of peacetime, they unequivocally come to their country's aid when needed. Note the use of 'dare' here: the Scots do not want or need to rush to war, but instead courageously venture forth for the sake of liberty and national honour. Stafford reads this passage as emphasising parallels between Fingal's legendary militia and Duffus's Highland army (*Sublime Savage*, p. 69). 'Homely' also implies domesticism and peaceableness.

<sup>16</sup> The full-form'd lines now crown the mountain's brow] before the seventeenth century Highlanders fought in tight lines with shields and broadswords, where one warrior would simultaneously attack with his sword and protect his neighbour with his shield. The Highland Charge, a military practice that involved running down from the mountain at great speed to attack the enemy while they were reloading their muskets, was a later practice, used particularly in the Jacobite risings (successfully at Prestonpans, but not at Culloden). For medieval weaponry see David H. Caldwell, ed., *Scottish Weapons and Fortifications 1100–1800* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1981); for the Highland Charge, see Geoffrey Parker, *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 35.

<sup>17</sup> Great in the war, ... in the thund'ring field] this passage emphasises the equality of the Scots and Danes.

Far to the right fierce MAGNUS'<sup>18</sup> fiery sway  
 Compels the troops, and rears the quick array:  
 65 Haughty, he moves, and catching flame from far,  
 Looks tow'rds the SCOTS, anticipates the war;  
 Feels cruel joys in all his fibres rise,  
 And gathers all his fury to his eyes.<sup>19</sup>

Young HACO, on the left, the battle rears,  
 70 And moves majestic thro' a wood of spears;<sup>20</sup>  
 With martial skill the rising ranks he forms,  
 No novice in the iron-trade of arms.<sup>21</sup>  
 Thus form'd, the DANES, in unconfus'd array,  
 Stretch their long lines along the murm'ring sea.  
 75 Their anchor'd ships, a sable wood, behind,  
 Nod on the wave and whistle to the wind.

On either side, thus stretch'd the manly line,  
 With darting gleam the steel-clad ridges shine:  
 On either side the gloomy lines incede,  
 80 Foot rose with foot, and head advanc'd with head.  
 Thus when two winds descend upon the main,  
 To fight their battles on the wat'ry plain;  
 In two black lines the equal waters croud,  
 On either side the white-top'd ridges nod.  
 85 At length they break, and raise a bubbling sound,  
 While echo rumbles from the rocks around.<sup>22</sup>

Thus march the DANES with spreading wings afar,  
 Thus moves the horror of the SCOTTISH war;  
 While drowsy silence droops her mournful head,

<sup>18</sup> MAGNUS'] a generic Viking name; possibly an allusion to one of two Magnuses: Magnus I, King of Norway 1035–47 and King of Denmark 1042–47; or Magnus Barefoot, King of Norway 1093–1103 and King of Mann and the Isles 1099–1102.

<sup>19</sup> Haughty, he moves ... fury to his eyes] in contrast to the Scots the Danes relish the challenge of war: the 'cruel joys' are noticeably absent from the Scottish side.

<sup>20</sup> wood of spears] used often in epic poetry. Examples can be found in Pope's *Iliad*, V. 767, X. 174; Dryden's *Aeneid*, IX. 1072; *Paradise Lost*, I. 447.

<sup>21</sup> No novice in the iron trade of arms] cf. Duffus's 'I am a novice in the art of war' (I. 166; note 45).

<sup>22</sup> On either side ... from the rocks around] cf. Buchanan: 'when the Armies came in sight of each other, they both drew up in Battle array, and fell to it with equal Force and Courage (I, p. 243).



90       Whose calm repose the clanking arms invade.  
           The Mountain-youth with unaffected pride,  
 Twice thirty warriors rising by his side,  
 His native band, precedes the SCOTTISH forms,  
 A shining column in the day of arms.

95       In act to throw, he holds the pond'rous spear,  
 And views, with awful smiles, the face of war.  
 Nodding along, his polish'd helmet shines,  
 And looks, superior, o'er the subject lines.  
           On either side, devour'd the narrow ground

100      The moving troops. — The hostile ridges frown'd.  
 From either host the HERALD's awful breath  
 Rung, in the trumpet's throat, the peal of death.  
 The martial sound foments<sup>23</sup> their kindling rage;  
 Onward they rush, and in a shout engage.

105      The swords thro' air their gleaming journeys fly,  
 Crash on the helms and tremble in the sky.  
 Groan follows groan, and wound succeeds on wound,  
 While dying bodies quiver on the ground.  
           Thus when devouring hatchet-men invade,

110      With sounding steel, the forest's leavy head,  
 The mountains ring with their repeated strokes;<sup>24</sup>  
 The tap'ring firs, the elms, the aged oaks,  
 Quake at each gash; then nod the head and yield;  
 Groan as they fall, and tremble on the field.

115      Thus fell the men; blood forms a lake around,  
 While groans and spears hoarse harmony resound.  
 The mountains hear, and thunder back the noise,  
 And eccho stammers with unequal voice.  
           As yet the battle hung in doubtful scales;

120      Each bravely fought, in death or only fails.  
           All, all are bent on death or victory,

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<sup>23</sup> foments] excites.

<sup>24</sup> Onward they rush ... repeated strokes] cf. the description of the battle in Pope's *Iliad*, IV. 508–19 ('Now shield with shield, with helmet helmet clos'd ... chanel to the main').

Resolv'd to conquer, or with glory die.<sup>25</sup>  
 Fierce DENMARK's honour kindles fire in these;  
 On these pale ALBION bends her parent-eyes.  
 125 This sternly says, "shall DENMARK's children fly?"  
 But that, "or save, or with your country die."<sup>26</sup>  
 The SCOTS, a Stream, wou'd sweep the DANES away,  
 The DANES, a Rock,<sup>27</sup> repell'd the SCOTS array.  
 They fight alternate, and alternate fly.  
 130 Both wound, both conquer, both with glory die.  
     Thrice HACO strove to break DUMBAR's array,  
 And thrice DUMBAR impell'd him to the sea.  
 The fiery MAGNUS, foaming on the right,  
 Pours on the Mountain-chiefs his warrior-might.  
 135 The Mountain-youths the furious chief restrain,  
 And turn the battle back upon the DANE.  
 The ranks of SUENO stand in firm array,  
 As hoary rocks repel the raging sea.  
 The Hero to the phalanx<sup>28</sup> crouds his might,  
 140 And calmly manages the standing fight;  
 Not idly madd'ning in the bloody fray,  
 He wears delib'rately the foe away.  
     Straight on his spear the godlike ALPIN stood,  
 His flaming armour 'smear'd with DANISH blood:  
 145 He casts behind an awe-commanding look,  
 And to his few, but valiant, followers spoke.  
 "The cautious DANES, O friends, in firm array,

<sup>25</sup> conquer, ... with glory die] cf. Home's *Douglas*: 'like Douglas conquer! or, like Douglas die' (V. 100). These lines are also reminiscent of *Paradise Lost*, II. 255–57 ('preferring/Hard liberty before the easy yoke/Of servile pomp'), and VI. 232–46 ('led in fight, yet leader seemed ... in even scale/The battle hung').

<sup>26</sup> save, or with your country die] cf. Home's *Douglas*, where 'to win a country, or to lose themselves' is the ardent desire of the Scots (III. 280).

<sup>27</sup> The SCOTS, a Stream ... the DANES, a Rock] this analogy of the Scots as water and the Danes as rock is used repeatedly in the poem. Cf., for example, II. 138, 160. Laing finds a similar passage in *Fingal*: 'As roll a thousand waves to a rock, so Swaran's host came on. As meets a rock a thousand waves, so Erin met Swaran of spears. — Frothal came forth with the stream of his people. But they met a rock. Fingal stood unmoved. Broken they rolled back from his side' (*History of Scotland*, ed. by Laing, II, p. 402; the *Fingal* reference is from Book II (*PoO*, p. 60)).

<sup>28</sup> phalanx] a shield wall.

With perseverance may secure the day;  
 Our people fall. — Let us their force divide;  
 150 Invade with flame their transports on the tide.  
 They will defend, the SCOTS restore the day;  
 Follow, my friends, your ALPIN leads the way.”  
 He said, and rush’d upon the phalanx’d DANE,  
 The bending ranks beneath his sword complain.  
 155 Arms, groans of men, beat time to ev’ry wound,  
 Nod at each blow, and thunder on the ground.  
 Behind his friends advance with martial care,  
 Move step for step, and spread the lane of war.  
 He low’rs before, and clears the rugged road;  
 160 They rush behind, a rough and headlong flood.  
       Thus on some eminence, the lab’ring swain  
 Unlocks his sluice to drench the thirsty plain:  
 With mattock<sup>29</sup> arm’d he shapes the water’s course,  
 The liquid flows behind, with rapid force.  
 165       Thus valiant ALPIN hews his bloody way,  
 And thus his friends force thro’ their firm array;  
 With great effort he seizes on the strand,  
 Turns to his friends, and issues his command.  
       “Thicken your lines, the battle’s shock sustain,  
 170 And gall<sup>30</sup> with vigour the recoiling DANE.  
 Brave CALEDONIANS!<sup>31</sup> face your country’s foe;  
 Your lives are hers, her own on her bestow.”  
 He added not. — The valiant youths obey:  
 The Hero shap’d along his rapid way;  
 175 Rush’d to the camp, and seiz’d a flaming brand,<sup>32</sup>  
 Then took his lofty seat upon the strand.  
 Swift, from his arm, the crackling ember flies,

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<sup>29</sup> mattock] agricultural pick-axe.

<sup>30</sup> gall] to harass or annoy in warfare.

<sup>31</sup> CALEDONIANS] this predates the earliest *OED* example of ‘Caledonian’, meaning the inhabitants of ancient Caledonia. Incidentally, the earliest example is Macpherson’s *Critical Dissertations on the Origin of the Ancient Caledonians* (1768).

<sup>32</sup> brand] torch.

Whizzes along, and kindles in the skies:  
 The pitchy hull receives the sparkling fire;  
 180 The kindling ship the fanning winds inspire.  
 Black smoke ascends: at length the flames arise,  
 Hiss thro' the shrouds, and crackle in the skies.  
 The riding fleet is all in darkness lost,  
 Its canvas wings the flame spreads on the blast.  
 185 Red embers, falling from the burning shroud,  
 Hiss in the wave, and bubble in the flood.  
         Great SUENO turns, and sees the flame behind  
 Swell its huge columns on the driving wind;  
 Then thus to ERIC<sup>33</sup> — “Urge your speedy flight,  
 190 Recal the fiery MAGNUS from the right:  
 Quick let him come! th' endanger'd transports save,  
 And dash against the burning ship the wave.”  
         The youth obeys, and, flying o'er the sand,  
 Repeats in MAGNUS' ear the King's command.  
 195 The warrior starts, rage sparkling in his eyes,  
 He tow'rs along resounding as he flies:  
 He comes. — From SUENO's army squadrons fall  
 Around the chief, and rear the manly wall;  
 Till in their front the stately chief appears,  
 200 They wave, behind, an iron wood of spears;  
 In all the gloomy pomp of battle low'r,  
 And beat with sounding steps the fatal shore.  
         Bent to support the flame, his thin array  
 Young ALPIN draws along the murm'ring sea.  
 205 He holds the massy spear in act to throw,  
 And bends his fiery eyes upon the foe.  
 Advanc'd. — With awful din the fight began;  
 Steel speaks on steel; man urges upon man.  
 Groans, shouts, arms, men, a jarring discord sound,  
 210 Gain on the sky and shake the mountains round.

<sup>33</sup> ERIC] a generic Viking name. Possibly an allusion to Eric Bloodaxe, King of Norway 931–33, who was succeeded by Haakon I.

Fierce MAGNUS, here, wou'd rush into the main:  
 Young ALPIN, there, wou'd keep at bay the DANE.  
 One pushes the swift boat into the sea;  
 Thro' his bent back the faulchion<sup>34</sup> cleaves its way:  
 215 Another dashes to the ship the wave,  
 And bends at once into a wat'ry grave;  
 Spouts with departing breath the bubbling flood,  
 And dyes the water with his foaming blood.

Thus fought the men. — Behind the flame resounds,  
 220 Gains on the fleet, and spreads its wasteful bounds.  
 Great MAGNUS, burning at the dismal sight,  
 Advanc'd with rage redoubled to the fight.  
 "Degen'rate DANES" — The raging warrior cries,  
 "The day is lost — Your fame, your honour dies!  
 225 Advance, — condense your ranks, — bear on your way,  
 And sweep these daring striplings<sup>35</sup> to the sea."  
 The men advance. — Proceeds their haughty lord,  
 And wounds the air with his impatient sword.  
 Bending, where ALPIN reapt the bloody plain,  
 230 "Turn, here's a man, turn, stripling, here's a DANE!"  
 He said. — The Mountain-warrior turns his eyes,  
 Then sternly wheels, and with a blow replies.  
 Great MAGNUS falling on young ALPIN's shield,  
 Adds to the dismal thunder of the field.  
 235 Revengeful ALPIN, with descending blade,  
 Crashes the shining thunder on his head.  
 They aim, defend; their swords, at every stroke,  
 Talk on the way, and gleam along the smoke.

At length on MAGNUS Fate deals home a wound;  
 240 He nods to death, and thunders on the ground.  
 Starting from the wide wound the bubbling blood,

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<sup>34</sup> faulchion] falchion: a broadsword.

<sup>35</sup> striplings] a youth. 'Stripling' is a common epic term, found in both Pope's *Iliad* and Dryden's *Aeneid*. However, it is also picked up by Home's *Douglas*, which shares with *The Highlander* not its epic genre, but its Scottish setting and parts of the story.

Sinks thro' the sand, and rolls a smoaking flood.  
 Prone on the strand, extended ev'ry way,  
 Clad o'er with steel, a shining trunk he lay.  
 245 Thus, on its lofty seat, shou'd winds invade  
 The statue keeps the mem'ry of the dead;  
 It quakes at ev'ry blast, and nods around,  
 Then falls, a shapeless ruin, to the ground.

The DANES beholding their commander die,  
 250 Start from their ranks, and in confusion fly.  
 The youth pursues: the flames behind him roar  
 Catch all the fleet, and clothe with smoke the shore.  
 Mean time great SUENO, DENMARK's valiant King,  
 Round royal INDULPH bends the hostile ring,  
 255 Hemm'd in a circle of invading men,  
 They face on ev'ry side the closing DANE;  
 Deal blow for blow, and wound return for wound,  
 And bring the stagg'ring en'my to the ground.  
 Great SOMERLED, ARGYLE's majestic lord,  
 260 Thro' HARALD's<sup>36</sup> sounding helmet drives his sword:  
 Stagg'ring he falls, his rattling arms resound,  
 And in the pangs of death he bites the ground.

Thro' HILRIC's<sup>37</sup> shield great INDULPH urg'd the spear,  
 It pierc'd his breast, and smok'd behind in air:  
 265 Groaning he sinks; as when repeated strokes  
 Bring headlong to the ground the slaughter'd ox.

Brave GRAHAME thro' mighty CANUTE<sup>38</sup> urg'd the spear,  
 Where, 'twixt the helm and mail, the neck was bare.  
 Press'd with the helm his pond'rous head inclin'd;  
 270 He nodding falls, as trees o'erturn'd by wind.

<sup>36</sup> HARALD's] a generic Viking name; possibly an allusion to Harald Bluetooth Gormson, Harald I of Denmark (Danish: *Harald Blåtand*, Old Norse: *Haraldr Blátönn*, Norwegian: *Harald Blåtann*), c. 935–86.

<sup>37</sup> HILRIC's] a fictional character; his name is not found in any of the chronicles.

<sup>38</sup> CANUTE] a generic Viking name; possibly an allusion to Canute I, or Canute the Great, King of England 1016–35, King of Denmark 1018–35, King of Norway 1028–35. Canute led the Viking forces in the Battle of Cruden in 1012. He was the son of Sweyn Forkbeard (Fordun, I, p. 176). However, Canute I of course did not die at the hands of the Scots, nor did he live in the tenth century.

While thus the en'my's front the chieftains wore,  
 And pil'd with hostile trunks the fatal shore;  
 By slow degrees their force declines away,  
 Surrounding DENMARK gains upon the day.  
 275 Great INDULPH stood amidst the warrior-ring;  
 All give attention to their valiant King.  
 "Hear me, ye chiefs," the mournful monarch cries,  
 "We fall to day, our state, our country dies.  
 Let us acquit ourselves of ALBION's death,  
 280 And yield in her defence our latest breath."  
 He said: and rush'd from the surrounding ring,  
 And 'midst the battle fought the DANISH King,  
 Ready to fight the royal warriors stood,  
 And long'd to revel in each others blood;  
 285 While ALPIN rushing from the flaming shore,  
 With wasteful path, pursu'd the flying pow'r;  
 Hew'd thro' great SUENO's ring his bloody way,  
 And to the desp'rate chieftains gave the day;  
 Rush'd 'twixt great INDULPH and bold SUENO's sword,  
 290 And with his royal life<sup>39</sup> preserv'd his lord.  
 Brave SUENO nods, falls to the strand, and cries;  
 "O honour! DENMARK lost, undone!" — and dies.  
 But still fierce DENMARK made a broken stand;  
 Here stands a squadron, there a gloomy band,  
 295 Rears a firm column on the smoky shore,  
 Makes the last efforts of a dying pow'r.  
 Thus, after fire thro' lanes its way has took,  
 A prostrate village lies o'erwhelm'd in smoke;  
 But here and there some sable turrets stand,  
 300 And look, a dismal ruin, o'er the land.  
 So stood the DANES; but, soon o'erpower'd, they fly,  
 Stumble along, and in their flight they die.  
 NORVEGIA's sons, of MAGNUS's fire bereft,

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<sup>39</sup> royal life] another hint at Duffus's true identity.

Fell down before the chieftains of the left.  
305 The great DUMBAR upon the right repell'd  
Young HACO's force, and swept him off the field:  
He winds his hasty march along the coast,  
Fights as he flies, and shields his little host.  
At length, within a wood o'ershades the sea,  
310 With new fell'd oaks he walls his thin array;  
Bent on his fate, and obstinately brave,  
There mark'd at once his battle-field and grave.

*End of Canto second.*



## CANTO III.

AS when, beneath the night's tempestuous cloud,  
 Embattl'd<sup>1</sup> winds assail the leafy wood;  
 Tear on their sable way with awful sound,  
 And bring the groaning forest to the ground:  
 5 The trunks of elms, the shrub, the fir, the oak,  
 In one confusion sink beneath the shock.  
 So death's sad spoils the bloody field bestrow'd;<sup>2</sup>  
 The haughty chieftain, the ignoble croud,<sup>3</sup>  
 The coward, brave, partake the common wound,  
 10 Are friends in death, and mingle on the ground.  
       Dark night approach'd. — The flaming lord of day  
 Had plung'd his glowing circle in the sea.  
 On the blue sky the gath'ring clouds arise,  
 And tempests clap their wings along the skies.  
 15 The murm'ring voice of heav'n, at distance, fails,  
 And eddying whirl-winds howl along the vales.  
 The sky inwrapt in awful darkness low'rs,  
 And threatens to descend, at once, in show'rs.  
       The CALEDONIAN chiefs, to shun the storm,  
 20 Beneath a leafy oak their council form.  
 An antient trunk supports the weary King;  
 The nobles bend around the standing ring.  
 With swords unsheath'd the awful forms appear'd,  
 Their shining arms with DANISH blood besmear'd:  
 25 Their eyes shoot fire; their meins<sup>4</sup> unsettled shew,  
 The battle frowns as yet upon their brow.  
 The monarch rose, and leaning on the oak,  
 Stretch'd out his hand, and to the nobles spoke.  
 "My lords! the DANES, for so just heav'n decreed,

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<sup>1</sup> Embattl'd] drawn up in battle array.

<sup>2</sup> bestrow'd] mostly covered.

<sup>3</sup> croud] crowd; in *Paradise Lost*, Milton uses 'croud' instead of 'crowd'.

<sup>4</sup> meins] miens (sixteenth- to eighteenth-century usage).

30        Ev'n on that shore they thought to conquer, bleed.  
           In vain Death wrapt our fathers in his gloom,  
           We raise them, in our actions, from the tomb.<sup>5</sup>  
           Not infamous their aim, o'er lands afar  
           To spread destruction and the plague of war;  
 35        To meet the sons of battle as they roam,  
           Content to ward them from their native home;  
           To shew invaders that they dar'd to die,  
           For barren rocks, for fame and liberty.<sup>6 7</sup>  
           In you they live, fall'n DENMARK's host may shew;  
 40        Accept my thanks; your country thanks you too."  
           He added not:<sup>8</sup> but turn'd his eyes around,  
           Till in the ring the valiant youth he found.  
           "Approach, brave youth!" the smiling monarch cry'd,  
           "Your country's soldier, and your country's pride,  
 45        SCOTLAND shall thank thee for this gallant strife,  
           While grateful INDULPH owes to thee his life."  
           Thus he, advancing, — and with ardour prest  
           The gallant warrior to his royal breast.  
           The unpretentious ALPIN bends his eyes,  
 50        And mix'd with blushes to the King replies.  
           "To save our King, our country's antient throne,  
           Are debts incumbent on her ev'ry son;  
           O monarch! add it not to ALPIN's praise,  
           That, of this gen'ral debt, his part he pays."  
 55        Thus said the youth, and modestly retir'd,  
           While, as he moves, the King and chief admir'd:  
           Slow to his stand his easy steps he bears,  
           And hears his praises with unwilling ears.

<sup>5</sup> In vain Death ... from the tomb] like the stone statues in Canto 1, the past is brought to life here.

<sup>6</sup> Not infamous their aim ... for fame and liberty] the Scottish preference for homely pursuits extends to battle.

<sup>7</sup> The monarch rose ... and liberty] cf. Kersey, who offers a Bolingbrokean Patriot Whig reading of this section: the ancestral spirits are patriotism and liberty personified, not tyranny ('Pre-Ossianic Politics', p. 69).

<sup>8</sup> He added not] he said no more.

The King resumes. — “O chiefs, O valiant peers!

60 Glad CALEDONIA dries her running tears:  
 The warrior rais'd his faulchion o'er her head  
 Now sleeps, forgotten, on an earthen bed.  
 Fierce SCANDINAVIA's fatal storms are o'er,  
 Her thunder-bolts lie harmless on the shore.  
 65 But as when, after night, has beat a storm,  
 On the mild morn some spots the sky deform;  
 The broken clouds from ev'ry quarter sail,  
 Join their black troops, and all the heav'ns veil;  
 The winds arise, descends the sluicy<sup>9</sup> rain,  
 70 The storm, with force redoubl'd, beats the plain:  
 So, when the youthful HACO shall afar  
 Collect the broken fragments of the war,  
 The Hero, arm'd with SUENO's death, may come  
 And claim an expiation<sup>10</sup> on his tomb;  
 75 Deep in that wood the gallant warrior lies  
 Who shall, to night, his little camp surprize;  
 Surround the martial DANE with nightly care,  
 And give the final stroke to dying war:  
 Hence<sup>11</sup> NORWAY's ships shall shun our fatal sea,  
 80 And point the crooked beak<sup>12</sup> another way;  
 If chance they spy where oft their armies fell,  
 Shall turn the prow, and croud away<sup>13</sup> the sail.”

He said no more: the gen'rous chiefs arise,  
 Bent on the glory of the enterprize.  
 85 Eager to climb thro' dang'rous paths to fame,  
 The nightly war they severally claim.  
 One chief observ'd where godlike HACO lay;  
 This knew the wood; — and that, the dusky way:

<sup>9</sup> sluicy] falling or pouring copiously.

<sup>10</sup> expiation] a rite intended to avert portended evil.

<sup>11</sup> Hence] from now on.

<sup>12</sup> crooked beak] Viking ships had bent bows.

<sup>13</sup> croud away] push away. 'Crowd' was a naval term in the eighteenth century.

Another urg'd his more unweari'd friends;  
 90 And ev'ry chieftain something recommends.  
       Thus for the arduous task the chiefs contest,  
 While each wou'd grasp the danger to his breast.  
 Th' attentive monarch heard their brave debates,  
 And, with a secret joy, his soul dilates.  
 95       Young ALPIN burns to urge the war of night,  
 To mix again with HACO in the fight.  
 Eager he stood, and thus the chiefs adrest,  
 The warrior lab'ring in his manly breast;  
 "King, gallant chiefs! — this enterprize I claim;  
 100 Here let me fix my unestablish'd fame.<sup>14</sup>  
 Already you have beat her arduous path,  
 Reapt glorious harvests in the fields of death:  
 Repeated feats fix'd fame within your pow'r,  
 But I gleam once, then sink, and am no more.  
 105 Nor am I wholly ign'rant of the fight,  
 I've urg'd the gloomy battles of the night:  
 ÆBUDÆ's<sup>15</sup> chief once touch'd on ABRIA's strand,  
 And swept our mountains with his pilf'ring band;  
 All day they drove our cattle to the sea,  
 110 I went at midnight and rescu'd the prey;  
 With a poor handful, and a faithful sword,  
 Dispers'd the robbers and their haughty lord.<sup>16</sup>  
 'Twas I commanded — these the gallant men!  
 May we not act that mid-night o'er again?"

<sup>14</sup> Young ALPIN ... unestablish'd fame] cf. Home's *Douglas*: 'A low-born man, of parentage obscure,/Who nought can boast but his desire to be/A soldier, and to gain a name in arms' (II. 34–6).

<sup>15</sup> ÆBUDÆ's] the Hebrides. They came under Norwegian control before the ninth century.

<sup>16</sup> ÆBUDÆ's ... haughty lord] cf. Home's *Douglas*:  
 A band of fierce Barbarians, from the hills,  
 Rush'd like a torrent down upon the vale,  
 Sweeping our flocks and herds. [...] I alone,  
 With bended bow, and quiver full of arrows,  
 Hover'd about the enemy, and mark'd  
 The road they took; then hasted to my friends,  
 Whom, with a troop of fifty chosen men,  
 I met advancing. The pursuit I led,  
 Till we o'ertook the spoil-encumber'd foe.  
 We fought and conquered (II. 51–61).

115           The Hero spoke; a murm'ring voice ensu'd  
 Of loud applause. — Each Hero's mind subdued,  
 The glorious danger to the youth resigns:  
 He tow'rs along, and marshals up his lines.  
 Some gallant youths, to share his fame, arise,  
 120 And mingle in the glorious enterprize.<sup>17</sup>

          The warrior-band move on in firm array,  
 He tow'rs before along the sounding sea.  
 Thro' their tall spears the singing tempest raves,  
 And, falling headlong on the spumy waves,  
 125 Pursues the ridgy sea with awful roar,  
 And throws the liquid mountains<sup>18</sup> on the shore.  
 In each short pause, before the billow breaks,  
 The clanking CALEDONIAN armour speaks.

          Thus on some night when sable tempests roar,  
 130 The watchman wearying of his lonely hour,  
 Hears some rent branch to squeak 'twixt ev'ry blast,  
 But in each ruder gust the creak is lost.

          The King and gallant chiefs, with wishful eyes,  
 Pursue the youthful warrior as he flies.  
 135 His praise thro' all the noble circle ran —  
 Approach'd the ghastly figure of a man:  
 His visage pale; his locks are bleach'd with years;  
 His tott'ring steps he onward scarcely bears:  
 His limbs are lac'd with blood, a hideous sight!  
 140 And his wet garments shed the tears of night.  
 With slow approach he lifts his fading eyes,  
 And rais'd the squeaking treble of his voice.  
 "O King! I feel the leaden hand of death,  
 To the dark tomb I tread the gen'ral path:  
 145 Hear me, O King! for this I left the field,  
 For this to thee my dying form reveal'd:  
 NORWAY in vain had interpos'd her flood,

<sup>17</sup> glorious enterprize] cf. Pope's *Iliad*, VII. 353: 'glorious war'.

<sup>18</sup> liquid mountains] cf. Dryden's *Aeneid*, I. 125, and the 'liquid plain' of *Paradise Lost*, IV. 455.

I come, alas! to pay the debt of blood.  
 Possess of crimes, which the good King pursu'd,  
 150 In fell conspiracy, unblest! I vow'd  
 With fierce DOVALUS;<sup>19</sup> that I live to tell!  
 By us, by us, the great King MALCOLM<sup>20</sup> fell!  
 Touch'd with remorse, behind my shield I laid  
 His smiling child, and wrapt him in my plaid.  
 155 Now to the sea we urge our rapid flight,  
 Beneath the guilty mantle of the night.  
 Still in my arms I little DUFFUS<sup>21</sup> bear;  
 Behind the voice of men, and arms we hear.  
 My comrades fly. — I lay the infant down,  
 160 And with my guilty life from vengeance run.  
 They found him, sav'd him; for I knew the voice:  
 It was" — he said, and clos'd at once his eyes;  
 Slowly inclin'd, and, tumbling headlong down,  
 His guilty life breath'd in a feeble groan.  
 165       The mournful monarch stood in dumb surprise;  
 The fate of MALCOLM fill'd afresh his eyes.  
 He folds his arms, and bends his silent look,  
 Then, starting from the gloom of sorrow, spoke.  
 "You see, my lords, tho' DENMARK's hostile state  
 170 Long sav'd the traitors from the hand of fate;  
 Yet heav'n, who rules with equal sway beneath,  
 Snatch'd from her arms a victim due to death;  
 DOVALUS shall not sink among the dead,  
 but with that vengeance hangs o'er treason's head.<sup>22</sup>  
 175 Still, MALCOLM, still, thou gen'rous, and thou best!  
 Thy fate hangs heavy on a brother's breast;  
 You left a young, you left a helpless son,

<sup>19</sup> DOVALUS] Buchanan mentions a Dovalus, in the reign of Nothatus, *c.* 230 BC, which could be where Macpherson found the name.

<sup>20</sup> MALCOLM] historically, this is Máel Coluim mac Domnaill (Malcolm I), King of Alba (952–61), the son of Donald II (889–900).

<sup>21</sup> DUFFUS] that is, Alpin.

<sup>22</sup> DOVALUS ... treason's head] Dovalus shall be executed as a traitor.

But lost to me, to SCOTLAND, and his throne.  
 Perhaps, opprest with hunger and with cold,  
 180 He 'tends some peasant's cattle<sup>23</sup> to the fold;  
 Or fights a common soldier on the field,  
 And bows beneath the scepter he should wield."  
 No more he said; the noble circle sigh'd,  
 They droop the silent head, nor aught reply'd.

185        Now dy'd apace the occidental light;  
 The subject world receives the flood of night.  
 The King from ev'ry side his troops recalls;  
 They fall around and rear their manly walls.  
 He issues to return the great command,  
 190 They move along, and leave the fatal strand.  
 The city gain'd, each soldier's weary breast  
 Forgets the day, and sooths his toil with rest.

      The King receives, with hospitable care,  
 The gallant chiefs, and drowns in wine the war.  
 195 Within the royal hall the nobles sat;  
 The royal hall, in simple nature great.  
 No pigmy art, with little mimicry,  
 Distracts the sense, or pains the weary eye:  
 Shields, spears and helms in beauteous order shone,  
 200 Along the walls of uncemented stone.  
 Here all the noble warriors crown the bowl,<sup>24</sup>  
 And with the gen'rous nectar warm the soul;  
 With social talk steal lazy time away,  
 Recounting all the dangers of the day:  
 205 They turn to ALPIN, and the gloomy fight,  
 And tost<sup>25</sup> the gallant warrior of the night.

      Mean time young ALPIN 'girts the fatal wood,  
 And longs to mix again with DANISH blood.

<sup>23</sup> 'tends some peasant's cattle] that is, in fact, what happened to Douglas in Home's play: 'like a peasant breed the noble child' (III. 121).

<sup>24</sup> crown the bowl] drink.

<sup>25</sup> tost] toast.

Already HACO had, with martial care,  
 210 With walls of oak embrac'd an ample square:  
 Himself beneath a tree, the storm defends,  
 And keeps in arms, around, his watchful friends.

The fair AURELIA<sup>26</sup> by the Hero's side,  
 An awful warrior, and a blooming bride,  
 215 Who plac'd in martial deeds her virgin-care,  
 Wields in her snowy hand the ashen spear.  
 A silver mail hung round her slender waist,  
 The corslet rises on her heaving breast.  
 On her white arm the brazen buckler<sup>27</sup> shows,  
 220 The shining helm embrac'd her marble brows;  
 Her twining ringlets, flowing down behind,  
 Sung grateful music to the nightly wind.

Fate was unkind; just as the lovers wed,  
 Nor yet had tasted of the nuptial bed;  
 225 Great SUENO's trumpet call'd the youth to war,  
 He sigh'd, embrac'd, and left the weeping fair.  
 With love embolden'd, up the virgin rose,  
 From her soft breast the native woman throws;  
 And with the gallant warrior clothes the wife,  
 230 Following her HACO to the bloody strife.<sup>28</sup>

She sought her love thro' war's destructive path,  
 And often turn'd from him the hand of death.  
 The chief, attentive, all the youth survey'd,  
 And in the warrior found the lovely maid.  
 235 She leans, inclining, on her martial spear,  
 And only for the youth employs her fear.

The valiant SCOT assails the oaken wall:

<sup>26</sup> AURELIA] invented; however, she anticipates Ossianic heroines that follow their lovers into battle and might thus be inspired by Gaelic folklore.

<sup>27</sup> buckler] a small round shield.

<sup>28</sup> The fair AURELIA ... the bloody strife] cf. Fragment V (*Fragments of Ancient Poetry*): 'The daughter of Rinval was near, Crimora, bright in the armour of man; her hair loose behind, her bow in her hand. She followed the youth to the war, Connal her much-beloved' (*PoO*, p. 13). However, Crimora accidentally shoots Connal; there is no happy end in the OC. John MacQueen notes this as an instance of nature triumphing over city (*Progress and Poetry: The Enlightenment and Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1982), p. 89).



The bulwark<sup>29</sup> groans, the brave defenders fall.  
 With sounding steel the firm barrier he ply'd,  
 240 And pour'd his warriors in on ev'ry side.  
 The godlike HACO rushing thro' the night,  
 Now here, now there oppos'd th' invaders might;  
 To ev'ry corner gave divided aid,  
 Still, still supported by the martial maid.  
 245       Thus when the ocean, swelling o'er the strand,  
 Invades with billowy troops<sup>30</sup> the subject land;  
 The sed'lous<sup>31</sup> swains the earthen weight oppose,  
 And fill the fissures where the tempest flows.  
 So valiant HACO flew to ev'ry side,  
 250 And stemm'd with pointed steel the manly tide;  
 With great effort preserv'd the narrow field,  
 And 'twixt the fair and danger kept the shield.  
 She, only she, employs the Hero's care;  
 HACO forgot, he only thinks on her.  
 255 He longs to sink with glory to the dead,  
 But can he leave in grief the captive maid?  
 Her dying image hags his fancy's eyes,  
 What shou'd he do, if fair AURELIA dies?  
 Love, mighty love, arrested all his pow'r;  
 260 He wish'd for flight who never fled before.  
           But as the lioness, to save her young,  
 Despises death, and meets the hunter-throng;  
 So, starting from the sable maze of care,  
 He faces death, and shields the lovely fair.  
 265 The martial maid with equal love possest  
 Wou'd dart 'twixt danger and her HACO's breast;  
 Oppose her buckler to the lifted spear,  
 And turn from him the iron hand of war.  
           Now godlike ALPIN hew'd his bloody path

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<sup>29</sup> bulwark] defensive wall.

<sup>30</sup> billowy troops] waves.

<sup>31</sup> sed'lous] diligent.

270 Thro' DANISH ranks, and mark'd his steps with death,  
 Th' inclosed square with desp'rate hand he shears,  
 And reaps a bloody field of men and spears.  
 Groans, crashing steel, and clangour of the fight,  
 Increase the stormy chorus of the night.

275 The DANES, diminish'd, meet th' unequal war,  
 Where two fall'n oaks confine an inner square:  
 Join their broad shields, the close-wedg'd column rear,  
 And on the SCOTTISH battle turn the spear.  
 On ev'ry side the CALEDONIANS close,

280 Hemming the desp'rate phalanx of the foes,  
 To give the final stroke to battle, croud:  
 While HACO thus bespoke the DANES aloud;  
 "Ye sons of North, unfortunate, tho' brave!  
 Here fate has marked out our common grave;  
 285 Has doom'd our bodies to enrich these plains:  
 Then die reveng'd — like warriors and like DANES!"

He spoke, and turning to the martial maid,  
 Embrac'd her softly, and thus, sighing, said;  
 "Shall then my spouse, my love, my only joy,  
 290 Shall fair AURELIA with her HACO die!  
 Thy death afflicts me. — I in vain complain;  
 I'll save AURELIA, or expire — a DANE!"

He said, and gath'ring up his spacious shield  
 Prepar'd to meet the battle in the field.

295 Young ALPIN heard. — It touch'd his feeling breast,  
 He stopt the war, and thus the DANE address.  
 "Our CALEDONIA, now reliev'd of fear,  
 Feels pity rising in the place of care;  
 Disdains to tyrannize o'er vanquish'd foes,  
 300 And for her steel on them her pity throws.  
 I now dismiss brave HACO from the field,  
 And own the gen'rous present of the shield."<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup> I now dismiss ... present of the shield] this time it is not just Duffus who shows compassion, but the whole of Scotland: 'our Caledonia ... feels pity'.

He said: — his thanks returns the royal DANE,  
Himself escorts them to the sounding main.

305           A ship escap'd the flame, within a bay,  
Where bending rocks exclude the rougher sea,  
Secure from stormy winds in safety rides,  
And slowly nods on the recoiling tides;  
Thither they bend, and launching to the sea,  
310       Plow with the crooked beak the wat'ry way;  
Their sable journey to the North explore,  
And leave their sleeping friends upon the shore.

*End of Canto third.*

## CANTO IV.

THE sprightly morn with early blushes spread,<sup>1</sup>  
 Rears o'er the eastern hills her rosy head;  
 The storm subsides, the breezes as they pass  
 Sigh on their way along the pearly grass.  
 5 Sweet carol all the songsters of the spray,  
 Calm and serene comes on the gentle day.  
     Amidst attendant fair CULENA<sup>2</sup> moves,  
 CULENA, fruit of INDULPH's nuptial loves!  
 Too soon to fate the beauteous queen resign'd,  
 10 But left the image of herself behind.  
 To the calm main the lovely nymphs repair,  
 To breathe along the strand the morning air;  
 They brush with easy steps the dewy grass  
 Observing beauteous nature as they pass.  
 15 Th' imperial maid moves with superior grace,  
 Awe mix'd with mildness sat upon her face;  
 High inbred virtue all her bosom warms,  
 In beauty rises, and improves her charms.  
 Silent and slow she moves along the main,  
 20 Behind, her maids attend, a modest train!  
 Observe her as she moves with native state,  
 And gather all their motions from her gait.  
     Thus thro' IDALIA's<sup>3</sup> balm-distilling grove,

<sup>1</sup> The sprightly morn with early blushes spread] cf. Pope's *Iliad*, XI.1: 'The saffron morn, with early blushes spread', and *Paradise Lost*, V. 1–2: 'Now morn her rosy steps in the eastern clime/ Advancing, sowed the earth with orient pearl'.

<sup>2</sup> CULENA] historically, Culen was was one Indulph's sons, not his daughter. Cuilén mac Ildulb (Culen) was King of Alba 967–71, after Duff. He was, according to Fordun, 'useless and slack in the government of the Kingdom; and nothing kingly or worthy of remembrance was done in his days' (I, p. 161). Macpherson seems to have taken just the name, not the character traits of Culen, when he created Culena. This emphasises Macpherson's sentimentalising tendencies: he readily changes historical facts to strengthen the poem's romance. Through her royal birth Culena is, of course, a suitable match for Duffus, and by joining her with Duffus Macpherson not only ensures the fulfilment of the hermit's prophecy from an earlier Canto, but also manages to retain the historically accurate line of royal succession without compromising either plausibility or the poem's happy end. Stafford notes the transformation of Culen as a 'typical [...] romantic quality' of Macpherson (*Sublime Savage*, p. 70).

<sup>3</sup> IDALIA's] the ancient town of Idalium in Cyprus, where Aphrodite was worshipped.

Majestic moves the smiling Queen of Love:  
 25 Her hair flows down her snowy neck<sup>4</sup> behind,  
 Her purple mantle floats upon the wind;  
 The Graces<sup>5</sup> move along, a blooming train!  
 And borrow all the gestures of their queen.  
     Thus steal the lovely maids their tardy way  
 30 Along the silent border of the sea.  
 Slow-curling waves advance upon the main,  
 And often threat the shore, and oft abstain.  
 A woody mound, which rear'd aloft its head,  
 Threw trembling shadows o'er a narrow mead:  
 35 From a black rock crystalline waters leap,  
 Arch as they fall, and thro' the valley creep,  
 Chide with the murm'ring pebbles as they pass,  
 Or hum their purling<sup>6</sup> journey thro' the grass.  
     Pleas'd with the scene the wand'ring virgins stood;  
 40 The main below, above the lofty wood.  
 Their eyes they sate with the transporting scene,  
 And, sitting, press the fair-enamel'd green;  
 Enjoy with innocence the growing day,  
 And steal with harmless talk the time away.  
 45 Mean time fierce CORBRED,<sup>7</sup> who preferr'd in vain  
 His suit to AGNES,<sup>8</sup> fairest of the train;  
 Who fled from TWEED<sup>9</sup> to shun his hated arms,  
 Intrusting fair CULENA with her charms;  
 Saw the disdainful nymph remote from aid,

<sup>4</sup> snowy neck] cf. Fragment VI (*Fragments of Ancient Poetry*), where the heroine's 'breast was like the snow of one night' (*PoO*, p. 14).

<sup>5</sup> Graces] in classical mythology the *Charites* or *Gratae* were goddesses who bestowed beauty and charm and were themselves the embodiment of both. They were the sisters Aglaia, Thalia and Euphrosyne, the daughters of Zeus and Eurynome, or, according to some, Hera.

<sup>6</sup> purling] flowing with a whirling motion.

<sup>7</sup> CORBRED] Corbred is a fictional character, not based on a historical person, although there is a third-century King Corbred of Dalriada and Dyfed (Buchanan, I, p. 150), which is where Macpherson might have found the name.

<sup>8</sup> AGNES] fictional. 'Agnes' derives from the Greek word *hagnē*, meaning "pure" or "holy". The Latinised form of the Greek name is Hagnes, the feminine form of Hagnos, meaning "chaste" or "sacred".

<sup>9</sup> TWEED] the river Tweed flows primarily through the Borders of Scotland.

50       And bent his lustful eyes upon the maid.  
           He rush'd with headlong ruffians from the wood,  
           And seiz'd the fair: the virgins shriek aloud.  
           "For help, for help!" the struggling virgin cries,  
           And as she shrieks, aloud the wood replies.  
 55       ALPIN alone, — his men were sent before,  
           Stalk'd on his thoughtful way along the shore.  
           The distant plaint assail'd the Hero's ear,  
           He drew his sword and rush'd to save the fair.  
           Before the chief the dastard CORBRED fled,  
 60       And to her brave preserver left the maid.<sup>10</sup>  
           Prostrate on earth the lovely virgin lay,  
           Her roses fade, and all her charms decay:  
           In humid rest her bending eye-lids close;  
           With slow returns her bosom fell and rose:  
 65       At length returning life her bosom warms,  
           Glow's in her cheeks, and lights up all her charms.  
                   Thus when invading clouds the moon assail,  
           The landskip<sup>11</sup> fails, and fades the shining vale;  
           But soon as CYNTHIA<sup>12</sup> rushes on the sight,  
 70       Reviving fields are silver'd o'er with light.  
                   Th' affrighted fair the gallant warrior leads  
           To join, upon the sand, the flying maids.  
           They croud<sup>13</sup> their cautious steps along the sea,  
           Quake at each breath, and tremble on their way;  
 75       Their tim'rous breasts unse'tl'd from surprize,  
           To ev'ry side they dart their careful eyes.  
                   Thus on the heathy wild the hunted deer  
           Start at each blast, together croud thro' fear;  
           Tremble and look about, before, behind,  
 80       Then stretch along, and leave the mountain-wind.

<sup>10</sup> ALPIN alone ... left the maid] this passage shows Duffus as a knight of Romance: fighting obstacles and doing knightly deeds.

<sup>11</sup> landskip] landscape.

<sup>12</sup> CYNTHIA] the moon personified as goddess.

<sup>13</sup> croud] they walk closely together by the sea.

The gallant youth presents the rescu'd fair,  
 Confirms their trembling breasts, removes their care;  
 The gen'rous story from herself they hear,  
 And drink his praises with a greedy ear;  
 85 Steal on the youth their eyes as AGNES spoke,  
 And pour their flutt'ring souls at ev'ry look.

But fair CULENA feels a keener dart,  
 It pierc'd her breast and sunk into her heart;<sup>14</sup>  
 She hears attentive, views, admires and loves,  
 90 Her eye o'er all the man with pleasure roves.  
 With painful joy she feels the flame increase,  
 Her pride denies it, but her eyes confess:  
 She starts, and blushing turns her eye aside,  
 But love steps in, and steals a look from pride.

100 Thus fair CULENA struggles up the stream,  
 And 'tempts in vain to quench the rising flame.  
 At length, with blushing cheek and bending look,  
 Th' imperial maid the warrior thus bespoke.  
 "O gen'rous chief! for thus your deeds wou'd say,  
 105 How shall our gratitude thy kindness pay?  
 INDULPH shall hear, and INDULPH shall reward;  
 Such gen'rous actions claim a King's regard."

She said: and thus the chief; — "Imperial maid,  
 More than the debt thy approbation paid.  
 110 In this I did not strive with gallant men,  
 Or drive disorder'd squadrons from the plain;  
 But frighted from his prey a sensual slave,  
 The gloomy sons of guilt are never brave.  
 Who'er wou'd seize on a defenceless fair,  
 115 Wou'd shun the sword and fly amain from war."

He said, and stalk'd away with manly state,  
 Grandeur, with awe commix'd, inform'd his gait.  
 His pond'rous mail reflects the trembling day,

<sup>14</sup> fair CULENA ... into her heart] cf. Dryden's *Aeneid*, I. 476: 'And either heart/At once was wounded with an equal Dart'.

And all his armour rings along the way.

120           The royal maid observes him as he flies,  
In silence stands, and from her bosom sighs,  
Slowly moves on before the silent fair,  
And in the palace shuts her secret care.

                  Mean time young ALPIN seeks the King and peers;  
125       But fair CULENA in his bosom bears.  
In vain against the rising flame he strove,  
For all the man dissolv'd at once to love.

                  Within the high-arch'd hall the nobles sat,  
And form'd in council the reviving state;  
130       For instant peace solicitous prepare,  
And raise a bulwark 'gainst the future war,  
No high-flown zeal the patriot hurl'd along,  
No secret gold engag'd the speaker's tongue.  
No jarring seeds are by a tyrant sown,  
135       Nor cunning senate undermines the throne.  
To public good their public thoughts repair,  
And CALEDONIA is the gen'ral care.<sup>15</sup>

No orator in pompous phrases shines,  
Or veils with public weal his base designs.  
140       Truth stood conspicuous, undisguis'd by art,  
They spoke the homely language of the heart.

                  Arriv'd the gallant warrior of the night;  
They hear with eager joy the gloomy fight.  
His conduct, courage, and compassion raise,  
145       And ev'ry voice is forward in his praise.

                  The great DUMBAR his awful stature rears,  
His temples whiten'd with the snow of years.  
On the brave youth he bends his solemn look,  
Then, turning round, thus to the nobles spoke.  
150       “Beneath the royal banner, SCOTS afar

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<sup>15</sup> No high-flown zeal ... gen'ral care] echoes the earlier sentiments: the Scots are peace-loving and defensive, and prefer games and hunting to war. Also, this scene is followed directly by games, not battle, to reinforce this idea.



Had urg'd on HUMBER's<sup>16</sup> banks the foreign war;<sup>17</sup>  
 My father dead, tho' young I took the shield,  
 And led my kindred-warriors to the field.  
 The noble CALEDONIAN camp was laid  
 155 Within the bosom of a spacious mead.  
 Green-rising hills encompass'd it around,  
 And these King MALCOLM with his archers crown'd;  
 Full on the right a spacious wood arose,  
 And thither night convey'd a band of foes.  
 160 The King commands a chief to clear the wood,  
 And I the dang'rous service claim aloud.  
 I went, expell'd the foes, and kill'd their lord,  
 And ever since have worn his shining sword.  
 I now retire from war, in age to rest;  
 165 Take it brave youth; for you can wield it best."  
     He said, and reach'd the sword. — The youth reply'd,  
 Shooting the heavy blade athwart his side,  
 "My lord with gratitude this sword I take,  
 Esteem the present for the giver's sake.  
 170 It still may find the way it oft explor'd,  
 And glut with hostile blood its second lord;  
 To bloody honour hew its wasteful path,  
 A faithful sickle in the fields of death."  
     He thus. — With placid mein great INDULPH rose,  
 175 And spoke; "Thus always meet our ALBION's foes;  
 With foreign blood your native arms adorn,  
 And boldly fight for ages yet unborn.  
 For us, my lords, fought all our godlike sires;  
 The debt we owe to them, our race requires:  
 180 Tho' future arms our country should enslave,  
 She shall acquit our ashes in the grave;  
 Posterity degen'rate, as they groan,

<sup>16</sup> HUMBER's] tidal estuary in the north of England.

<sup>17</sup> Beneath the royal banner ... foreign war] the symbolic presentation of Dumbar's sword to Duffus emphasises the change from the old, belligerent ways to Duffus's modern peaceful ways.

Shall bless their sires, and call their woes their own.  
 Let us, my lords, each virt'ous spark inspire,  
 185 And where we find it, blow it to a fire.  
 Thy service, gallant ALPIN, in this war,  
 Shall both be INDULPH's and the senate's care.  
 Mean time, with manly sports and exercise  
 Let us from bus'ness turn the mental eyes:  
 190 The mind relax'd acquires a double force,  
 And with new vigour finishes the course."<sup>18</sup>  
     He added not: the godlike chiefs obey;  
 All rise at once; great INDULPH leads the way.  
 The palace here, and there a virid mound,  
 195 Confine a flow'y spot of grassy ground.  
 The under-rock, emerging thro' the green,  
 Chequers with hoary knobs the various scene.  
 Thither repair the chiefs and scepter'd King,  
 And bend upon the plain the hollow ring.  
 200 Obedient servants from the palace bear  
 The horny bow, the helm, the shining spear,  
 The mail, the corslet, and the brazen shield;  
 And throw the ringing weight upon the field.  
 Imperial INDULPH, tow'ring o'er the plain,  
 205 With placid words address'd the warrior-train:  
 "Let those who bend the stubborn bow arise,  
 And with the feather'd shaft dispute this prize;  
 An antique bow a BALEARIAN<sup>19</sup> wore,  
 When ROMANS thunder'd on our ALBION's shore.  
 210 The skilful archer, dealing death afar,  
 Threw on our SCOTTISH host the distant war;  
 Great FERGUS springs, a King devoid of fear,  
 And thro' his body shoots the reeking spear;

<sup>18</sup> Mean time ... finishes the course] games are a prominent feature of epic poetry. See, for example, the games in the *Iliad* XXIII, *Aeneid* V and *Paradise Lost* II and IV.

<sup>19</sup> BALEARIAN] from the Balearic islands: Majorca, Minorca, Iviça, etc. Like the stone statues in Canto I the weapons evoke past heroes.

The bloody spoil thro' striving cohorts brings,  
 215 And sends this relique down to after<sup>20</sup> Kings.”  
     Thus, grasping the long bow, the monarch said:  
 Rose valiant GRAHAME and youthful SOMERLED.  
 Next GOWAL<sup>21</sup> in the strife demands a part,  
 Fam'd on his native hills to wing the dart.  
 220 Full on the mound a helm, their aim, was plac'd;  
 And GOWAL drew the nerve<sup>22</sup>, first, to his breast;  
 The bow reluctant yields, then backward springs;  
 The nerve resounds, thro' air the arrow sings.  
 Close to the aim, the earth the arrow meets,  
 225 And as it vibrates the bright helmet beats.  
 Applause ensues. — The shaft was sent by GRAHAME,  
 And cut its brazen journey thro' the aim.  
 The prize on him the murm'ring chiefs bestow,  
 Till SOMERLED assumes the antient bow.  
 230 The dancing chord the leaping arrow left,  
 And, rushing, took on end GRAHAME's birchen shaft;<sup>23</sup>  
 Tore on its way, around the shivers fly,  
 And SOMERLED brings off the prize with joy.  
     “Who,” cries the King, “this shield his prize shall bear,  
 235 And fling with skilful hand the martial spear?  
 Behind this buckler mighty KENNETH<sup>24</sup> stood,  
 When TAY, impurpled, ran with PICTISH blood.”  
     He said, and plac'd a mark, the knobby round,  
 And measur'd back with equal steps the ground.  
 240 The valiant GRAHAME, the Mountain-youth arose;  
 GOWAL again his martial stature shows;  
 Bent on the knobby splendour of the prize,  
 First from his hand the singing weapon flies.

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<sup>20</sup> after] later.

<sup>21</sup> GOWAL] a fictional character. The name is not found in the chronicles.

<sup>22</sup> nerve] bowstring.

<sup>23</sup> The dancing chord ... GRAHAME's birchen shaft] the image of the arrow being split in two is a familiar one, found, for example, in the Robin Hood legends.

<sup>24</sup> mighty KENNETH] Kenneth MacAlpin.

The steel-head mark'd a circle as it run,  
 245 Flam'd with the splendour of the setting sun.  
         Thus when the night the weeping sky o'er-veils,  
 Athwart the gloom the streaming meteor sails,  
 Kindles a livid circle as it flies,<sup>25</sup>  
 And with its glory dazzles human eyes.  
 250         Thus flew the spear, and, sinking in the mound,  
 With quick vibrations beat the air around;  
 But miss'd the shield. — GRAHAME's not unpractis'd art  
 Dismisses thro' the air the murm'ring dart:  
 Full on the middle boss it takes the shield;  
 255 The fighting metals clatter o'er the field:  
 From the firm knob the point obliquely flies,  
 And on the field the trembling weapon lies.  
         Next valiant ALPIN takes the pond'rous spear,  
 And, bending back, dismisses it thro' air:  
 260 The long, quick weapon, flying o'er the field,  
 Falls on the boss, and perforates the shield;  
 The waving shaft is planted on the mound;  
 And with applause the neighb'ring rocks resound.  
         Young SOMERLED wrench'd from the rock a quoit,<sup>26</sup>  
 265 A huge, enormous, sharp, unwieldy weight;  
 Such now-a-days as many panting swains  
 A witness rear on long-contested plains:  
 Slow-bending down, at length the Hero springs;  
 The rolling rock along the heavens sings;  
 270 Falling, it shakes at once the neighb'ring ground,  
 And on the face of earth indents a wound.  
         Thus when strong winds the aged tow'r invade,  
 And throw the shapeless ruin from its head;  
 It falls and cleaves its bed into the ground;

<sup>25</sup> Athwart ... as it flies] Laing reads these lines as reminiscent of 'Croma': 'The clouds, divided, fly over the sky, and shew the burning stars. The meteor, token of death! flies sparkling through the gloom. It rests on the hill!' (*History of Scotland*, ed. by Laing, II, p. 401; the 'Croma' reference is from *PoO*, p. 190).

<sup>26</sup> quoit] a flat disk of stone.

275     The valley shakes, and rocks complain around.  
           All try the mark to reach, but try in vain;  
           All, falling short, unequal wound the plain.  
           ALPIN with diffidence assumes the stone,  
           For such a space had SOMERLED o'er thrown:  
 280     Th' unwieldy rock a while he weighs with care,  
           Then, springing, sends it whizzing thro' the air;  
           The wond'ring warriors view it as it rolls;  
           Far o'er the distant mark the discus falls:  
           It shakes the plain and deals a gaping wound;  
 285     Such as when headlong torrents tear the ground.  
           Th' applauding chiefs own in the manly game  
           The Hero great, as in the fields of fame.  
           CULENA, leaning on her snowy arms  
           Observant, from the window points her charms.  
 290     Th' imperial virgin saw with pleasing pain,  
           The fav'rite youth victorious on the plain:  
           Sadly she sigh'd, accusing cruel fate,  
           Which chain'd her in captivity of state.  
           The veil of night had now inwrapt the pole;  
 295     The feast renew'd, goes round the sparkling bowl.  
           Great INDULPH rose with favour-speaking mein;  
           Approaching ALPIN thus the King began:  
           "Say, will the stranger tell from whence he came  
           To reap this harvest of unrivall'd fame?  
 300     Nobler the youth, who, tho' before unknown,  
           From merit mounts to virtue and renown,  
           Than he, set up by an illustrious race,  
           Totters aloft, and scarce can keep his place!"<sup>27</sup>  
           The monarch spoke: — attentive look the peers,  
 305     And long to drink his voice with greedy ears.

<sup>27</sup> Nobler the youth ... keep his place] deeds matter more than reputation. This contradicts a Jacobite reading of the poem: lineage is not important.

*End of Canto fourth.*

## CANTO V.

THE Hero, rising from his lofty seat,  
 Thus unpretentiously accosts the great:  
 “The fame of DENMARK pass’d our mountains o’er,  
 And fill’d our ears on ABRIA’s distant shore:  
 5 Brave RYNOLD starts: — the aged chief alarms,  
 And kindles all his family to arms.  
 A hundred youths, who, from the sounding wood,  
 Or tow’ring mountain brought their living food,  
 Obey the bag-pipe’s voice; for all, in view  
 10 Of RYNOLD’s seat, the friendly Canton<sup>1</sup> grew.  
 The hoary warrior leads the onward path,  
 No stranger to the road which led to death.  
 Behind advancing, I, with martial care,  
 Lead on the youthful thunder-bolts of war;<sup>2</sup>  
 15 With arms anticipate the kindling fire,  
 And move to ev’ry motion of my sire.  
       “On GRAMPUS,<sup>3</sup> night her mantle round us throws;  
 We slept in heath — the dappled morn arose:  
 Descending thence pursue our headlong way,  
 20 And cross the silver errors<sup>4</sup> of the TAY.  
 Groans, feeble shrieks, ascending from the vale,  
 Speak on the pinions<sup>5</sup> of the southern gale.  
 A dismal scene breaks on our distant eyes;  
 Here one pursues, and there another flies.

<sup>1</sup> Canton] that is, in sense of both the area around Rynold’s seat, and the song of the bagpipes. Blackwell uses the term in a translation from G. Leibniz, in Section XI of his *Enquiry* (p. 220).

<sup>2</sup> thunder-bolts of war] this phrase is a standard epic epithet. See, for example, Pope’s *Iliad*, VIII. 100, XIX. 246, and XX. 287; Dryden’s *Aeneid*, VI. 1159, and IX. 914.

<sup>3</sup> GRAMPUS] the Grampians. The name ‘Grampians’ is believed to have first been applied to the mountain range in 1520 by the Scottish historian Hector Boece, an adaptation of the name Mons Graupius, recorded by the Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus as the site of the defeat of the native Caledonians by Gnaeus Julius Agricola *c.* AD 83. The actual location of Mons Graupius, literally ‘the Graupian Mountain’ (the element ‘Graupian’ is of unknown significance), is a matter of dispute among historians, though most favour a location within the Grampian massif, possibly at Raedykes, Megray Hill or Kempstone Hill.

<sup>4</sup> errors] windings. Though this is the primary sense in Latin, in French and English it occurs only as a conscious imitation of Latin usage.

<sup>5</sup> pinions] wings.

25       This breathes his life thro' the impurpled wound,  
           While his proud villa smokes along the ground.  
           That with the foe maintains unequal strife,  
           While his dear offspring fly, and dearer wife.<sup>6</sup>  
           “The senior saw it with indignant eyes,  
 30       And bid, at once, his kindred-ranks arise.  
           With hasty steps we seize a virid brow,  
           And form a sable cloud above the foe.  
           Thus on the mountain's brow, I oft have seen  
           The must'ring clouds brew torrents for the plain;  
 35       At length the blust'ring south begins to roar,  
           And heav'n descends impetuous in a show'r;  
           The bubbling floods foam down the hill, and spread  
           A swimming deluge on the subject mead.  
           “Thus RYNOLD formed on the mountain's brow,  
 40       And headlong rush'd into the vale below.  
           While on the banks of TAY terrific shine  
           The steel-clad foe, and stretch the hostile line.  
           They form a wall along the flowing flood,  
           And awful gleam their arms, an iron wood.  
 45       We shout, and rush upon the hostile throng:  
           The echoing fields with iron clangour rung.  
           Firm stood the foe, nor made they flight their care,  
           But hand to hand return'd the equal war:  
           Man close to man, and shield conjoin'd to shield,  
 50       They with the stable phalanx keep the field.  
           With pointed spear I mark'd the stoutest foe,  
           And heav'n directed home the happy blow:  
           He tumbles backward to the groaning flood:  
           TAY circles round, and mingles with his blood.  
 55       My kindred-youth their useful weapons wield,  
           Fomenting the confusion on the field.  
           DANE fell on DANE, and man transfix'd his man,

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<sup>6</sup> This breathes his life ... dearer wife] this passage echoes the aftermath of the 1745 rising.



Till bloody torrents smoak'd along the plain.  
 At length they fly along the banks of TAY;  
 60 Their guilty leader points th' inglorious way.  
 Eager we follow: — still the foe with art  
 Wound as they fly, and shoot th' inverted dart.  
 RYNOLD is wounded. — Still he urg'd the foe;  
 While down his limbs the crimson torrents flow:  
 65 With eager voice he still foments the strife,  
 Preferring ALBION's liberty to life.

“An antient pile uprear'd its rev'rent head,  
 And from its lofty seat survey'd a mead:  
 The mould'ring walls confess'd their beauty past;  
 70 A fragment falls with each invading blast.  
 Old arms above the gate time's empire own;  
 The rampant lion moulders in the stone:  
 Tall elms around, an old and shatter'd band,  
 Their naked arms erect, like centries<sup>7</sup> stand.

75 “Within the ruin'd walls their fear inclose  
 The desp'rate squadrons of the flying foes.  
 An antient plane, whose leaf-dismantled weight  
 Rude winds o'erturn'd, secures the shapeless gate.  
 On ev'ry side my quick array I form,  
 80 Prepar'd at once the muniment<sup>8</sup> to storm.  
 Missing my sire, I fly to find the chief,  
 And give the wounded all a son's relief.

“Far on the plain the wounded warrior creeps,  
 And scarcely moves along his tot'ring steps;  
 85 But still, far as his feeble voice cou'd bear,  
 He kindles with his words the distant war.  
 Quick I apporach'd: — He first the silence broke;  
 And leaning on his lance, the warrior spoke.”

““Say, why returns young ALPIN from the fight?  
 90 Pursue the foe, and urge the DANISH flight.

<sup>7</sup> centries] sentries.

<sup>8</sup> muniment] monument.

I sink, my son, I sink into the grave;  
 You cannot me, your country, ALPIN, save.”

“No more he said. — I, mournful, thus reply,  
 Compassion melting in my filial eye,  
 95 “O sire, the DANES, within yon walls secur’d,  
 Will share our pity, or must feel our sword:  
 Of filial duty what his wants require,  
 I come to offer for a dying sire.””

“He thus returns: “still good, still gen’rous mind!  
 100 My wants are, ALPIN, of no earthly kind:  
 The world, the fading world, retires from view;  
 Earth cloys<sup>9</sup> me now, and all it has, but you.  
 Go, ALPIN, go; within that lofty wood  
 A hermit lives, a holy man and good!<sup>10</sup>  
 105 Relieve, my son, relieve me of my cares,  
 And for the dying RYNOLD raise his pray’rs.””

“Thus said; — himself the wounded warrior laid,  
 Within the coolness of a birchen shade:  
 Some youths around employ their friendly care,  
 110 And o’er the dying shed the mournful tear.  
 Around the antient fastness guards I sent;  
 And to the lofty wood my journey bent.  
 Two rising hills, whose brows tall pop’lars grace,  
 With stretching arms a woody plain embrace;  
 115 Along the tree-set vale a riv’let flow’d,  
 And murmur’d softly thro’ the under-wood:  
 Along the purling stream my steps I bear,  
 And seek the lonely mansions of the seer.  
 Irreg’lar files of tow’ring elms embrace,  
 120 In their calm bosom, an enamel’d space.  
 Full at the end a rock with sable arms,

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<sup>9</sup> cloys] disgusts.

<sup>10</sup> Within that lofty wood ... a holy man and good] cf. Home’s *Douglas*: ‘In a deep cave, dug by no mortal hand,/A hermit liv’d; a melancholy man,/Who was the wonder of our wand’ring swains’ (IV. 47–9).

Stretch'd o'er a moss-grown cave, a grotto forms.  
 A silver stream, clear-issuing from the stones,  
 In winding mazes thro' the meadow runs;  
 125 Depending flow'rs their vary'd colours bind,  
 Hang o'er the entrance, and defend the wind.  
 On a green bank the holy seer<sup>11</sup> is laid,  
 Where weaving branches cloud the chequer'd shade;  
 In solemn thought his hoary head's inclin'd,  
 130 And his white locks wave in the fanning wind.  
         "With rev'rent steps approaching, I began.  
         "O blest with all that dignifies the man!  
         Who far from life, and all its noisy care,  
         Enjoy'st the aim of all that wander there:  
 135 Let, holy father, thy propitious aid  
         Guide dying RYNOLD thro' the deathful shade."  
 I said: — the prophet heav'n-ward lifts his eyes,  
 Long fix'd in solemn thought, and thus replies;  
         "Vain mortals! worms of earth! How can ye dare  
 140 To deem your deeds not providence's care?  
         Heav'n looks on all below with equal eye:  
         They long escape, but yet the wicked die.  
         With distant time, O youth! my soul's imprest;  
         Futurity is lab'ring in my breast:<sup>12</sup>  
 145 Thy blood, which rolling down from FERGUS came,  
         Passes thro' time, a pure untainted stream.  
         ALBION shall in her pristine glory shine,

<sup>11</sup> holy seer] the seer evokes Pope's description of Chalkas, *Iliad*, I. 92–3: 'That sacred seer, whose comprehensive view,/The past, the present, and the future knew'.

<sup>12</sup> Futurity is lab'ring in my breast] the seer's prophecy is not to be seen chronologically, but rather as a conglomerate of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century British history (which is of course the future in the time-frame of the poem). This is in contrast to the OC, where thoughts are always turned to the past, for example in Fragment VI: 'Of former times are my thoughts; my thoughts are of the noble Fingal' (*PoO*, p. 14). Also cf. Home's *Douglas*: 'Like some entranc'd and visionary seer,/On earth though stand'st, thy thoughts ascend to heaven' (I. 294–95).

And, blest herself, bless the FERGUSIAN line.<sup>13</sup>  
 “But ah! I see grim treason rear its head,  
 150 Pale ALBION<sup>14</sup> trembling, and her monarch dead;  
 The tyrant wield his scepter ’smear’d with blood;  
 O base return! but still great heav’n is good:  
 He falls, he falls: see how the tyrant lies!  
 And SCOTLAND brightens up her weeping eyes:  
 155 The banish’d race, again, resume their own;  
 Nor SYRIA boasts her royal saint alone.<sup>15</sup>  
 Its gloomy front the low’ring season clears,  
 And gently rolls a happy round of years.<sup>16</sup>  
 “Again I see contending chiefs come on,  
 160 And, as they strive to mount, they tear the throne;  
 To civil arms the horrid trumpet calls,  
 And CALEDONIA by her children falls.<sup>17</sup>  
 The storm subsides to the calm flood of peace;  
 The throne returns to FERGUS’ antient race.  
 165 Glad CALEDONIA owns their lawful sway;  
 Happy in them, in her unhappy they!  
 See each inwrapt untimely in his shroud,  
 For ever sleeping in his gen’rous blood!  
 Who on thy mournful tomb refrains the tear?  
 170 O regal charms, unfortunately fair!  
 Dark FACTION grasps her in his sable arms,

<sup>13</sup> Thy blood ... FERGUSIAN line] the hermit creates an instantaneous bond between past, present and future: Duffus is the present, Fergus is the past, Albion is the future. This passage also serves as a reminder of Duffus’s royal lineage (other instance: I. 77). The ‘Fergusian line’ was, according to Kersey, a ‘liability among Scottish Whig historiographers’ of the period (‘Pre-Ossianic Politics’, p. 66; also “‘Where are the originals?’ Britishness and problems of authenticity in post-Union literature from Addison to Macpherson’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leeds, 2001), p. 235).

<sup>14</sup> ALBION] takes on a wider British meaning here, as a consequence of Charles I’s execution.

<sup>15</sup> SYRIA boasts her royal saint alone] an allusion to Andrew, Scotland’s ‘national’ saint (cf. Kersey, “‘Where are the originals?’”, p. 236). Andrew of Crete (c. 650–740) is a saint in the Eastern Orthodox (that is, Syriac) Church.

<sup>16</sup> Pale Albion ... round of years] this section of the seer’s prophecy refers to the execution of Charles I (1649), the Interregnum (1649–1660) and the restoration of the monarchy under Charles II (1660).

<sup>17</sup> Again I see ... CALEDONIA by her children falls] this is an allusion to the ‘Glorious’ Revolution (1688). Kersey reads this section as a particular allusion to the Battle of Killiecrankie (1689): ‘Caledonia ‘falls’ by the divided Jacobite and Williamite loyalties of ‘her children’ (“‘Where are the originals?’”, p. 237).

And crushes down to death her struggling charms:  
 The rose, in all its gaudy liv'ry drest,  
 Thus faintly struggles with the blust'ring west.<sup>18</sup>

175           “Why mention him in whom th' eternal fates  
 Shall bind in peace the long-discording states?  
 See SCOT and SAXON coalesc'd in one,  
 Support the glory of the common crown.  
 BRITAIN no more shall shake with native storms,  
 180    But o'er the trembling nations lift her arms.”<sup>19 20</sup>

                  “He spoke, and in the cave inclos'd his age:  
 In wonder lost I leave the hermitage;  
 Measure with thoughtful steps my backward way,  
 While to the womb of night retires the day.

185    Pale doubtful twilight broods along the ground:  
 The forest nods its sleeping head around.

<sup>18</sup> Glad CALEDONIA ... blust'ring west] this section likely refers to Queen Anne, the last Stuart monarch, whose children all died before they reached adulthood. While the 'rose' is used merely as a natural analogy for Anne's reign, it also carried connotations of Englishness; cf. 'Hunter': 'hateful slavery and the aspiring Rose' (III. 12). Other readings include William and Mary — they, the rulers; her, Caledonia —, or to the Jacobites — they, the exiled Stuarts; her, Caledonia.

<sup>19</sup> Vain mortals ... lift her arms] Kersey sees the hermit's vision as resembling that of Thomson and Mallet's *Alfred: A Masque* (1740), where Union is also praised; he also points out that 'the Hermit's vision picks up the narrative of Scotland's mythical history where Buchanan's [...] had stopped' ('Pre-Ossianic Politics', pp. 66, 67). On the whole, Kersey reads this section as a Whig manifesto (*ibid.*, p. 68).

<sup>20</sup> Why mention him ... lift her arms] Kersey misunderstands this passage: he reads the rhetorical question as separate from the section that follows (quoted above). The narrator's reluctance to mention 'him' by more than this cryptic couplet is, for Kersey, a clear allusion to Charles Edward Stuart: 'the Pretender is finished: "Why mention him" in a nation in which "Scot and Saxon" are happily mixed, or "coalesced in one"?' ('Pre-Ossianic Politics', p. 68; "Where are the originals?"', p. 237). In context, however, this passage more likely alludes to George II's rule after the 1745 Jacobite rising, when England and Scotland 'shall' be united once and for all. Indeed, as the hermit's other predictions are all true, it seems unlikely that he would err on the side of Jacobitism. 'Why mention him' is not as much a hushed allusion to Charles Edward Stuart as a sly reference to the current king: George II does not need to be mentioned because it is obvious that he 'shall' bring peace and Union. (Other critics also note this passage: Stafford emphasises Union, and reads this as a response to the Seven Years War, when Britain had to present a united front against the enemy, France (*Sublime Savage*, p. 74; this is repeated by Thomas Curley, *Samuel Johnson, The Ossian Fraud, and the Celtic Revival in Great Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 27). Weinbrot mistakenly reads the opening couplet as a reference to the Union of 1707: but that would require 'her' (Anne) instead of 'him' (George II) in the first line (*Britannia's Issue: The Rise of British Literature from Dryden to Ossian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 540). Colin Kidd sees this as emblematic of Macpherson's 'dual identity as a Scot and Briton', and, ultimately, his Whiggism ('Macpherson, Burns and the Politics of Sentiment', in *Scottlands* 4:1 (1997), 25–43 (p. 29)).

“Before my eyes a ghastly vision stood;<sup>21</sup>  
 A mangled man, his bosom stain’d with blood!  
 Silent and sad the phantom stood confest,  
 190 And shew’d the streaming flood-gates of his breast.  
 Then pointing to the Dome his tardy hand,  
 Thither his eyes my silent way command.  
 He hands my sword, emits a feeble groan,  
 And weakly says, “revenge me, O my son!”<sup>22</sup>  
 195 I to reply — he hiss’d his way along,  
 As breezes sing thro’ reeds their shrilly song.  
 I stood aghast, then wing’d me to obey;  
 Across the field I sweep my hasty way.  
 The men I arm; — the firm barrier we ply;  
 200 And those who dare dispute the passage die.  
 With dying groans the lonely walls resound:  
 I on the guilty leader deal a wound;  
 Thro’ his bright helm the sword its journey takes;  
 He falls, and thus with dying accents speaks:  
 205 ““Just heav’n! in vain the wicked shun thy pow’r;  
 Tho’ late thy vengeance, yet the blow is sure.  
 This earth receiv’d the blood from off my hands;  
 A just return, my own, my own demands!  
 In night’s dead hour, when all, but treason, slept,  
 210 With ruffian bands, a bloody train, I crept.  
 ’Twas here, ’twas here, oh! long-deserved death!  
 ’Twas here the godlike man resign’d his breath:  
 The sleeping fam’ly we with blood surprize,

<sup>21</sup> a ghastly vision stood] cf. Home’s *Douglas*, where the ghost of a warrior is evoked in the opening scene:

in your shade I deem some spirit dwells,  
 Who from the chiding stream, or groaning oak,  
 Still bears and answers to Matilda’s moan.  
 O Douglas! Douglas! if departed ghosts  
 Are e’er permitted to review this world,  
 Within the circle of that wood thou art,  
 And with the passion of immortals hear’st  
 My lamentation: hear’st thy wretched wife  
 Weep for her husband slain, her infant lost (I. 5–13).

<sup>22</sup> revenge me, O my son] cf. Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, I.V. The phantom is, of course, Malcolm, Duffus’s murdered father.

And send the palace flaming to the skies.  
 215 I fled, but fled, alas! pursued by fate;  
 'Tis now I find that I have sinn'd too late.  
 O MALCOLM! O my King! before my eyes  
 He stands confest; — accurst DOVALUS dies.”  
 “His guilty soul in these dire accents fled,  
 220 I left with hasty steps the silent dead.  
 Beneath the birch my aged sire I found;  
 His life was ebbing thro' the purple wound.  
 On me the aged senior lifts his eyes,  
 And mixes feeble accents with his sighs.  
 225 ““ALPIN, the commerce of this world I leave,  
 Convey my reliques to my father's grave.  
 Ten friendly youths the homely rites shall pay;  
 Lead thou the rest, my ALPIN, to the fray:  
 DENMARK invades: — this was a pilf'ring band,  
 230 Who spread divided terror o'er the land.”  
 “He said: a qualm<sup>23</sup> succeeds; tears fill my eyes,  
 And woe, securely, shuts the gates of voice;  
 Silent and sad I hang the dying o'er,  
 And with warm tears intenerate<sup>24</sup> his gore.”  
 235 “The chief resumes: — “my brave, my only son!  
 Yes, ALPIN, I may call thee all my own;  
 I shall not veil a secret in my death;  
 Take then this story of my latest breath:  
 The twentieth season liv'ries o'er the year,  
 240 Since on the SEVERN's<sup>25</sup> banks I met the war;  
 In private feud, against a SAXON lord,  
 The great DUMBAR had rais'd his kindred-sword:  
 I on the foe my bow auxiliar<sup>26</sup> bend,  
 And join afar our fam'ly's antient friend:

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<sup>23</sup> qualm] calm.

<sup>24</sup> intenerate] soften.

<sup>25</sup> SEVERN's] the longest river in Great Britain; flows from Mid-Wales through England into the Bristol Channel.

<sup>26</sup> auxiliar] helpful.

245     Returning thence I next the TAY divide,  
           That very night the great King MALCOLM dy'd.  
           My clan in arms might then preserve their King;  
           But Fate withstood; — along in arms we ring.  
           An infant's cries, at distance, took my ear,  
 250     I went, found thee, a helpless orphan there.”

          The King, who long infix'd in dumb surprize,  
           Run o'er the speaking youth with searching eyes,  
           Here stopt him short, his arms around him flung,  
           And silent on th' astonish'd warrior hung;  
 255     “My son, my son!” at last, perplex'd, he cries,  
           “My DUFFUS!” — tears hung in his joyful eyes:  
           The crouding tide of joy his words suppress'd;  
           He clasps the youth, in silence, to his breast.  
           Th' astonish'd chiefs, congeal'd in dumb amaze,  
 260     Stiffen'd to silence, on each other gaze.  
           Sudden their cheeks are vary'd with surprize,  
           And glad disorder darted from their eyes.

          As when before the swains, with instant sound,  
           The forky bolt descending tears the ground;  
 265     They stand; with stupid gaze each other eye:  
           So stood the chiefs oppress'd with sudden joy.

          At length, relax'd from fetters of surprize,  
           “Welcome, brave youth!” the scepter'd senior cries,  
           “Welcome to honours justly thine alone,  
 270     Triumphant mount, tho' late, thy father's throne.  
           To thee with joy the scepter I resign,  
           And waft<sup>27</sup> the kingdom to the coming line.”<sup>28</sup>  
           He said: and thus the youth; “I only know  
           To shoot the spear, and bend the stubborn bow;  
 275     Unskill'd to stretch o'er nations my command,

<sup>27</sup> waft] transport instantaneously.

<sup>28</sup> waft the kingdom to the coming line] historically Indulph is not Malcolm's brother (and Duffus's uncle) but his cousin: because of the system of succession Duffus would succeed upon Indulph's death.



Or in the scales of judgment poise a land.  
 Wield still the scepter which with grace you wear,  
 And guide with steadier hand the regal car;  
 While, looking up to thee, as I obey,<sup>29</sup>  
 280 I first transcribe my future rules of sway;  
 Till late enjoy the throne which you bequeath,  
 And only date dominion from thy death.”  
 Resolv’d he spoke: — bursts of applause around  
 Break on the chief: — with joy the halls resound.<sup>30</sup>  
 285 As when some valiant youth returns from far,  
 And leaves the fields of death, and finish’d war;  
 Whom time and honest scars another made,  
 And friendly hope long plac’d among the dead;  
 At first his sire looks with indifference on,  
 290 But soon he knows, and hangs upon his son.  
         So all the chiefs the royal youth embrace;  
 While joys, tumultuous, rend the lofty place.  
         While thus the King, and noble chiefs rejoice,  
 Harmonious bards exalt the tuneful voice:  
 295 A select band by INDULPH’s bounty fed,  
 To keep in song the mem’ry of the dead!<sup>31</sup>  
 They handed down the ancient rounds of time,  
 In oral story and recorded rhyme.<sup>32</sup>  
         The vocal quire<sup>33</sup> in tuneful concert sings  
 300 Exploits of Heroes, and of antient Kings:

<sup>29</sup> as I obey] the 1805 version has ‘with humble eye’ instead.

<sup>30</sup> with joy the halls resound] this phrase is reminiscent of *Beowulf*, l. 770: ‘reced hlynsode’ (literally: ‘the hall resounded’). However, *Beowulf* was not known in the 1750s: the first rendition in modern English was Sharon Turner’s in 1805.

<sup>31</sup> To keep in song the mem’ry of the dead] cf. Home’s *Douglas*, where Lady Randolph is desolate because her first husband, Douglas, has no such memorial: ‘Childless, without memorial of his name,/He only now in my remembrance lives’ (I. 29–30).

<sup>32</sup> While thus the king ... recorded rhyme] cf. Pope’s *Iliad*, IX. 245–50 (‘Amus’d at ease ... immortal deeds of Heroes and of Kings’). Also *Paradise Lost*, II. 546–51 (‘Others more mild ... enthal to force or chance’). This mention of the bards and their function as clan historians anticipates the Ossianic works and Macpherson’s insistence that Ossian truthfully recorded Fingal’s wars, and that their deeds have been passed on from bard to bard until the present day. Notice, however, the absence of Ossian and Fingal in the bards’ songs. Like the stone statues in Canto I, the bards preserve history and the ‘mem’ry of the dead’.

<sup>33</sup> quire] choir.

How first in FERGUS CALEDONIA rose;  
 What hosts she conquer'd, and repell'd what foes.  
 Thro' time in reg'lar series they decline,  
 And touch each name of the FERGUSIAN line;  
 305 Great CARACTACUS,<sup>34</sup> FERGUS' awful sword;  
 That bravely lost his country, this restor'd:  
 HIBERNIA's spoils, GREGORIUS' martial fire;  
 The stern avenger of his murder'd sire:  
 Beneath his sword, as yet, whole armies groan,  
 310 And a whole nation paid the blood of ONE.  
 At length descend the rough impetuous strains  
 To valiant DUFFUS, and the slaughter'd DANES:  
 The battle lives in verse; in song they wound;  
 And falling squadrons thunder on the ground.<sup>35</sup>  
 315       Thus, in the strain, the bards impetuous roll,  
 And quaff the gen'rous spirit of the bowl;<sup>36</sup>  
 At length from the elab'rate song respire;  
 The chiefs remove, and all to rest retire.

*End of Canto fifth.*

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<sup>34</sup> CARACTACUS] historically, a British chieftain of the Catuvellauni tribe, who led the British resistance to the Roman conquest.

<sup>35</sup> At length ... on the ground] poem within the poem: Duffus's recent exploits are now part of the bards' repertoire.

<sup>36</sup> quaff the gen'rous spirit of the bowl] cf. *Paradise Lost* V. 637f: 'They eat, they drink, and in communion sweet/Quaff immortality and joy'.

## CANTO VI.

NOW, in the blushing east, the morn arose;  
 Its lofty head, in grey, the palace shows.  
 Within, the King and valiant chiefs prepare  
 To urge the chace, and wage the mountain-war.  
 5 The busy menials thro' the palace go;  
 Some whet the shaft, and others try the bow;  
 This view'd the toils<sup>1</sup>; that taught the horn to sound;  
 Another animates the sprightly hound.  
     For the fleet chace the fair CULENA arms,  
 10 And from the gloom of sorrow 'wakes her charms:  
 The Hero's royal birth had reach'd her ear,  
 And sprightly hope assum'd the throne of care:  
 Around her slender waist the cincture<sup>2</sup> slides;  
 Her mantle flows behind in crimson tides.  
 15 Bright rings of gold her braided ringlets bind;  
 The rattling quiver, laden, hangs behind.  
 She seiz'd, with snowy hand, the polish'd bow,  
 And mov'd before, majestically slow.  
 The chiefs behind advance their sable forms;  
 20 And with dark contrast heighten all her charms.  
     Thus, on expanded plains of heavenly blue,  
 Thick-gather'd clouds the Queen of Night<sup>3</sup> pursue;  
 And as they croud behind their sable lines,  
 The virgin-light with double lustre shines.  
 25 The maid her glowing charms thus onward bears;  
 His manly height, aside, young DUFFUS rears.  
 Her beauty he, his manhood she admires;  
 Both mov'd along, and fed their silent fires.  
     The HUNTERS to the lofty mountains came:  
 30 Their eager breasts anticipate the game:

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<sup>1</sup> toils] nets.

<sup>2</sup> cincture] girdle.

<sup>3</sup> Queen of Night] the moon.

The forest they divide, and sound the horn;  
 The gen'rous hounds within their bondage burn:  
 Struggle for freedom, long to stretch away,  
 And in the breeze already find the prey.<sup>4</sup>

35           At the approaching noise the starting deer  
 Croud on the heath, and stretch away in fear;  
 Wave, as they spring, their branchy heads on high,  
 Skim o'er the wild, and leave the aching eye.  
 The eager hounds, unchain'd, devour the heath;  
 40 They shoot along, and pant a living death:  
 Gaining upon their journey, as they dart,  
 Each from the herd selects a flying hart.  
 Some urg'd the bounding stag a different way,  
 And hung with open mouth upon the prey:  
 45 Now they traverse the heath, and now assail  
 The rising hill, now skim along the vale:  
 Now they appear, now leave the aching eyes,  
 The master follows with exulting cries;  
 Fits, as he flies, the arrow to the string;  
 50 The rest within the rattling quiver ring:  
 He, as they shoot the lofty mountains o'er,  
 Pursues in thought, and sends his soul before.  
 Thus they with supple joints the chace pursue,  
 Rise on the hills, and vanish on the brow.  
 55           On the blue heav'ns arose a night of clouds;  
 The radiant lord of day his glory shrouds:  
 The rushing whirlwind speaks with growling breath,  
 Roars thro' the hill, and scours along the heath:  
 Deep rolling thunder, rumbling from afar,  
 60 Proclaims with murm'ring voice th' aerial war:  
 Fleet light'nings flash in awful streams of light,  
 Dart thro' the gloom, and vanish from the sight:  
 The blust'ring winds thro' heav'ns black concave sound,

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<sup>4</sup> in the breeze already find the prey] this line reads 'in the wind already scent the prey' in the 1805 version.

Rain batters earth, and smokes along the ground.  
 65 Down the steep hill the rushing torrents run,  
 And cleave with headlong rage their journey on;  
 The lofty mountains echo to the fall;  
 A muddy deluge stagnates on the vale.  
 CULENA mov'd along the level ground;  
 70 A hart descends before the op'ning hound:  
 From the recoiling chord she twang'd the dart,  
 And pierc'd the living vigour of the hart:  
 He starts, he springs; but falling as he flies,  
 Pours out his tim'rous soul with weeping eyes.  
 75 As o'er the dying prey the huntress sigh'd,  
 Before the wind heav'n pours a sable tide,  
 And lowring threats a storm: A rocky cave,<sup>5</sup>  
 Where monks successive hew'd their house and grave,  
 Invites into its calm recess the fair:  
 80 The rev'rend father breath'd abroad his pray'r.  
 The valiant DUFFUS comes with panting breath,  
 Faces the storm, and stalks across the heath.  
 His sleeky hounds, a faithful tribe, before,  
 Are bath'd with blood, and vary'd o'er with gore.  
 85 Drench'd with the rain, the noble youth descends,  
 And, in the cave, the growling storm defends.  
 Amaz'd, astonish'd, fix'd in dumb surprize,  
 The lovers stood, but spoke with silent eyes:  
 At length the distant colloquy<sup>6</sup> they rear,  
 90 Run o'er the chace, the mountain, and the deer.  
 Far from the soul th' evasive tongue departs,  
 Their eyes are only faithful to their hearts.  
 The winding volumes of discourse return,  
 To hostile fields by gallant DUFFUS shorn.  
 95 Th' imperial maid must hear it o'er again,

<sup>5</sup> A rocky cave ...] this scene is reminiscent of the meeting of Dido and Aeneas in the cave in Book IV of the *Aeneid*.

<sup>6</sup> colloquy] conversation.

How fell<sup>7</sup> DOVALUS was by DUFFUS slain:  
 How, by the son, the father's murd'rer fell.  
 The kindling virgin flames along the tale.  
 She turns, she quakes, and from her bosom sighs,  
 100 And all her soul comes melting in her eyes.  
 Flames, not unequal, all the youth possess,  
 He, for the first, hears willingly his praise.  
 Praise, harshly heard from warriors, Kings and lords,  
 Came down in balm on fair CULENA's words.  
 105 The royal pair thus fed the mutual fire,  
 Now speak, now pause, when both alike admire.  
 He longs to vent the passion of his soul,  
 And she the tempests in her bosom roll.  
 Now he begun; but shame his voice opprest;  
 110 Loth to offend, his eyes must tell the rest.  
 At length, upon the headlong passion born,  
 He spoke his love, and had a kind return;  
 She sigh'd, she own'd, and bent her modest eyes,  
 While blushing roses on her cheeks arise.  
 115 Thus, on the vale, the poppy's blushing head,  
 Brimful of summer-show'rs, to earth is weigh'd,  
 Fann'd with the rising breeze it slow inclines,  
 While o'er the mead the rosy lustre shines.  
 INDULPH into his cave the hermit led,  
 120 Found erring thro' the mountains stormy head.  
 CULENA, starting as the King appears,  
 Looks ev'ry way, and trembles as she fears:  
 On her mild face the modest blushes rise,  
 And fair disorder darted from her eyes.  
 125 The parent-king observ'd the virgin whole,  
 And read the harmless secret in her soul.<sup>8</sup>  
 A while the maze of calm discourse they wind;

<sup>7</sup> fell] fierce.

<sup>8</sup> The parent-king ... in her soul] unlike in the *Aeneid*, Culena emerges from the cave as a virgin: this, as Stafford has noted, emphasises Macpherson's sentimentality (*Sublime Savage*, p. 71).

At length the King unveils his royal mind.  
     “Warded from ALBION’s head the storm is o’er;  
 130 Her prince is found, her foes are now no more:  
     Thro’ time ’tis ours her happiness to trace;  
     ’Tis ours to bind the future bands of peace.  
     Posterity for ALBION’s crown may fight,  
     And couch ambition in the name of right;  
 135 With specious titles urge the civil war,  
     And to a crown their guilty journey tear:  
     I end these fears: — the streams shall run in one;  
     Nor struggling kindred strive to mount the throne.<sup>9</sup>  
     I shield my daughter with young DUFFUS’ arms,  
 140 And bless the warrior with CULENA’s charms.”  
     Thus said the King. Their willing hands they join:  
     The rev’rent priest runs o’er the rites divine.  
     The solemn ceremony clos’d with pray’r;  
     And DUFFUS call’d his own the royal fair.  
 145 The storm is ceas’d: the clouds together fly,  
     And clear, at once, the azure fields of sky:  
     The mid-day sun pours down his sultry flame,  
     And the wet heath waves glist’ring in the beam.<sup>10</sup>  
     The hunter chiefs appear upon the brow,  
 150 Fall down the hill, and join the King below:  
     Slow, thro’ the narrow vale, their steps they bear;  
     Behind advance the spoils of Sylvan war.  
     Far on a head-land point condens’d they stood,  
     And threw their eyes o’er ocean’s sable flood;  
 155 Tall ships advance afar: their canvas-sails  
     In their swoln bosom gather all the gales;  
     Floating along the sable back of sea,

<sup>9</sup> Posterity ... mount the throne] cf. the hermit’s prophecy: ‘See Scot and Saxon coalesc’d in one’. The Jacobite uprisings are ‘ambition couched in the name of right’. The specious titles are those of James (III) and Charles Edward (III) Stuart.

<sup>10</sup> And the wet heath ... in the beam] MacQueen notes this as a line that particularly reveals Macpherson’s sensibility despite the Augustan form and ‘traditional poetic diction’ of the poem (*Progress and Poetry*, pp. 90–91).

Before the wind they cut their spumy way;  
 Bend in their course, majestically slow,  
 160 And to the land their lazy journey plow.

Thus spungy clouds on heav'n's blue vault arise,  
 And float, before the wind, along the skies;  
 Their wings oppos'd to the illustrious sun,  
 Shine, as they move, majestically on.  
 165 Thus godlike HAROLD<sup>11</sup> brought his floating aid,  
 Unknowing SUENO's number'd with the dead.  
 From ANGLIA's coasts he call'd his troops afar,  
 To aid his brother in the foreign war.  
 Arriv'd, he in the wave the anchor throws,  
 170 Attempts to land, and ALBION's chiefs oppose;  
 Wave on the fatal shore the pointed spear,  
 And send the arrow whizzing thro' the air.

The DANES return the flying death afar,  
 And, as they croud away, maintain the war.  
 175 An arrow tore thro' air its murm'ring path,  
 Fell on the King, and weigh'd him down to death:  
 Quick, from the wound, the blood tumult'ous sprung,  
 And o'er the sand the reeking weapon flung:  
 Prone on the strand, an awful trunk he lies,  
 180 While sleep eternal steals upon his eyes.  
 The mournful chiefs around the dying stood,  
 Some raise the body, others stem the blood:  
 In vain their care; — the soul for ever fled,  
 And fate had number'd INDULPH with the dead.<sup>12</sup>

185 CULENA, whom young DUFFUS set apart,  
 With a green bank secur'd the hostile dart.  
 Her father's fate assail'd her tender ear,  
 She beat her snowy breast, and tore her hair:  
 Frantic along the sand she run, she flew,

<sup>11</sup> HAROLD] a fictional Danish chief.

<sup>12</sup> An arrow ... with the dead] Fordun mentions that Indulf 'was struck in the head by a dart out of one of the ships, and died that same night' (I, p. 160).



190 And on the corse distressful beauty threw:  
 She call'd her father's shade with filial cries,  
 And all the daughter streaming from her eyes.  
 Bent on revenge the furious DUFFUS strode,  
 And ey'd, with angry look, the sable flood.  
 195 A ship, which near had took its nodding stand,  
 Fix'd with the pitchy haulser<sup>13</sup> to the strand,  
 Remains of SUENO's fleet, the Hero view'd,  
 And to the mournful warriors spoke aloud:  
 "Let these whose actions are enchain'd by years  
 200 Honour the mighty dead with friendly tears;  
 While we of youth, descending to the main,  
 Exact severe atonement of the DANE."

He thus: and rushing thro' the billowy roars;  
 With brawny arms his rapid journey oars;  
 205 Divides with rolling chest the ridgy sea,  
 Lashing the bubbling liquid in his way.  
 The boat he seiz'd, and, meas'ring back the deep,  
 Wafted his brave companions to the ship;  
 The haulser broke, unfurl'd the swelling sail,  
 210 And caught the vig'rous spirit of the gale:  
 Before the sable prow the ocean parts,  
 And groans beneath the vessel as it darts.<sup>14</sup>

Now on the foe the SCOTTISH warriors gain;  
 Swells on the approaching eye the floating DANE.  
 215 Fierce ULRIC's<sup>15</sup> skill brought up the lazy rear,  
 Fam'd in the fields of main to urge the war.  
 Twice seven years, in base pursuit of gain,  
 He plow'd the waves, the common foe of men;  
 At last to HAROLD aiding arms he join'd;  
 220 Grasping the spoil with avaricious mind.

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<sup>13</sup> haulser] a large rope or small cable.

<sup>14</sup> rushing thro' the billowy roars ... as it darts] Buchanan notes that the Scots chase the Danes to their ships (I, p. 243)

<sup>15</sup> ULRIC's] Ulric is a fictional character, not found in any of the chronicles.

At first he shoots the leaping shaft afar,  
 And manages with skill the distant war.  
 The chiefs of ALBION with collected might,  
 Bear on the foe, and close the naval fight.  
 225 Deck join'd to deck, and man engag'd with man,  
 Sword spoke with sword, and SCOT transfix'd his DANE.  
 The smoaking oak is cover'd o'er with gore,  
 Till the whole pyrate-crew<sup>16</sup> are now no more.  
 The empty hull from wave to wave is tost,  
 230 Nods as it floats, the sport of ev'ry blast.

The CALEDONIAN chiefs again pursue:  
 The SCANDINAVIAN fleet o'er ocean flew.  
 T'elude the foe the DANES fly diff'rent ways;  
 And cut with sep'rate prows the hoary seas.  
 235 Some bear to sea, some rush upon the land,  
 And fly amain<sup>17</sup> on earth, a trembling band.

As, in pursuit of doves, on rapid wings  
 The darting hawk thro' air his journey sings;  
 But when the parting flock divides the sky,  
 240 Hovers, in doubt this way or that to fly.  
 So undetermin'd long young DUFFUS stood;  
 At length he sigh'd, and thus began aloud:  
 "While thus, O chiefs, we urge the flying DANE,  
 Unmourn'd, unhonour'd lies the mighty slain;  
 245 'Tis ours to grace with woe great INDULPH's bier,  
 And o'er his fallen virtue shed the tear."

The warrior spoke: the CALEDONIANS sigh'd,  
 And with returning prow the waves divide;  
 With swelling sail bring on the fatal shore,  
 250 Where, o'er the dead, the aged chiefs deplore.  
 The warriors bear their monarch as they come,  
 In sad procession to the silent tomb;

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<sup>16</sup> pyrate-crew] Vikings were often seen as pirates. However, this is a mislabeling: piracy takes place at sea, and the Vikings in the poem attack on land.

<sup>17</sup> amain] at once.

Forsake with lazy steps the sounding main,  
 And move a sad and lamentable train.

255           Behind the dead the tuneful bards appear,  
 And mingle with their elegies the tear:  
 From their sad hearts the mournful numbers<sup>18</sup> flow,  
 In all the tuneful melody of woe.

                  In grief's solemnity CULENA leads  
 260   A mournful train of tear-distilling maids:  
 Above the rest, the beauteous queen appears,  
 And heightens all her beauties with her tears.

                  Now in the tomb the godlike INDULPH laid,  
 Shar'd the dark couch with the illustrious dead:  
 265   All o'er his grave the mournful warriors sigh,  
 And give his dust the tribute of the eye:  
 Removing, as the night inwrapt the sky,  
 They share the nuptial feast with solemn joy.  
 The royal DUFFUS, with a husband's care,  
 270   Sooth'd, in his martial arms, the sorrowing fair;  
 O'er ALBION's rocks exerted his command,  
 And stretch'd his scepter o'er a willing land.

*FINIS*

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<sup>18</sup> numbers] verses or metre. Cf. Pope: 'I lisp'd in numbers, for the numbers came' in 'Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot, l. 128.

## CHAPTER 4 — ORIGINALITY IN THE 1750S

Originals shine, like comets; have no peer in their path; are rival'd by none, and the gaze of all: All other compositions (if they shine at all) shine in clusters; like the stars in the galaxy; where, like bad neighbours, all suffer from all; each particular being diminished, and almost lost in the throng.<sup>1</sup>

(Edward Young)

Originality and its counterparts — forgery, authenticity, imitation, invention, etc. — have defined criticism on Macpherson's works since their first publication. This chapter shows that Macpherson's poetical works are *all* original: *The Highlander* and 'The Hunter' as well as the OC. In most discussions of this topic the concept of originality is limited to the distinction between invention and imitation: inventive works are original, imitative ones are not. In contrast this chapter introduces a tripartite concept of originality: source originality (*type 1*), creative originality (*type 2*), characteristic originality (*type 3*).<sup>2</sup> *Type 1* focuses on historical, authentic and primary precedents, *type 2* on notions of invention, imitation and genius, and *type 3* on unusual and individual types and characteristics. Three aesthetic tracts from the 1750s and 1760s form the theoretical basis for discussion: Alexander Gerard's *Essay on Taste* (1756/59), Edward Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759) and Richard Hurd's *Four Dissertations* (written 1751–65). This chapter then examines the OC, *The Highlander* and, briefly, 'The Hunter' to show how each of these works is, in fact, original.

<sup>1</sup> Edward Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition. In a Letter to the Author of Sir Charles Grandison* (Dublin: P. Wilson, 1759), p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> A similar structure is proposed by Elizabeth L. Mann in 'The Problem of Originality in English Literary Criticism, 1750–1800', in *Philological Quarterly* 18:2 (1939), 97–118: her tripartite structure consists of sources and themes, passions, and individualism as the three means by which to achieve originality (cf. esp. pp. 117–18 for a summary).

Over the years Macpherson criticism has been heavily biased: the question of authenticity has outweighed any other critical enquiries.<sup>3</sup> Even the OC have received little traditional literary criticism, and his other works have either been ignored by critics or used as evidence in the authenticity debate. This chapter focuses on Macpherson's originality: his unique ability to adapt history in various styles and genres. Macpherson has been generally overlooked by critics as a poet; instead he is studied, on the one hand, as a forger and fabricator of ancient poetry, and on the other as key proponent of European Romanticism. His poetical works — excluding the OC — are largely ignored by critics. By discussing their — and his — originality this chapter seeks to counteract this trend, and hopes to establish Macpherson as an original poet. In the OC, Macpherson takes older stories — circulated, for the most part, orally — and converts them into rhythmic prose epics without trying to be particularly faithful to his source material. In *The Highlander*, he translates medieval and Renaissance chronicles — history proper — into heroic couplets with only minimal plot changes. Finally, in 'The Hunter' Macpherson mixes romance and epic in a way that anticipates the OC. The chapter also comments on Macpherson's originality (as opposed to that of his works): his unique ability to adapt history in various styles and genres. This chapter is sub-divided into six sections: Typology (pp. 113–15), Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics (pp. 115–24), the OC (pp. 124–31), *The Highlander* (pp. 131–39), 'The Hunter' (pp. 140–41) and Concluding Thoughts (pp. 141–47).

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<sup>3</sup> Joep Leerssen stresses the importance of this for the history of Ossianic scholarship: 'there must be few texts which are so predisposed, condemned almost, to a genetic reading, a reading in terms of its genesis' ('Ossianic Liminality: Between Native Tradition and Preromantic Taste', in *From Gaelic to Romantic: Ossianic Translations*, ed. by Howard Gaskill, Fiona Stafford (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), 1–16 (p. 1)).

## TYPOLOGY: THREE KINDS OF ORIGINALITY

Young's star-crossed analogy for poetic compositions (from the epigraph of this chapter) seems obvious: his originals are those rare creative ventures that eclipse all others by their sheer inventive genius. George Buelow points out that 'it was in eighteenth-century England that the concept of originality as the main force in the creative process in all of the arts received its earliest definitions', but it was not until the middle of the century — the period that this thesis is concerned with — 'that both the concept of originality and its moral antonym plagiarism appeared as crucial topics in aesthetic criticism and debate'.<sup>4</sup> He insists that the eighteenth century neither developed nor continued a theory of invention, and that originality as a concept became 'significant as a standard of evaluation only in the 18<sup>th</sup> century'.<sup>5</sup> As Robert Macfarlane explains, in theories of literary creation, originality has been seen in two distinctly contrasting ways: first, as the 'first copy' or a re-arranged creation of previously created material (*inventio*); second, as something produced first-hand and without predecessors as a product of an author's creativity (*creatio*).<sup>6</sup> These two kinds of originality, Macfarlane explains

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<sup>4</sup> George J. Buelow, 'Originality, Genius, Plagiarism in English Criticism of the Eighteenth Century', in *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 21:2 (1990), 117–28 (p. 117).

<sup>5</sup> The quotation is from *ibid.*, p. 118. Cf. Elizabeth Larsen, who summarises the traditional view of historians of rhetoric and composition: 'historians of rhetoric and composition traditionally have agreed that the eighteenth century neither developed a new inventional theory nor successfully maintained what it inherited of the old. According to this thinking, invention, as a concern of rhetoric, simply disappeared; rhetoricians from about 1750 on could — and did — maintain a theoretical stance about composing that lacked a space for generation of knowledge' ('Re-Inventing Invention: Alexander Gerard and *An Essay on Genius*', in *Rhetorica* 11:2 (1993), 181–97 (p. 181). Larsen's article, however, does not share this view, and instead reads Gerard's *Essay on Genius* (1774) as an attempt to transform, not abandon, *inventio*. Robert Macfarlane also notes that 'Romantic' invention and genius were in fact a fairly new concept when Young published his *Conjectures on Original Composition* in 1759 (*Original Copy: Plagiarism and Originality in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 19). Also cf. Buelow, who extends this idea to all arts: 'the Romanticized view of creative accomplishment seems to see the writer, the artist, the composer in a state of suspended animation until he is mysteriously infused with the inspired idea, the original invention' ('Originality, Genius, Plagiarism', p. 117).

<sup>6</sup> Macfarlane bases this distinction on George Steiner's linguistic analysis of originality. Steiner's analysis is based on the etymology of the verbs 'to invent' and 'to create', which corresponds to these two definition of originality. Cf. George Steiner, *Grammars of Creation* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), pp. 13–53, and Macfarlane, *Original Copy*, p.1. Macfarlane explains that 'invent', from the Latin *invenire*, 'implies a coming upon what is already there', while 'create' 'intuitively suggests a making out of nothing'.

further, have fluctuated between being *en vogue* and not, and Young's *Conjectures* appeared at just such a turning point when *inventio* was giving way to *creatio*.<sup>7</sup>

Although Macfarlane's distinction between *inventio* and *creatio* is valid, it is not exhaustive enough to explore originality in all its facets. In the 1750s and '60s other aspects of originality were equally important, both in theoretical discourses on poetics and in works of art.<sup>8</sup> There is more to originality than simply imitation and creativity: both of these aspects — as different as they are — are in fact part of the same category of originality: its creative aspect (*type 2* in this thesis).<sup>9</sup> Imitation — Steiner's *inventio* — is a creative act; not in the same way that new creative ventures are, but nonetheless creative. What limits this understanding of originality is its exclusive focus on creation — a craftsman-like forging or making — and its disregard for the other aspects of originality: authenticity, authority and source. Originality also encompasses 'origins' as the root of 'original' (*type 1* in this thesis), and 'original' in the sense of characteristic qualities — of characters, authors or pieces of literature (*type 3* in this thesis). This chapter explores originality in all its facets, and thus constructs a different idea of originality from other studies in the field; one that is more diverse and less restraining. It echoes the shifting notions of poetry and ideas in the period and allows for a more

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<sup>7</sup> Macfarlane: 'a period in which *creatio* has been valued has usually been followed by a swing back towards *inventio*' (*Original Copy*, p. 6).

<sup>8</sup> There has been an increase in the last decade or so in scholarly works concerned with creativity. Apart from Macfarlane and Steiner see, for example, *The Idea of Creativity*, ed. by M. Krausz, D. Dutton, K. Bardsley (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2009); *The Routledge Companion to Creativity*, ed. by T. Rickards, M. A. Runco, S. Moger (London; New York: Routledge, 2009); David W. Galenson, *Old Masters and Young Geniuses* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Rob Pope, *Creativity: Theory, History, Practice* (London: Routledge, 2005); John H. Mason, *The Value of Creativity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> Critics of Romanticism and the nineteenth century tend to use 'creative' to distinguish between Romantic works of genius (which are 'creative') and imitation (which are not). Cf., for example, David Higgins, who summarises the later eighteenth-century view of genius: 'by the end of the eighteenth century, genius — creative rather than imitative; innate rather than learned; exalted; original; and *rare* — had become a key concept in aesthetics and criticism'. ('Celebrity, Politics and the Rhetoric of Genius', in *Romanticism and Celebrity Culture: 1750–1850*, ed. by T. Mole (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 41–59 (p. 42); also *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine: Biography, Celebrity, Politics* (London: Routledge, 2005)).

unanimous interpretation of the originality of Macpherson's works. To clarify these facets the three different types of originality are categorised in this chapter as *type 1* (source originality), *type 2* (creative originality) and *type 3* (characteristic originality).

#### EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY AESTHETICS

Gerard's *Essay on Taste* (1759), as the title suggests, is primarily a discussion of taste: what it consists of, how it is acquired, how it can be improved. Anticipating Young's more extensive discussion of these issues, Gerard sees works of art as imitations of nature, which are judged by taste. Taste, he argues, is a combination of natural and studied skill in judging the principles of '*the powers of the imagination*'.<sup>10</sup> It is this concept of imaginative power that corresponds to *type 2* originality: it is required for the creation of art. For Gerard, imagination is an expression of original genius; original genius, in turn, is dependent on the genius of an author, and the originality of a work. It is linked to the sense of novelty that excites the mind far more than known facts; in poetry this novelty, or ingenuity, is the mark of original genius (1759, pp. 6–11). Ingenuity combines novelty and innovation with genius and imagination, and epitomises the creative aspect of both inventive and imitative *type 2* originality. In fact, Gerard explicitly values imitations as creative ventures, arguing that 'the sublime, the new, the elegant, the natural, the virtuous, are often blended in the imitation; brighten'd by the power of fiction, and the richest variety of imagery; and rendered more delightful by the harmony of numbers' (1759, p. 82). For Gerard, then, both kinds of *type 2* originality are original; he does not value *creatio* higher than *inventio*.

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Alexander Gerard, *An Essay on Taste* 1<sup>st</sup> edition (London: A. Millar, 1759) p. 1. All references to this edition of Gerard's *Essay* will be given in parentheses in the text to differentiate between this and the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the *Essay* (Edinburgh: J. Bell, W. Creech, 1780).



Gerard fully discusses the relationship between poetry and imitation in the third edition of the *Essay* (1780). It is the subject of the appendix he added to this extended edition.<sup>11</sup> He reminds us that poetry has traditionally been seen as ‘an *imitative* art’ by classical scholars such as Aristotle, but that more modern critics, such as Kames, disagree with poetry as imitation, and limit imitation to the pictorial arts (1780, p. 276). Gerard agrees with Kames and draws a fine distinction between imitating real life, which poetry cannot, and describing it, which poetry does (1780, p. 277). Gerard sees this description as copying: the imitation of a conceived — a fictional — subject.<sup>12</sup> Imitation, on the other hand, requires a certain measure of truth, or reality. Similarly, Gerard uses copying to distinguish between history and fiction: ‘history is more than an imitation; it is an accurate detail of real things. But poetry is an imitation, and not more: it is not a description of what has actually been, but a description of something so like to real fact, that it might have been, or is probable’ (1780, p. 282). Sometimes, Gerard admits, poetry comes close to being a sort of history: when it ‘strictly adheres to that real thing’ (1780, p. 282). If poetry records a particular historical event in verse, then it is merely a ‘history in metre’ (p. 283). If the poet, however, embellishes the facts, then it turns into poetic imitation, or copying. Poetry, then, can only rarely be *type I* original: this is reserved for history and other delineations of facts and nature. The OC are thus original in the Gerardian sense because their form — rhythmic prose epic — adds novelty to the Gaelic tales. They are not, however, imitations. *The Highlander*, on the other hand, qualifies as a metrical history, with the exception of the love story between Duffus and Culena. ‘The

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. James McCosh, *The Scottish Philosophy: Biographical, Expository, Critical, from Hutcheson to Hamilton* (New York: Carter, 1875) who notes in an appendix that Gerard had raised this question at the Philosophical Society in Aberdeen on the 26 January 1768 (p. 471). See Christopher Maclachlan, ‘Philosophical Criticism in the Eighteenth Century’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1974), p. 99.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Maclachlan, ‘Philosophical Criticism’, p. 104; Gerard, *Essay on Taste* (1780), pp. 280–81.

Hunter’ shows less ingenuity than the OC, and less faithfulness to historical sources and is thus, at least in a Gerardian reading, less original.

Despite the titular emphasis of Young’s *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759) on original composition, Young is not concerned with ‘what is, or is not, strictly speaking, *Original*’.<sup>13</sup> This fundamental absence of definition, Joel Weinsheimer argues, implies that ‘originality and imitation belong to a continuum’ — because Young does not define originality independently without recourse to imitation, he can *only* define them in relation to one another.<sup>14</sup> Instead, Young’s essay is the first to explicitly value inventive originality higher than imitation.<sup>15</sup> It does so because imitation, no matter how good or how successful, always depends on another’s creativity; this, like copying, (to borrow Paul Baines’s, rather than Gerard’s phrase) ‘represented not only a diminution of the original, but a loss of self, authenticity, spontaneity’.<sup>16</sup> This focus on *creatio* exemplifies Macfarlane’s notion of the change in value placed on creative and imitative originality from the middle of the eighteenth century, and it is this which makes Young’s work both unique and, pertinently, original. In an analogy that echoes Shaftesbury, Young describes originals as ‘the fairest Flowers’ of ‘a perpetual Spring’ of genius; they are of ‘a *vegetable* nature’, rising ‘spontaneously from the vital root of Genius’ —

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<sup>13</sup> Young, *Conjectures*, p. 7. All references to Young’s *Conjectures* are taken from the 1759 edition (s. footnote 1) and will be given in parentheses in the text.

<sup>14</sup> Joel Weinsheimer, ‘Conjectures on Unoriginal Composition’, in *Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 22:1 (1981), 58–73 (p. 60). However, Weinsheimer’s leap from this to his next statement, and that it is therefore perfectly legitimate to speak of imitative originals as well as original imitations’ (*ibid.*) is unclear and speculative.

<sup>15</sup> In the second edition of the *Conjectures*, also published in 1759, Young states ‘I begin with Original Composition; and the more willingly, as it seems an original subject to me, who have seen nothing hitherto written on it’ (p. 4). Weinsheimer has pointed out that this is not entirely accurate; ‘it is scarcely necessary to say’, he points out, ‘that references and allusions to prior writing on originality abound in the *Conjectures*; among others, Locke permeates the whole, forebears from Tacitus to Ben Jonson are cited, and it is self-confessedly written “under the shadow” of Bacon’ (‘Conjectures on Unoriginal Composition’, p. 59). Buelow, on the other hand, asserts that Young ‘was the first in England to emphasize in a coherent and concise essay the previously scattered attacks on the tyranny of imitation of ancient writers’ (‘Originality, Genius, Plagiarism’, p. 123).

<sup>16</sup> Paul Baines, *The House of Forgery in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), p. 96.

an original ‘*grows*, it is not *made*’ (p. 8). Macfarlane sees this as implying that originality ‘requires only the proper environment to flourish’; ‘society and culture’, as the ‘atmospheric conditions’ of genius.<sup>17</sup> However, this is too limiting a view: Young, as is clear from the *Conjectures*, places the burden of originality on the writer; it is their choice, and an ‘*original* author is born of himself, is his own progenitor’, rather than influenced by society (pp. 12, 37). Original authors in this sense, then, are necessarily *type 1* original, while their works can be inventive or imitative — *type 2* original — without also being *type 1*.

Mostly, though, Young is concerned with *type 2* originality. In the *Conjectures* inventive originality always outclasses imitation: ‘copies surpass not their originals’ (p. 23). Indeed, ‘an *Original*, tho’ but indifferent (its *Originality* being set aside,) yet has something to boast’ — something that mere imitation does not (p. 8). Of course, ‘pure’ originals, that is originals not inspired by, or themselves imitative of, other originals are hard to come by except in nature. Even early poetry is, essentially, an imitation; a retelling of history or a fictionalising of nature. Yet some classic works can become originals themselves: when their originals — whatever it is they imitate — are lost, they in turn become ‘*accidental* originals’ (p. 10). These are not ‘*real*’ originals but works that assume originality because their models are no longer extant. Such works, though strictly imitations, are the best kinds of imitations: they ‘receive our highest applause’ (p. 10). Imitations, thus, become original when their model is eradicated. This, of course, combines *type 1* and *type 2* originality: without a model even an imitation becomes a ‘first’ original, because it is the earliest of its kind — and now a source for imitations itself — but also necessarily a creative original, because a creative act was required to produce it in the first place. Young’s emphasis differs from

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<sup>17</sup> Macfarlane, *Original Copy*, p. 19.

Gerard's: he values early poetry, which the OC purported to be, over imitations of history, such as *The Highlander*. However, as reworkings of older material both the OC and *The Highlander* are imitative rather than original. Only when they are considered as new genres or direct versifications of history can they be considered original in Young's sense. 'The Hunter', though, can only ever be imitative in Young's world.

Hurd's *Four Dissertations* (written 1757–63, published 1811) combine Gerard's and Young's ideas: they praise both *inventio* and *creatio* as original, and thereby value all facets of *type 2* originality. In the third dissertation, 'A Discourse on Poetical Imitation', Hurd compares and contrasts imitative and inventive poetry, and finds merits in both. Hurd's work is heavily influenced by Horace's theory of poetry; for him, as for Horace, poetry has pleasure as its end — not instruction.<sup>18</sup> *Delectare* — without the *prodesse* that is the ultimate end for other forms of writing — is the purpose of poetry: 'in all other kinds of literary composition pleasure is subordinate to USE; in poetry only, PLEASURE is the end, to which use itself [...] must submit'.<sup>19</sup> The sources of this pleasure — and this is where originality comes in — are 'novelty and variety', which, as we have seen in Gerard's *Essay*, are necessary for *type 2* originality (p. 5). For Hurd, as for Gerard before, these can be seen in both inventive and imitative poetry; in fact, Hurd emphasises the importance of new versions of the same subject matter, or reworkings of other works. However, Hurd also echoes Young's thoughts about *type 1* original poetry: the earliest examples of poetry are necessarily spontaneous, original, compositions, and they in turn become models — or originals — for later

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<sup>18</sup> Richard Hurd had translated several Horatian texts before he wrote the *Dissertations: Ars Poetica* and *Epistola ad Pisones* (1749), and the *Epistola ad Augustam* (1751).

<sup>19</sup> Hurd, *The Works of Richard Hurd*, 8 vols (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1811), II, p. 3. All references to Hurd's *Four Dissertations* are taken from this edition and will be given in parentheses in the text.

works: ‘in process of time, what was at first the extemporaneous production of genius and passion, under the conduct of a *natural ear*, becomes the labour of the closet, and is conducted by artificial rules’ (p. 12). Apart from these very early examples, however, all poetry is imitation; in fact, for Hurd, ‘all is *unoriginal*’ (pp. 109–11).

Hurd also brings in a notable distinction between imitation and invention: invention, he argues, is the ‘primary or original *copying* [of nature], which in the ideas of Philosophy is [called] *Imitation*’ and ‘in the language of Criticism [or literature] INVENTION’ (p. 111). Not only does Hurd, then, distinguish between imitation and invention in poetry, but he also recognises a difference in usage between the two disciplines. Hurd’s philosophical imitation is based on Plato’s ideas; like Young, Hurd here considers all inventions as imitations of nature. Unlike Young, though, Hurd does not apply this distinction to criticism (or literature); there imitation is only a secondary copying of invented originals — not the copying of nature. Apart from Horace and Plato, Hurd also invokes Longinus and the idea of poetry as painting, or the painting of poetry. This, he argues, is a mark of genius, and can be accomplished only by those who possess ‘the genuine plastic powers of original creation’ (p. 128). Original creation, in this context, is the primary creation of works of art — ‘invention’ in the language of criticism. It is a first original, a *type I* one; one that is necessarily inventive *because* it is the first of its kind. It is creation in the sense of making — the making of poetry, in its craftsman-like aspect. Therefore on the one hand the OC, *The Highlander* and ‘The Hunter’ are all equally unoriginal: none is a primary reworking of nature. On the other hand, though, all are inventive and original with regard to Hurd’s emphasis on the novelty and pleasure of adaptations, and only literary invention as original creation.

*Type 1* and *type 2* originality feature — implicitly and explicitly — in both modern discussions of forgery and authenticity and, as we have seen, in eighteenth-century treatises on genius and creativity. Gerard, Young and Hurd all explore *type 1* originality in their respective tracts. For Hurd early poetry — and each individual work at that — is an invention, and the product of chance: ‘the extemporaneous production of genius or passion’ is original in our first sense (p. 12). Young takes a step further back: he considers only imitations of nature as ‘original’ art, with nature itself as the first original: ‘*Imitations* are of two kinds; one of Nature, one of Authors: The First we call *Originals*, and confine the term *Imitation* to the second’ (p. 7). The imitations of nature, as we have seen, are certainly *type 1* original: while all art is imitation, original art is an imitation of nature infused with genius, not of previous authors. Gerard also stresses the importance of nature as the model for originality, and, like Hurd, draws a distinction between literature and other disciplines. All three writers thus emphasise the necessarily imitative nature of literature while reserving ‘pure’ originality — that is, *type 1* originality — for history (Gerard), philosophy (Hurd) and early poetry (Young). This type of originality is both source-based and authentic: it goes back in time to seek for that illusive ‘first original’ that gains authenticity precisely because it is the first of its kind. Originality thus requires an act of creation, the making or forging of ‘original originals’ out of nothing. Indeed, as the full title of Johnson’s *Dictionary* suggests, *type 1* originals are those originals that ‘the Words are deduced from’.<sup>20</sup>

Creation links *type 1* originality with *type 2* originality. The spontaneous, original creation of *type 1* becomes fully creative with the addition of an author’s

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<sup>20</sup> Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language: in which The Words are deduced from their Originals, and Illustrated in their Different Significations by Examples from the best Writers*, 2 vols (London: W. Strahan, 1755).

intent: *type 2* originals are original because an author has consciously forged a new work, imitative or inventive. For Young all art is ultimately imitation, but he admits a certain kind of originality to that art, which is the product of an author's inspired creativity rather than of his previous reading. Hurd concurs, and also stresses novelty and variety as 'certain sources of pleasure' in poetry; novelty and variety than can arise in both conventionally creative and imitative works (p. 5). This is also the case for Gerard, whose sense of novelty is linked to the creative imagination, that displays original genius. As well as inventive originality of this type based on creative imagination, springing from an author's creative genius, imitation was also valued as original in the mid-eighteenth century. Gerard argues that imitations can be enjoyed for two reasons: because they owe their beauty to the beauty of their *type 1* originals and because the skill of the imitator can be enjoyed (pp. 44, 48). For Hurd, poetry is always imitative: but whether or not something can be considered *type 2* original depends on whether it imitates general principles or particular examples (p. 15). Creative originality for Hurd thus becomes a matter of style; a poet's way of adapting a *type 1* original is original in this sense if his re-working of the subject matter is sufficiently novel.<sup>21</sup> For Young, as we have seen, art is also imitation — imitation of nature — but he disapproves of conventional imitative works because they depend on another's originality or creativity; they lack the vital spark that early poetry had.<sup>22</sup> The different views on *type 2* originality emphasise the shift from imitative originality to creative originality that Macfarlane pointed out. However, both kinds of originality are part of the same *type* of originality.

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Baines, who picks this up and insists that 'it was on the matter of style, [...] that all defensive theories of originality finally rested' (*House of Forgery*, p. 96).

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Young, *Conjectures*, p. 9. However, Young praises Joseph Addison's work and advises his readers to imitate his *Cato* (cf. Matthew Wickman, 'Imitating Eve Imitating Echo Imitating Originality: The Critical Reverberations of Sentimental Genius in the *Conjectures on Original Composition*', in *ELH* 65:3 (1998), 899–928 (p. 899)).

Modern scholars, like Macfarlane, tend to only consider *type 2* originality when exploring creativity, genius and originality. Ian Haywood, for example, sees text as ‘a unique creation of a single mind’, and uses ‘originality’ as ‘the term which summarises these facets of authentic authorship’.<sup>23</sup> Authenticity, we recall, was one of the features of *type 1* originality outlined above, but in the period it was only applied to works, not authors. Indeed, as Samuel Johnson points out in his *Dictionary*, ‘it is never used of persons’.<sup>24</sup> Here, though, Haywood is more concerned with authorship than authenticity, something he shares with Paul Baines and others who discuss the role of the author and copyright laws in the eighteenth century. Baines, for example, insists that ‘there could be no property without originality’; creative originality, that is as the pronouncement of an author’s claim on a piece of art through invention.<sup>25</sup> Authorship and *type 2* originality are, of course, notoriously difficult to prove and assess, but this is where *type 3* originality is invaluable. *Type 3* originality uses ‘original’ as a short hand for someone’s, or some thing’s, distinctiveness — their defining characteristic that makes them unique. In terms of characters, originals range from the slightly unusual to the downright ludicrous. Examples of this are all the Shandys in Sterne’s *The Life and Opinion of Tristram Shandy* (‘all the Shandy Family were of an original character throughout’), Matthew Bramble in Smollett’s *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (‘I was much pleased with meeting the original of a character’), or Oldbuck and Sir Arthur Wardour in Scott’s *Antiquary* (‘the breach between these two originals might have been immortal, but for the kind exertions and

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<sup>23</sup> Ian Haywood, *Faking It: Arts and the Politics of Forgery* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1987), p. 30.

<sup>24</sup> Johnson, *Dictionary*, vol. I.

<sup>25</sup> Baines, *House of Forgery*, p. 95. Others who discuss these concepts are, for instance, Jack Lynch, *Deception and Detection in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); K. K. Ruthven, *Faking Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).



interpositions of the Baronet's daughter').<sup>26</sup> For authors, distinction lies in their unique 'voice'. Originality of this *type* is noticeably absent from both modern and eighteenth-century discussions of originality; it is, apparently, limited to discussions of characterisation rather than applied to an author's *oeuvre* or their style.<sup>27</sup>

#### THE OC: ORIGINAL 'MACPHOSSIAN'<sup>28</sup>

As this next section will show, Macpherson's works — OC and otherwise — display all three *types* of originality. *Type 1* originality was a crucial, though often unacknowledged, part of Macpherson's reception. The interpretation and popularity of the OC was distinguished primarily by the debate about their origins and sources, and only secondarily concerned with their creative contribution. Discussions of Macpherson are still largely focussed on the Collections, and any consideration of him and his works is thus almost predisposed to involve ideas of origins and sources. If anything, Macpherson founded a new genre: that of the OC. The odd combination of prose and poetry, of ancient stories and polite embellishments, was the source for many imitations, at home and abroad (as well as, some would argue, one of the foundations of the Romantic movement).<sup>29</sup> However, because the OC are neither straight translations

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<sup>26</sup> Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, ed. by Melvyn New (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 58; Tobias Smollett, *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*, ed. by Lewis M. Knapp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 20; Walter Scott, *The Antiquary*, ed. by Nicola J. Watson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 54.

<sup>27</sup> Cf., however, Mann's take on individual originality, which is the fullest discussion of this type of originality ('The Problem of Originality', pp. 110–16, and 117–18).

<sup>28</sup> 'Macphossian' is taken from K.K. Ruthven, *Faking It*, p. 7.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Susan Manning, *Fragments of Union: Making Connections in Scottish and American Writing* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 149: 'One of the most striking aspects of the furore caused by James Macpherson's recovery (or forgery) of the *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* in 1760, and its epic successors *Temora* and *Fingal*, was how quickly these publications of dubious authenticity and questionable merit themselves became sources of imitation and the model for a wave of structurally ruinous, emotionally attenuated 'Fragments' across Europe and into America. *The Poems of Ossian*, with all their cultural baggage of defeat, nostalgia, and unspecified longing, became a source text for European Romanticism'.

nor entirely unprecedented, their *type 2* originality is a blend of *inventio* and *creatio*. As we have seen above, our period was at a creative turning-point, and the OC are symptomatic of this: their creative originality is muddled because the conflict between Gerard's *inventio* and Young's *creatio* is signified by their debatable originality. As for *type 3*, the OC have been seen by critics as 'mak[ing] defeat a defining and original characteristic of an entire culture'.<sup>30</sup> It is this defeat — utter, hopeless, grief-inducing defeat — that provides the *type 3* originality of the OC; their most characteristic, and pervading, feature is Ossian's 'joy of grief' and the 'last of the race' mentality.

Macpherson's character, and thus his celebrity, was also an important factor in the authenticity debate. From the very beginning of the 1760s, and especially after the publication of *Fingal* in December 1761, Macpherson's roles, behaviour, involvement in and refusal to comment on the authenticity of the OC caused more critical and public interest than the poems themselves. The fact that the authenticity debate was never fully resolved and that it is still touched on by every critic writing on Macpherson, even those who mention it only to say that they will *not* discuss it, shows that a full investigation of Macpherson's originality is long overdue.<sup>31</sup> The question of sources — whether oral, printed or manuscripts — has plagued critics from Samuel Johnson to Thomas Curley. Closely related to *type 1* originality, this search for sources — Johnson's 'original' of *Ossian* — is a

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<sup>30</sup> Dafydd Moore, *Enlightenment and Romance in James Macpherson's The Poems of Ossian: Myth, Genre and Cultural Change* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p. 15. See also ch. 6 thereof, 'Ossian and the Romance of Defeat', pp. 140–66.

<sup>31</sup> Few critics discuss Macpherson's originality explicitly. John Dwyer does, but his conclusion differs from that of this thesis: 'To suggest that Macpherson was an imitator; to say that he fabricated a set of ancient poems which pandered to the sentimental ethos of his age; or even to argue that he followed the philosophical, historical, and literary rules set down by his teachers and supporters; to say all of this is not to say that his works are irrelevant or lack originality. Macpherson's real achievement was to weave together the various strands of sentimental literature and enlightened philosophy in such a way as to demand the reader's involvement and to provide a recognizable model for future writers' (John Dwyer, 'The Melancholy Savage: Text and Context in the *Poems of Ossian*', in *Ossian Revisited*, 164–207 (p. 183)).

search for source authenticity, and thus ultimately a search for source originality.<sup>32</sup> At the heart of the authenticity debate is a fundamental misunderstanding about the nature of *type 1* originality: critics like Johnson were searching for the constituent parts that the Collections were made from — their direct models and predecessors. They failed to understand that these, either oral or lately written down, were neither the earliest form of them, nor was there any one definitive version of the stories and tales, while their opponents, lead by Hugh Blair, misleadingly labelled Macpherson’s translations as ‘third century’, thereby raising these expectations. Because the OC were marketed as translations, the search for what they were translated from is understandable.

However, in the same way that Dafydd Moore’s re-reading of the poems as romance, rather than epic — despite being labelled as epic by Macpherson and Blair — re-evaluates them critically in a move away from a discussion of their impact as a cultural phenomenon or their reception, our enquiry might benefit from defying the claims that the Collections are translations.<sup>33</sup> In doing so, we take Ruthven’s ‘Macphossian’ one step further: instead of considering them as Ossian’s poems collected and translated by Macpherson (which is how they were sold), or as a conglomerate of Macpherson and Ossian (Macphossian), we will regard them as Macpherson’s later poetical works, marketed and sold as Ossian’s works.<sup>34</sup>

When viewed in this way, the *type 1* originality of the OC becomes, at the same time, less contentious and more difficult to assess. Because there are no

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<sup>32</sup> Cf., for example, as only one instance thereof, *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*, in *Journey to the Hebrides*, ed. by Ian McGowan (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1996), p. 104: ‘The editor, or author, never could shew the original’.

<sup>33</sup> Moore, *Enlightenment and Romance*.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas Curley also regards them as an original venture: Macpherson ‘was the author of new, and historically bogus, literature’ (*Samuel Johnson, the Ossian Fraud, and the Celtic Revival in Great Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 23). However, Curley’s study is heavily biased against Macpherson and his poetical efforts; he regards the OC as ‘a work of almost complete fabrication, composed rather quickly over several years and based on very meager original materials or, mostly, none at all’ (p. 22).

longer ‘originals’ to be searched for, the Collections themselves become originals: they are the first productions of their kind. Nick Groom argues that ‘imitations of Ossian were published so rapidly that Macpherson almost seemed to have inaugurated a new genre of writing’ — the Ossianic imitation.<sup>35</sup> In fact, Macpherson *did* establish a new genre: *Ossian*, and not just the imitation thereof. Macpherson’s ‘crime’ was not just to appropriate someone else’s work as his own, but to extend an existing corpus of poems and to provide that extension with a single, identifiable author. As Derick Thomson has shown some of the pieces in the OC really were translations, but the collection as a whole — *The Works of Ossian* as they appeared in 1765 — is a collection of Macpherson’s verse.<sup>36</sup> Of course, the publication of collections of poetry was common, and collections of older poetry were very much an eighteenth-century Scottish phenomenon.<sup>37</sup> But Macpherson’s collection was different: it was the first that consciously created a single authorial persona to give it authenticity, something that, unforeseen by Macpherson and Blair, backfired phenomenally.

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<sup>35</sup> Nick Groom, *The Forger’s Shadow: How Forgery Changed the Course of Literature* (London: Picador, 2002), p. 130.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Thomas Curley, who claims that ‘the Ossianic canon is almost completely Macpherson’s invention’ (*Samuel Johnson, the Ossian Fraud, and the Celtic Revival*, p. 23). However, the present author disagrees with this: it is not ‘the Ossianic canon’ that Macpherson invented, but the unique blend of translated pieces, additions and elaborations, all in a distinctive poetic style.

<sup>37</sup> Macpherson was only the latest in a series of Scottish collectors. In the decades following the Union a number of Scottish song and poetry collections were published. The most famous ones are James Watson’s *Choice Collection of Comic and Serious Scots Poems both Ancient and Modern* (1706–11) and Allan Ramsay’s *Tea-Table Miscellany* (1724–32) and *Ever Green* (1724). What made Macpherson’s collection stand out, however, was that it was advertised as ‘genuine remains of ancient Scottish poetry’ (Preface to the *Fragments, PoO*, p. 5). Watson’s *Collection* is presented as ‘the first of its Nature which has been publish’d in our own Native SCOTS Dialect’, with Ramsay’s *Miscellany* and *Ever Green* following in the tradition of Watson’s (From the Preface of Watson’s *Collection*. The Preface has no page numbers). *The Ever-Green* is subtitled ‘A Collection of Scots Poems. Wrote by the Ingenious before 1600’ and openly presents itself as a continuation and preservation of the poetry of the Scots Makars, otherwise known as Scottish Chaucerians, of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The poems in the OC are neither in Scots nor ‘wrote’, like Ramsay’s. The poems in the earlier collections are taken from manuscripts; their sources are emphasised in their Prefaces: Watson’s collection is ‘copied from the most Correct Manuscripts that could be procured of them’, Ramsay had access to the Bannantyne Manuscript. Neither are they concerned with ‘ancient’ poetry. Macpherson’s poems were, as the title suggests, ‘collected in the Highlands of Scotland’.

The *Fragments*, the part of the OC that is closest to Gaelic originals, never insisted on Ossian as their author; while Ossian is a speaker of some of the *Fragments*, he is also a character in the collection. As a whole, though, the OC are fully original: they are authentic *because* they are no more, and no less, reliant on ancient Scottish poetry than, say, *Paradise Lost* is reliant on the Bible. The OC are somewhere on Joep Leerssen’s ‘blurred grey zone between the authentic and the counterfeit, a sliding scale from literal translation to free translation to adaptation to reconstitution to re-creation to manipulation to imitation to falsification’.<sup>38</sup> In this respect they fulfil two of Hurd’s requirements for originality: they are adaptations of other texts, and they are novel, and thus pleasurable, reworkings. This creative interpretation — and adaptation — of classical models does not, as was claimed for much of the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, reduce the authenticity of the Collections. It only does so if they are seen merely as translations, but if they are accepted as imitations, and thus as an original poetic venture, they forge their own authenticity, and are given authority by Macpherson, their creator. Indeed, as David Hall Radcliffe notes, ‘it is better to think of him [Macpherson] as an “inventor”, with the traditional ambiguity between discovery and making-up. He created something new out of found materials, though he was dishonest about the process’.<sup>39</sup> It is this blend of invention and imitation that makes the OC *type 2* original, but because they are unprecedented in English they are also *type 1* original.

As remarked above, the *type 3* originality of the OC — their defining feature — is the ‘joy of grief’ and ‘last of the race’ mentality that pervades the Collections. However, because of their curious critical history — studied as a

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<sup>38</sup> Leerssen, ‘Ossianic Liminality’, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> David H. Radcliffe, ‘Ancient Poetry and British Pastoral’, in *From Gaelic to Romantic*, 27–40 (p. 34).

phenomenon but only rarely as poetry in their own right — Macpherson’s notoriety is almost as characteristic. ‘It is no coincidence [...] that celebrity became a significant phenomenon at the same time as genius became a significant concept’, David Higgins observes.<sup>40</sup> He is careful to trace the connection between celebrity and the concept of original genius in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when ‘changes in literary production and consumption [...] encouraged the emergence of a culture of literary celebrity in which certain writers [...] became of interest to the public as much for their personal appearance and private lives as for their works’.<sup>41</sup> Although, as we have seen, genius is an important concept in the mid-century discussions about originality, ‘original genius’ was not a concept happily applied to Macpherson: the very nature of the OC opposes that notion. His insistence on the authenticity of the Collections, and thus his somewhat limited role as translator, collector and editor, makes it impossible for genius fully to enter the discussion. In discussions of the OC, however, ‘genius’ often featured, but it was applied to Ossian, their supposed author, rather than Macpherson.<sup>42</sup> The genius of Ossian was linked to the immediate popular appeal of the OC, and to their originality: if accepted as genuine ancient Gaelic poetry they are *type 1*, and very much *type 2* inventive.

The OC have often been seen as the starting point for European Romanticism. Their layer of sentimentality — the added romance observed by Moore — orients them away from neo-classicism and towards the range of sentimental literature so popular in the later eighteenth century.<sup>43</sup> Even critics who

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<sup>40</sup> Higgins, ‘Romanticism and Celebrity Culture’, p. 42.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. Cf. also Higgins, *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine*, p. 3.

<sup>42</sup> Stafford points out that ‘Ossian was heralded as an Original Genius’ (*The Sublime Savage. James Macpherson and the Poems of Ossian* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988), p. 4).

<sup>43</sup> John Dwyer reads the sentimentalism of the OC not as (pre-)Romantic but as part of the Enlightenment discourse of polite societies in the vein of Smith, Hume and Ferguson (‘Melancholy Savage’). While his reading is convincing, this thesis focuses not so much on the polite aspects of Macpherson’s sentimentalism, but on his emphasis on feeling.

disapprove of Macpherson's project admit as much; Curley, for example, notes 'the pervasive sense of melancholy for a lost past'.<sup>44</sup> This is what defines them: the 'joy of grief'.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, as Stafford notes, 'Ossian was the poet of defeatism; heroic perhaps, but offering no hope at all for the future'; defeat, loss and failure characterise the Collections.<sup>46</sup> This is where their *type 3* originality lies: what distinguishes the OC is this 'sensitivity of defeat' (Moore's phrase).<sup>47</sup> Incidentally, the 'sensitivity of defeat' also makes the OC *type 1* original: as Moore notes, 'Ossian represents an originating text for this sort of interpretation of defeat'.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, many early readers questioned the authenticity of the OC *because* of this eighteenth-century sentimentality; that 'polish' was, as Moore points out, 'Ossian's greatest selling-point and greatest weakness'.<sup>49</sup>

Macpherson's shaping of the OC, and his resulting fame, are also intrinsically linked to Ossian's inherent genius: he became celebrated *because* of the 'original genius' of Ossian. It is, of course, difficult to distinguish between Macpherson's fame and that of Ossian and the OC — they are, after all, closely related and ultimately dependent on one another — but surely the relationship between them is one that lies at the centre of Higgins's argument. 'Macphossian' was both famous and original because of both Macpherson and Ossian; the two

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<sup>44</sup> Curley, *Samuel Johnson, the Ossian Fraud, and the Celtic Revival*, p. 24.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Susan Manning, who notes the connection between 'joy of grief' and romantic sentimentalism in Macpherson and Henry Mackenzie: 'it is rather similar to something which he notes in Macpherson's writing [...]: the transition from the terse Gaelic expression "*the joy of grief*" to "the construction of a sentiment", an index of what Keats would call the "true voice of feeling"' ('Henry Mackenzie and Ossian: Or, The Emotional Value of Asterisks', in *From Gaelic to Romantic*, 136–52 (p. 140)).

<sup>46</sup> Fiona Stafford, 'Dangerous Success': Ossian, Wordsworth, and English Romantic Literature', in *Ossian Revisited*, ed. by Howard Gaskill (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), 49–72 (p. 66). Cf. also Moore, who points out that 'memorialisation and celebration of [...] defeat' characterises the poems (*Enlightenment and Romance*, p. 15).

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Dafydd Moore, 'James Macpherson and William Faulkner: A Sensibility of Defeat', in *From Gaelic to Romantic*, 183–215.

<sup>48</sup> Moore, 'James Macpherson and William Faulkner', p. 185.

<sup>49</sup> Moore, *Enlightenment and Romance*, p. 32. Laing sees this as 'its greatest weakness': he thought (in the words of John Dwyer) that 'Macpherson's sentimental descriptions stripped his characters of any semblance of historical realism or authenticity' (Dwyer, 'Melancholy Savage', p. 167).

are difficult to separate, and while Macpherson's fame is certainly dependent on the perceived genius of Ossian, Ossian's genius in turn depends on Macpherson, because only through him and his collections of Ossianic verse did Ossian's genius become apparent to the public. Without Macpherson's involvement in the Collections the genius of Ossian could never have been discovered by its English audience, and naturally the question remains as to how much of their perceived genius was due to Ossian, and how much was, in fact, Macpherson's.<sup>50</sup>

#### *THE HIGHLANDER*: ADAPTING CHRONICLES

*The Highlander* is also an original poem. It translates Scotland's factual past into neo-classic verse, and its originality lies in this. While other works are original in form or style — *type 2* — *The Highlander* is original in all three ways. It is *type 1* original because it is the earliest historical epic after the battle of Culloden in 1746; it is a founding text for the assertion of Scottish identity in a pro-Union British context. It is *type 2* original because of the way Macpherson refashioned history: the poem is simultaneously imitative and inventive. It imitates neo-classic epics, such as Pope's *Iliad* and Dryden's *Aeneid*, but its subject matter is inventive: history, not fiction. Its added layer of romance and pan-British nationalism sets it apart from the earlier epics. It is *type 3* original as an inversion of the OC: it has traceable sources, a recognisable form, and a positive outlook. The prophecy in Canto V particularly emphasises this: it heralds British glory for Scotland.

Hall has observed that 'if his poems lack the consistency expected from historical documents [...] Macpherson achieves the coherent design expected from probable romantic fiction'.<sup>51</sup> Unlike the OC, *The Highlander* is foremost a

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Stafford, who notes that '[Ossian's] simple effusions were polished enough to suit the refined tastes of the eighteenth-century aesthete' (*Sublime Savage*, p. 4). They were, of course, polished by Macpherson.

<sup>51</sup> Radcliffe, 'Ancient Poetry and British Pastoral', p. 35.



history in verse, with only a few sentimental elements. Its very genre — epic — is symptomatic of this: while both the OC and *The Highlander* have been interpreted as an attempt to formulate, or recover, *the* Scottish epic, the OC have been successfully reinterpreted as romance. *The Highlander*, though, is a valid attempt to formulate an epic that was more historical than antiquarian: its sentimental concessions, as Gerard Carruthers observes about the OC, are due to the period's need for 'antique subject-matter collided with the predilections of the age of sensibility'.<sup>52</sup> Dafydd Moore has pointed out the treatment of vanquished foes in the OC as a symptom of this sensibility — something which can easily be extended to the earlier *Highlander*, as Duffus also refuses to take advantage of his enemy, Haco, throughout the poem.<sup>53</sup> Of course, *The Highlander*, with its neo-classic form and emotional hero, is far removed from the grandeur and sublimity of the OC. Yet, like the OC (and, Carruthers would argue, like most Scottish literature of the age), *The Highlander* adapts older material and presents an idea of Scotland both ancient and contemporary. What makes it *type 1* original is therefore its content, and its intention. It is a strikingly British poem: pro-Scottish and pro-Union in outlook, set in the Highlands and written by a Highland Scot only twelve years after Culloden.

But the poem is *type 1* original in another way: it anticipates the OC as an attempt to (re-)write Scottish history, and to give Scotland an epic. Both in itself and seen together with the OC it is the earliest post-Culloden attempt to forge an epic from actual historic sources; an adaptation of history that is authenticated by

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<sup>52</sup> Gerard C. Carruthers, 'The Invention of Scottish Literature During the Long Eighteenth Century' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 2001), p. 187.

<sup>53</sup> Moore, *Enlightenment and Romance*, p. 94

the past. Indeed, as Alexander Macbain observed, *The Highlander* is ‘vigorously original in thought and expression’.<sup>54</sup>

This refashioning of history was inventive, and thus *type 2* original. *Type 1* and *type 2* originality necessarily always overlap if *type 2* is limited to invention: a truly inventive work is always the first of its kind. Yet *type 2* originality is more than mere invention; although some have argued for an inspired, unprecedented, ingenious kind of originality as the only variant of creative originality — the solitary genius of Romantic lyrical poetry — this is by no means an exhaustive approach.<sup>55</sup> Instead, creative originality can range from improvements in imitations to re-interpretations of well-known subject matters, in a different genre or form, perhaps, than previous instances of it. As we have seen above, aesthetic theorists of the 1750s valued both imitation and invention. The adaptation of sources also makes *The Highlander* *type 2* original in the imitative sense.

In form *The Highlander* is a straightforward neo-classical epic poem, modeled on eighteenth-century translations of the classics. Pope’s *Iliad* and Dryden’s *Aeneid* are particularly relevant: Macpherson’s poem derives parts of its plot and expressions from these epics. On closer inspection, however, this becomes no more than a mere shared framework of poetic conventions; its improvement, and thus its *type 2* originality, lies in its added layer of romance and British nationalism. *The Highlander* explores at least two of the themes of romance that Dafydd Moore sets out when he discusses the genre of the OC: the meaning of heroism, and the nature of sentiment.<sup>56</sup> While Macpherson’s heroes — both Scottish and Danish — display many of the character traits and values that the

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<sup>54</sup> Alexander Macbain, ‘Macpherson’s Ossian’, in *The Celtic Magazine* 137:12 (1887), 145–54, 193–201, 240–54 (p. 193).

<sup>55</sup> Cf., for example, Higgins, who outlines this view in the Introduction to *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine*.

<sup>56</sup> Moore, *Enlightenment and Romance*, p. 84.

classical heroes adhere to, he constructs them with a sentimental finish that anticipates both the OC and (Romantic) Men of Feeling. Duffus in particular is singled out as compassionate: throughout the poem he displays unexpected sympathy towards Haco, his Danish opponent. Twice he has the opportunity to kill him in nocturnal duels, and both times he is overcome by sentiments. The first time he ‘scorn’d to take advantage of the foe’ (I. 238), he is rewarded by Haco’s respect and, more materially, Haco’s shield so that they can evade one another in the coming battle. The second time, Duffus is moved by Haco’s feelings for his bride, Aurelia, who followed Haco to the battle. Duffus’s ‘feeling breast’ is ‘touched’ (III. 295) by a scene between the lovers he inadvertently witnesses, and he refrains from contending with Haco alone.<sup>57</sup> While Duffus is not, of course, a knight in shining armour, on a quest to defeat a supernatural creature and to win the love of his lady, there are nonetheless elements of this in the poem. Canto IV is particularly relevant here: in it Duffus rescues Agnes, one of Culena’s maids, from the unwanted advances of Corbred, which secures him not only the admiration of the Court and King Indulph, but also the love of Culena: ‘fair CULENA feels a keener dart,/It pierc’d her breast and sunk into her heart’ (IV. 87–88). The use of ‘fair’ here and later in the canto is indicative of romance rather than epic, as is Duffus’s description as ‘gallant youth’ (IV. 81).

*The Highlander* is unusual amongst Scottish poetic works of its decade in that it is based on clearly traceable historic events, and not principally, like Home’s

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<sup>57</sup> Lisa Kozlowski identifies a similar scene in the OC (in ‘Carric-thura’ as reminiscent of an episode from Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, Book V: ‘when Artegall fights the woman warrior, Radigund, he subdues her [...]. The sight of Radigund’s beauty, however, arouses Artegall’s pity’ (‘Terrible Women and Tender Men: A Study of Gender in Macpherson’s *Ossian*’, in *From Gaelic to Romantic: Ossianic Translations*, ed. by Howard Gaskill, Fiona Stafford (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), 119–135 (p. 129 n13)). However, Duffus is not moved by Aurelia’s beauty, but by the sentimental display of love between her and Haco. In ‘Carric-Thura’ Macpherson follows the model from *The Highlander* (although Kozlowski reads the scene as highlighting feminine beauty and vulnerability (ibid., p. 130)). Cf. also John MacQueen, who notes that ‘Aurelia [...] is only the first heroine compelled by the natural passion of love to step outside her conventional role and become a warrior’ (*The Enlightenment and Scottish Literature. Volume One: Progress and Poetry* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1982), p. 89).

*Douglas*, on a Gaelic ballad, or, like Wilkie's *Epigoniad*, on the *Iliad* and other classical epic poems. Critics have traced *The Highlander* to the Fiann legends and the Magnus ballad and only given cursory attention to its historical sources. This brings the poem closer to the OC and allows them to establish a line of reasoning that sees *The Highlander* merely as a precursor to the OC. What makes the poem unusual, however, is not its shared Gaelic references, but instead its insistence on historical accuracy. Seen on its own — outwith the overbearing context of the OC — Macpherson's translation of actual history is singularly important. It is, of course, also influenced by epic poetry and shares some traits with Gaelic ballads but it is this historic awareness that singles it out from other, more commercially successful works.

As briefly mentioned in the Prologue of this thesis, the plot of *The Highlander* is taken from Scottish histories. Its events centre around the Danish invasion of Scotland and northern England *c.* 960. It is the story of King Indulf, the seventy-seventh Scottish king after Fergus Mor, who was killed by a Danish arrow in 956. Macpherson borrows this story and makes Duffus, the seventy-eighth king, its hero, despite the fact that Duffus is not actually mentioned in the chronicles as having taken part in the episode. Likewise, he embellishes it with episodes from epic poetry and romance, such as the games in Canto IV and the hero rescuing the 'damsel in distress' in the same Canto. Duffus's obscure upbringing as Alpin, Rynold's son, might come from the Fiann legends, but the complex system of succession explains why — historically as well as in the poem

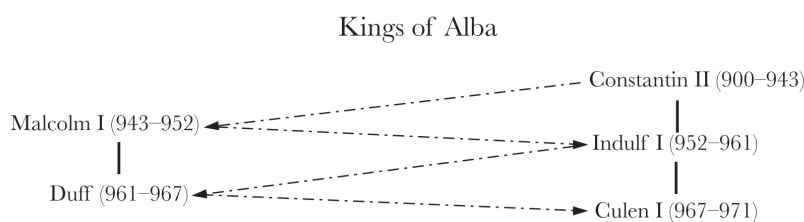
— Duffus would succeed as the next king.<sup>58</sup> Macpherson conveniently transforms Culen, Indulf's son, into Culena, Indulph's daughter: a suitable partner for Duffus, and no threat to the (historically accurate) line of succession. This emphasises Macpherson's sentimentalising tendencies: he readily changes historical facts to strengthen the poem's romance, but he nonetheless remains firmly grounded in history.

John of Fordun's *Chronicle* (of about 1360), the precursor of Bower's *Scotichronicon* (1440s), is generally credited as the first attempt to write a continuous history of Scotland. Macpherson himself mentions that he is familiar with Fordun's *Chronicle* in the Preface to *Temora*. Fordun notes that

At length, while they happened, one day, to be scattered by companies, laying the country waste near a place called Collyn, the king stationed an ambuscade under cover, not far from the coast; for he happened, by mere chance, to be there at that time, with a few followers — but would that he had not been! So while the spoilers were roving about, scattered by companies throughout the fields and towns, he rushed impetuously upon them with shouts, slew a great number, and forced the rest to have recourse to flight. Finally he, high-spirited as he was, having unfortunately thrown away his weapons, so that he might pursue the runaways more swiftly, was struck in the head by a dart out of one of the ships, and died that same night.<sup>59</sup>

Some of the basic plot details are there: the Viking invasion, the Scots' response to it, and Indulph's death by arrow. However, it is more likely that *The Highlander* is based on George Buchanan's sixteenth-century version of events, as he mentions a

<sup>58</sup> During the rule of the Mac Alpin dynasty, direct patrilineal succession was not practised. Instead, the line repeatedly branched off into two separate lines, which in the case of Indulf and Duffus led to the the line passing from Constantine II to Malcolm I, his cousin, then to Indulf, Constantine II's son, then to Duff I, Malcolm I's son, then to Culenus, Indulf's son. Cf. Michael Lynch, *Scotland: A New History* (London: Pimlico, 1992), p. 42.



<sup>59</sup> John of Fordun, *Chronicle of the Scottish Nation*, trans. by Felix J. H. Skene, ed. by William F. Skene, 2 vols (Edinburgh: Edmonston & Douglas, 1872).

number of details that Fordun lacks, and that Macpherson evidently included in the poem. Buchanan's *Rerum Scoticarum Historia* (1582) gives a more detailed account of the battle and Indulph's subsequent death:

When Indulfus heard of [the Danes'] landing, he marched towards them, before they could well have any Notice of his coming; and first he set upon the stragling Plunderers, and drove them to the rest of their Army, but made not great Slaughter of them, because the Camp of the Danes was near, to which they might make their Retreat. When the Armies came in sight of each other, they both drew up in Battle array, and fell to it with equal Force and Courage [...] Indulfus, as if his Enemies had been wholly overcome, rode up and down with a few Attendants, and, casually lighting into their Hands, was slain, at the beginning of the tenth Year of his Reign.<sup>60</sup>

In *The Highlander* there are also battles before the main battle, stragglers faced away from the group, a Danish camp nearby, and an emphasis on the equality of the Scots and Danes. In the poem Indulph is also slain when he least expects it. No mention is made of Alpin or Duffus in the description of the battle, but he is, of course, listed as the next king after Indulph: 'after his Death, Duffus, the Son of Malcolm, got the Kingdom'.<sup>61</sup>

Buchanan also notes other details that Macpherson incorporates into his version of the story: the chase of the Danes to their ships and the last Danish stand, which they achieve by forming a circle.<sup>62</sup> While Fordun mentions the four main Scottish characters — Duffus, Indulf, Malcolm, Culenus — he does not feature any of the Danish characters, or the minor Scottish ones. Buchanan, on

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<sup>60</sup> George Buchanan, *Buchanan's History of Scotland. In Twenty Books. The Second Edition, Revised and Corrected from the Latin Original, by Mr. Bond* (London: A. Bettesworth, W. Taylor, T. Bickerton J. Batley) 1722), pp. 243–44. Bower's *Scotichronicon* and Abercromby's *Martial Achievements of the Scots Nation* also detail the battle. Walter Bower, *Scotichronicon in Latin and English*, ed. by John and Winifred MacQueen, 2 vols (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1989), II, p. 351; Patrick Abercromby, *The Martial Achievements of the Scots Nation. Being an Account of the Lives, Characters, and Memorable Actions, of Such Scotsmen as Have Signaliz'd Themselves by the Sword at Home and Abroad. And a Survey of the Military Transactions Wherein Scotland or Scotsmen Have Been Remarkably Concern'd, from the First Establishment of the Scots Monarchy to the Present Time* (Edinburgh: R. Freebairn, 1711), p. 146.

<sup>61</sup> Buchanan, *History of Scotland*, p. 244.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

the other hand, does. He includes the four Scottish heroes, as well as ‘Hago’, whom Macpherson turns into Haco, and Grame and Dumbar, two of the Scottish chiefs. Alpin’s unknown origin is added by Macpherson but possible derived from the Fiann legends. The love-story is Macpherson’s invention, but this is not unusual: post-medieval romances and later romantic literature often employed that motif to make older materials more interesting or to overcome obstacles between two lovers.<sup>63</sup>

*The Highlander* is thus a much closer translation of history into poetry than, say, the OC. However, the poem is not a direct versification of its sources, but instead an adaptation of them into another genre; an adaptation that necessarily changes some of the ‘plot’ details for dramatic reasons, and adds a sentimental layer to the factual chronicling of the historical accounts. The most noticeable change is the choice of Duffus as the hero of the poem, who was not present in Indulf’s campaign against the Danes. But Duffus is not the only character with whom Macpherson takes poetic liberties in the adaptation from historical source to poem. Culena, Indulf’s daughter and Duffus’s bride, is based on Culen, Indulf’s son. Not much is known about the historical Culen, other than that he became King of Alba after Dubh’s death in 967. He was, according to Fordun, ‘useless and slack in the government of the Kingdom; and nothing kingly or worthy of remembrance was done in his days’.<sup>64</sup> Macpherson took just the name, not the character traits of Culen, when he created Culena; she is graceful, virtuous, modest and, above all, fair.<sup>65</sup> Through her royal birth Culena is, of course, a suitable match for Duffus, and by joining her with Duffus Macpherson not only ensures the fulfilment of the hermit’s prophecy from Canto V, but also

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<sup>63</sup> Cf. Elisabeth Frenzel, *Motive Der Weltliteratur. Ein Lexikon Dichtungsgeschichtlicher Längsschnitte* (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1980), pp. 244–54.

<sup>64</sup> Fordun, *Chronicle*, I, p. 161.

<sup>65</sup> *Highlander*, IV. 15, 17, 5, 48; VI. 113.

manages to retain the historically accurate line of royal succession without compromising either plausibility or the poem's happy end. While Culen and Culena have no more in common than their name and parentage, the use of Culen in *The Highlander* is significant as a further indication of Macpherson's devotion to history and sources. He could have easily invented a female character to suit his love interest, or kept Egidia, the heroine of 'The Hunter' — the draft version of *The Highlander* — but instead he chose to adapt Culen, whose authenticity is warranted by the past. Macpherson does not alter the events depicted in the chronicles. He adapts the characters; occasionally, as in Culena's case, retaining no more than a common name, but he is faithful to the episodes depicted in the chronicles.

Although *The Highlander* and the OC are very different poetic projects — in content, in style, in popularity — the earlier poem nonetheless anticipates the OC, but not in the way other critics have seen it, as a mere confirmation of Macpherson's Ossianic scheme. Despite the similarities between the works — both projects taken older works and adapt them into eighteenth-century epics with an added layer of romance — *The Highlander* is so different in outlook as to negate the defining feature of the OC: defeat. Instead, *The Highlander* is pervaded by gleeful Unionism and pride in newly united Britain. Indeed, the *type 3* originality of the poem — its distinctive quality — consists in faithfulness to historical sources, and in its joyful celebration of union. As Paul deGategno observes, '*The Highlander* is an original narrative'.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> DeGategno, *James Macpherson*, p. 15.



## ‘THE HUNTER’: AN EPIC ROMANCE

Although ‘The Hunter’ predates *The Highlander* and shares similarities in plot, in some respects it is much closer to the OC. Like the OC, it displays Macpherson’s devotion to sentimental romance, and its sources are far more obscure than those of *The Highlander*. ‘The Hunter’ was written in 1756–57, and it only survives in Laing’s edition of *The Poems of Ossian*.<sup>67</sup> The plot of ‘The Hunter’ is very similar to that of *The Highlander*: Donald, a young orphaned highlander, leaves the Highlands for Edinburgh, where an invading army is waiting to attack. He fights them off almost single-handedly, earning praise from the king and nobles. Eventually his true parentage is discovered: he is the son of a noble and thus able to marry Egidia, the king’s daughter. The poem ends with their union. However, the premise of the poem is one of romance: Donald does not leave his home because he wants to fight for his country, like Duffus in *The Highlander* — he only hears about the invasion after he has left — but because a fairy, whose faun he accidentally kills, instills ambition in him as revenge.

This presentation of the poem as a literal fairy tale immediately establishes it as a romance epic, or an epic romance, like Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*.<sup>68</sup> Donald’s search for honour and glory, initially driven by the ambition that the fairy generated in him, is, in fact, a quest: as Barbara Fuchs points out, quests were traditionally made for love or adventure, and Donald’s combines both.<sup>69</sup> His quest

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<sup>67</sup> A couple of passages are dated November 1756. Laing prints the poem from a manuscript found by the Rev. John Anderson, the minister of Kingussie, after Macpherson’s death. Sadly, this manuscript is now lost.

<sup>68</sup> David Fairer points out that ‘the scholarship of John Upton (1707–60) and Thomas Warton (1728–90) in the 1750s effected a breakthrough in critical understanding of *The Faerie Queene*. Upton’s *Spenser’s Faerie Queene. A New Edition with a Glossary, And Notes explanatory and critical*, 2 vols (London: J. & R. Tonson, 1758 [actually 1759]) marked a great advance in establishing an authentic text and offered the earliest analysis of the historical allegory; and Warton’s *Observations on the Faerie Queene of Spenser* (London: R. & J. Dodsley, 1754), expanded to two volumes in 1762, revealed for the first time the full scope of Spenser’s sources, especially the poem’s kinship with medieval romance’ (‘Historical Criticism and the English Canon: A Spenserian Dispute in the 1750s’, in *Eighteenth-Century Life* 24 (2000), 43–64 (p. 45)).

<sup>69</sup> Barbara Fuchs, *Romance* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 4.

begins as an adventure, but quickly, after he has proven his worth, turns to love and the pursuit of Egidia. Similarly, Donald's (albeit unwitting) search for his origins can be seen as a quest.<sup>70</sup> Another romance element occurs in Canto VI, during the feast after the successful battle: the minstrel. More medieval than the Ossianic bard (and more English than Celtic), the unnamed minstrel in 'The Hunter' sings not only of the exploits of heroes, but also tells stories of love and courtship. This is reflected by the poem as a whole: both war and love are present in 'The Hunter', but love plays a far greater role than it does in *The Highlander*, which is almost exclusively focused on war; there, love is almost just a side-line to the wider concerns of war and nationalism. In 'The Hunter', love is revealed as a force stronger than patriotism: 'Love', it is said, 'only pleases; love alone shall pain:/Disturbed the mien of unaffected ease,/And all that native sweetness formed to please' (VI. 74–76). Unlike *The Highlander*, which closes with the hero as king, and his responsibilities divided between 'a husband's care' and 'Albion's rocks' (*Highlander* VI. 269, 271), the ending of 'The Hunter' is only concerned with the love interest in the poem: the the union of Donald and Egidia. 'The Hunter' is the most conventional — and thus least innovative — of Macpherson's productions. But its blend of epic and romance — if not its style or form — anticipates the OC, and makes the poem *type 2* original.

#### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: MACPHERSON'S ORIGINALITY

The last section in this chapter looks at Macpherson's originality through a number of related theoretical concepts, some of which may appear in opposition to one another, and some that seem to complement each other. That, however, is not always the case; at times the complementary ones may be in

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 28.

greater opposition and the oppositional ones may be more complementary. One concept that is not addressed except in passing is that of genius: mainly because it becomes more important later in the century, during the Romantic period.<sup>71</sup>

Some eighteenth-century historical fictions, such as the OC, were seen as forgeries rather than history writing, while others were accepted as either collections of older songs and poems, or indeed as historical fiction. It is unclear why the reception of these collections differed from the reception of the OC. Forgeries, it has been argued, are heavily reliant on their author's intentions: 'forgery is only a threat when there is the possibility of "prejudicing another [person's] right"'.<sup>72</sup> Haywood, it seems, is thinking of Macpherson prejudicing Ossian's rights here, and not, as is more common in the authenticity debate, of Macpherson prejudicing his reading public's right (if such a thing exists) to receive what the Collections advertised: genuine remains of ancient Scottish poetry. This is indeed the case: 'no one need actually be defrauded or deceived for forgery to occur', Haywood observes, 'the intention to deceive in general will suffice'.<sup>73</sup> Any literary forgery is, of course, fiction (in the same way non-forged fiction is), but of course not all fiction is forgery.<sup>74</sup> Yet good forgers are often, as in the case of Macpherson or Chatterton, also gifted poets. Fiction, by its very nature, is not truth, but forgery asks to be taken for truth; that is where its deception lies. Fiction is only forgery if and when an author's rights are prejudiced — if, for example, someone else's works are claimed as their own.<sup>75</sup> Literary forgery is therefore a crime against both *type 2* and *type 3* originality; both an author's creative

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<sup>71</sup> The two main studies for the concept of genius as part of the history of aesthetics are still M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953) and James Engell, *The Creative Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985). For a more recent one see Higgins, *Romantic Genius*.

<sup>72</sup> Haywood, *Faking It*, p. 6.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 26; Ruthven, *Faking Literature*, p. 3–5.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Haywood, *Faking It*, p. 6.

contribution, and the distinctive qualities of their works — their voice perhaps. Plagiarism appears to require originality in the same way. However, while forgery is the theft of style, or an author's identity, plagiarism is the theft of work produced. The authenticity debate centres on this distinction; but, with these definitions in mind Macpherson was neither a forger — he never stole someone's else's style for his own works — nor a plagiarist, as he never stole someone else's works. Instead, he published a group of poems under someone else's name; he passed off his own work and style as someone else's. This, it appears, is an inversion of the classical forger's art.

Fakes are often seen as the 'other' of genuine literature. There is a commonsense assumption that forgery/fake and original/authentic are polar opposites, but recent studies of the subject have tried to move away from this dichotomy towards a more inclusive view of literary forgery.<sup>76</sup> Jack Lynch's 'deception', for example, combines fakes and forgeries, and, as Lynch argues, notions thereof depend on notions of authenticity, which in turn depend on notions of originality.<sup>77</sup> Deception is not, therefore, the opposite of *type 1* originality/authenticity, but instead dependent on it; we need to define what is original in order to claim something as deceptive. Fakes and forgeries are often seen as two sides of the same coin, but 'fake' is almost exclusively applied to art while 'forgery' includes fake money, fake wills and other similarly serious crimes. Some critics have applied their expanded understanding of these topics to the OC, arguing that they are genuine fakes rather than forgeries.<sup>78</sup> Surely, however, this is not only true for the OC but for all literary fakes; all literary fakes are genuine fakes and therefore, by extension, genuine fiction.

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<sup>76</sup> For example, Ruthven in *Faking Literature* or Lynch in *Deception and Detection*.

<sup>77</sup> Lynch, *Deception and Detection*, p. 1.

<sup>78</sup> Ruthven, *Faking Literature*, p. 16.

‘Genuine’, it appears, might not be such a useful term for discussing deceptions; if all fakes are genuine, both as fakes and as literature, its validity is effectively negated. Instead, authenticity might be a more appropriate term, because, as we have seen, deceptions depend on *type 1* originality; authenticity is the concept that links the two. Debates about authenticity are often, implicitly at least, debates about authority. In the case of deceptions both the authenticity and the authority of texts are questioned; the authenticity relies on the text itself — its words, meanings and nuances — while the authority relies on its author. A person gives authority to a text, but authenticity is not generally dependent on the author; it is given to a text by the text itself.<sup>79</sup> It is in *type 1* originality that we can trace authenticity most clearly: if a text is found to be ‘original, first-hand, prototypical’ (*OED*) then it also genuine, which reflects Johnson’s opposition of ‘authentick’ and ‘counterfeit’.<sup>80</sup> The OC, rather than Macpherson as their editor/translator/collector, confected their own authority: the emphasis here is on Ossian as their identifiable single author. Indeed, genuineness has traditionally been applied to the OC in terms of their supposed author, Ossian, but it might be better applied to Macpherson: whatever the OC are, they are genuine Macpherson; it is he, in his several roles as editor/translator/collector, who shaped the Collections into the form that we know them now — poems and paratexts, traceable translations and made-up parts.<sup>81</sup> In legal terms this translates to the

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<sup>79</sup> Cf. John V. Price, who insists that the OC ‘were not ‘new’ at all but had the authority of antiquity’ (‘Ossian and the Canon in the Scottish Enlightenment’, in *Ossian Revisited*, 109–28 (p. 109)).

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Johnson’s *Dictionary* (1755), ‘authentick’: that which has every thing requisite to give it authority, as an authentick register. It is used in opposition to any thing by which authority is destroyed, as authentick, not counterfeit. It is never used of persons’.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Margaret Russett, who notes that ‘the critical tradition of treating *Fingal* and the other works of “Ossian” as forgeries has almost obscured the originality of Macpherson’s experiment in a hybrid prose-poetry. Considered formally it is without precedent, and although Ossian produced many tonal and stylistic imitations, the *form* remained virtually unique to Macpherson’ (*Fictions and Fakes: Forging Romantic Authenticity, 1760–1845* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 17).

rights of the public being more important than the rights of the author, because, after all, the authenticity debate was concerned with whether or not the audience got what they paid for — ‘genuine Ossian’, as opposed to genuine Macpherson.<sup>82</sup> Instead they received bogus Ossian — an inverted forgery.

As we have seen, both the OC and *The Highlander* are original. The different *types* of originality apply to them in different ways, but they apply nonetheless. Yet one question remains: that of Macpherson’s originality (as opposed to that of his works). K. K. Ruthven believes that ‘Macpherson overcame the disappointments of modern authorship provoked by indifference to *The Highlander* (1758) by deciding to become a great ancient poet’, but this seems unlikely.<sup>83</sup> Paul deGategno is certain of Macpherson’s ‘ambition to succeed as an original poet’; an ambition which he undoubtedly achieved, despite the controversy surrounding the Collections.<sup>84</sup> While *type 1* and *type 2* originality apply to works more than authors — for where is their authentic and creative originality most obvious if not in their works? — *type 3* originality concerns their overall authorial persona, or their ‘distinguishing traits’ that ‘will express [their] original character in everything [they] write’, as Elizabeth Mann observes.<sup>85</sup> Several of Macpherson’s interests combine to provide these distinguishing traits: his interest in (Scottish) history, his status as both Scot and Highlander, his ambitious nature. However, while all of these, and more, can be traced in *all* of his works, poetical and historical/political, there is one trait that unites the OC and *The Highlander*, and that is his failure to write *the* Scottish epic.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Cf. Ruthven, *Faking Literature*, p. 7.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>84</sup> DeGategno, *James Macpherson*, p. 3. DeGategno would probably disagree with this: he contrasts Macpherson’s ambition to be original with his ‘seven poems in hackneyed neoclassical verse [...] none can be considered distinguished’.

<sup>85</sup> Mann, ‘Problem of Originality’, p. 117.

<sup>86</sup> Stafford sees *The Highlander* as ‘the great Scottish poem Macpherson hoped to write when he left university’ (*Sublime Savage*, p. 31).

Dafydd Moore is acutely aware of previous scholarship's interpretation of and insistence on the OC's status as epic: 'Ossian must be epic, or modify epic, or fail to be epic in order to fit the narratives of the mid-eighteenth century, of cultural identity, or of literary theory, within which it is perceived to be speaking'.<sup>87</sup> His solution to the uneasy epic consistency of the OC is to question their genre, and re-evaluate them as romance.<sup>88</sup> As we have seen, romance is something Macpherson was keen on from at least the late 1750s, as both 'The Hunter' and *The Highlander* fail as pure epics but succeed as romance epics; perhaps their failure is not as dramatic as that of the OC, but it is nonetheless present. Macpherson, and his works, it appears, are thoroughly original.

*The Highlander* is seldom regarded as an original venture by critics. However, as this chapter has shown, it is original in all three senses, much like the OC. *The Highlander* is unique in its period in the way it adapts historical sources. It is *type 1* — authentically — original because it is neither an imitation of the prose chronicles it is based on, nor an entirely fictional romance: it is the blend of sources and embellishments that, just like the OC, allows Macpherson to forge a new kind of epic. *The Highlander* turns history into fiction: it translates factual prose into fictional verse and forges a Scottish epic that is factual enough to be historical, and fictional enough to be enjoyable (which, as we recall, Hurd insisted on). As such *The Highlander* — again, much like the OC — combines *inventio* and *creatio*: *inventio* in its neo-classical epic form style and expressions, and *creatio* in its romance additions that add a layer of pre-Romantic sentimentality to the martial tales. Finally, *The Highlander*'s curious Britishness — pro-Union Highland celebration of military exploits — provides its *type 3* originality. Victory and Britishness are to *The Highlander* what defeat and Scottishness are to the OC.

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<sup>87</sup> Moore, *Enlightenment and Romance*, p. 4.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 84.

What makes Macpherson, and his works, original is thus his ability to translate history into different fictional genres. The adaptation of chronicles into the epic *Highlander*, the blend of history, romance and fairy tale in ‘The Hunter’ and the transformation of oral stories into the rhythmic prose of the OC provided Macpherson with the opportunity to demonstrate his skill in and dedication to preserving the past. Macpherson was not, as often claimed, a forger and hack writer, but instead an author capable of broadcasting his talents in many different forms: apart from *The Highlander*, ‘The Hunter’ and the OC he also published translations of Horace, graveyard poems, heroic war poetry, classical translations, histories and political pamphlets. Throughout his life Macpherson returned to the past, and continued to experiment with different genres and styles. His oeuvre, diverse as it may seem, is united by his passion for history, and this is where his originality lies.



## CHAPTER 5 — SCOTTISH IDENTITY IN THE 1750S: MYTH &amp; TRADITION

Enjoy *Scotching the Myths*.<sup>1</sup>  
(Jim Hewitson)

This chapter explores myth and tradition in Scottish works of the 1750s and 1760s, when the ‘myth of the Highlands’ and the ‘invention of tradition’ took hold in public opinion. In the past these concepts have been used interchangeably by critics: they often fail to distinguish between myth and tradition. This chapter understands the two concepts as addressing different aspects of Scottish identity, and investigates how these different aspects have been represented both in the literature of the period and in later criticism.<sup>2</sup> The terms have their equivalents in the critical vocabulary of the 1750s, as evident from William Wilkie’s Preface to the *Epigoniad* (1757).<sup>3</sup> The ‘myth’ is part of the Romantic idea of Scotland that tourists came to expect; it is derived mainly from literature and art. By its very nature it is inventive and fictional: both the past and present displayed in the works are, and always have been, unreal, and only loosely based on actual antiquarian or historical sources. ‘Tradition’, on the other hand, pertains to political and historical realities: the Union of 1707, Jacobitism and Scotland’s political standing

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<sup>1</sup> Jim Hewitson, *Scotching the Myths: An Alternative Route Map to Scottish History* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 1995), p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Simpson observes that there was ‘in Scottish writing from roughly 1740 onwards [...] a crisis of identity among Scots’ (*The Protean Scot: The Crisis of Identity in Eighteenth Century Scottish Literature* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988), p. 3). Although he is more concerned with authorial crises, the distinction between ‘myth’ and ‘tradition’ in Scottish historical writing of the period is part of the wider identity crisis. Also cf. Colin Kidd, who notes that ‘since the middle of the eighteenth century Scotland’s enlightened literati had rigorously deconstructed the redundant myths of Scottish nationhood, not only the destabilising Jacobite version, but also the traditional Scottish whig interpretation of history’ (‘Macpherson, Burns and the Politics of Sentiment’, in *Scottlands* 4:1 (1997), 25–43 (p. 27)). Also Paul M. and Joan deRis Allen, who note the difference between traditional Ossianic material and the OC: ‘Why are the rhythms and sounds of these poems so meaningful, even after being handed down for centuries through tradition alone?’ (*Fingal’s Cave, the Poems of Ossian, and Celtic Christianity* (New York: Continuum, 1999), p. 145).

<sup>3</sup> Wilkie discusses questions of poetic expectation and historical veracity in the Preface and singles out ‘tradition’ as particularly relevant to epics. However, he uses ‘tradition’ in the same way that this chapter uses ‘myth’. See pp. 182ff of this chapter.

within Britain.<sup>4</sup> Despite Eric Hobsbawm's and Terence Ranger's seminal study *The Invention of Tradition*, and particularly Hugh Trevor-Roper's essay in that volume, tradition as this chapter understands it is not inventive: it is based on antiquarian and historical research and seeks to understand and propose an identity for Scotland that is firmly based in its traceable past.<sup>5</sup> Mythical Scotland is the land of Ossianic fancy and tartan spectacles — traditional Scotland is the country of James VI and Charles Edward Stuart, of British government and Scottish laws.<sup>6</sup> In contemporary Scotland the myth may well have become tradition, but in Macpherson's present there was a distinct difference between the two.<sup>7</sup> The concentration on the OC in modern works on Scottish identity has obscured the period 1746–1760, from the end of the Jacobite uprising to the publication of the *Fragments*, and instigated the division in Scottish identity that corresponds to the distinction between myth and tradition. This chapter shows that Macpherson's works of the 1750s formulated ideas of Scotland that were distinctly different from those put forward by the OC, and that by examining their context — historical, political, cultural — we can understand where this division originated.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Kidd, who juxtaposes 'pre-existing Scottish traditions' and sentimental nationalism ('Macpherson, Burns and the Politics of Sentiment', p. 40).

<sup>5</sup> Hugh Trevor-Roper, 'The Invention of Tradition: The Highland Tradition of Scotland', in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. by Eric Hobsbawm, Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 15–42. Kenneth McNeil also misunderstands the distinction, and sees the OC as 'an example of Scotland's ancient martial tradition' (*Scotland, Britain, Empire: Writing the Highlands, 1760–1860* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2007), p. 29). The title of Trevor-Roper's posthumous collection, which contains a long section on the OC, is far more apt: *The Invention of Scotland: Myth and History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Indeed, as Susan Manning points out, 'while formal histories of Britain set the union in a concrete story of the nation's advancement from barbarism to civility, a sort of shadow-history was created through antiquarian collections of artefacts, tales, songs, myths and legends of the nation, which brought a more diverse past into the popular present to celebrate the continuities of national identity' ('Post-Union Scotland and the Scottish Idiom of Britishness', in *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature*, ed. by Ian Brown, 3 vols (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), II, 45–56 (p. 48)).

<sup>7</sup> See chapter 7 — Epilogue — for an exploration of Ossianised Scotland.

Macpherson and his works have often been seen as the driving force behind both myth and tradition: ‘by combining history and legend with nationalistic fervour, Macpherson rediscovers [...] ancient traditions’.<sup>8</sup> Although not discussed by previous scholarship, the division between myth and tradition in his work is conspicuous: *The Highlander*, based on traceable sources, portrays traditional Scotland, and only encourages myth-making through its ancient setting. The OC, on the other hand, embody the myth in their fictional (re)invention of Scotland’s ancient past. In his later histories (see chapter 6) Macpherson continued to formulate an idea of Scotland, but one removed from the myth of the OC, and — like *The Highlander* — authenticated by history itself. In this chapter we see Macpherson at work as a historian and antiquary, translating the past into an idea of Scotland that is both mythical and traditional. It examines how Macpherson’s poetical works — *The Highlander* and ‘The Hunter’ — contribute to mid-eighteenth-century Scottish identity, and how, partly because of their sources, and partly because of their content, they each construct a different version of Scotland’s past. It also briefly considers other Scottish works of the period — Mallett’s *Britannia* (1755), Home’s *Douglas* (1756), Wilkie’s *Epigoniad* (1757) — to emphasise Macpherson’s unique blend of myth and tradition. This chapter is sub-divided into four sections: *The Highlander* (pp. 150–60), ‘The Hunter’ (pp. 161–65), Other Scottish Works of the Period (pp. 165–74) and Concluding Thoughts (pp. 174–80).

#### *THE HIGHLANDER*: SCOTLAND’S TRADITIONAL PAST

In *The Highlander*, Macpherson portrays Scotland’s glorious past. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the poem is based on clearly traceable sources,

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<sup>8</sup> James deGategno, *James Macpherson* (Boston: Twayne, 1989), p. 16.

and Macpherson's versification of them is largely faithful to the historical realities. But history is also very tangible in the poem: the past is constantly evoked. This allows Macpherson to establish contemporary Scotland as steeped in British history: the Scottishness of the poem is not a threat to Union, but a celebration of it. *The Highlander* is very much a Scottish work: set in ancient 'Caledonia', and of course written by a Scottish author. Unlike other works of the period, however, the poem is Scottish through and through: plaids, bagpipes and Scottish steel are more than simple colouring here. Unlike Home's *Douglas*, for example, which is set mainly in and near a castle — and not a particularly Scottish one at that — and which only mentions rugged mountains and violent streams in passing, the action of *The Highlander* takes place, identifiably, both in the Highlands and in the Lowlands, as well as in the 'dome of state' (I. 34) — the Scottish hall of fame, a decidedly Scottish 'senate' (I. 27). The senate, we are told, meets in a 'city' which the Scandinavians 'prepar'd, at once, [...] to invade' (I. 21), in order to 'conquer CALEDONIA in [its] head' (I. 22). The implication here is two-fold: that the city, home of the senate and King Indulph, is naturally the prime target for the invading Danes, but also that the city, merely by virtue of being a city, is the head of the country. The phrasing 'in her head' encourages the latter reading: to conquer Scotland in its head implies the elevation of city over country, Lowlands over Highlands, Enlightenment over primitivism, tradition over myth.

History is deeply ingrained in the poem. Not only is it a historical poem — datable, due to its historic characters, to the later tenth century — but within the poem history is ever-present. In the first Canto Duffus encounters 'the antient Kings of CALEDONIA'S land' (I. 40) on either side of the dome's gates. The statues are almost alive: 'the marble lives, they breathe within the stone,/And still, as once, the royal warriors frown' (I. 41–42). Their anonymity does not diminish

their liveliness, but instead reinforces the image of breathing marbles. The named individuals, ‘seen above the gate’ (I. 43), the two Ferguses and Gregorius, are also living history, ‘threaten[ing] from the stone the spear’ (I. 46), as is Kenneth MacAlpin: ‘the filial heart of hapless ALPIN’S son,/In marble melts and beats within the stone’ (I. 53–54). Finally, ‘young ALBION’, the spirit of Caledonia and also one of the statues, ‘seems to rise,/And on her fathers turns her smiling eyes’ (I. 47–48). Later, the past comes to life in a different way: after the initial fight Indulph rallies his troops again, pointing out that ‘in vain Death wrapt our fathers in his gloom,/We raise them, in our actions, from the tomb’ (III. 31–32). The ancient heroes are re-awakened later on, when Indulph bestows their weapons as prizes during the games in Canto IV. Throughout the poem history is thus almost tangibly present: the Scotland presented here is steeped in tradition, not myth, with all historic personages, authenticated by chronicles and later histories of Scotland.

Unlike ‘The Hunter’, *The Highlander* contains no formal reference to England as the enemy of Scotland.<sup>9</sup> There is only one reference to England in the early parts of the poem: ‘England’s subdu’d, the Saxons are o’ercome,/and meanly own a Danish lord at home./Scarce now a blast from SCANDINAVIA roars,/But wafts a hostile squadron to our shores’ (I. 119–22). As well as highlighting the Danes as the common British enemy, this passage also expresses Scottish superiority: after all, while the English ‘own a Danish lord at home’, the Scots, as we have just seen, ‘deals [...] death upon the Dane’. However, instead of developing this contrast further, Macpherson draws attention to the inevitability of war, in the close of Indulph’s speech: ‘thus war returns in an eternal round,/

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Mel Kersey, who argues that the absence of Anglo-Scottish rivalry in *The Highlander* ‘remov[es] internal faction from the rhetorical unity of ‘Albion’’. He does not, however, develop this idea the way this chapter does (‘The Pre-Ossianic Politics of James Macpherson’, in *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 27 (2004), 61–75 (p. 65)).

Battles on battles press, and wound on wound' (I. 125–26). Ultimately, thus, the focus here lies on similarities, and not on differences; war is inexorable. This might appear as a justification, or even encouragement, of a continuation of the recent British struggles, yet the rest of the poem counteracts this idea. War is only seen as inevitable in the present of the poem, but not in Macpherson's eighteenth-century present. Traditional Scotland therefore encourages a common British mindset that focuses on past battles and present peace.

Apart from the prophecy in Canto V, which depicts the relations between the two countries, Macpherson carefully avoids references to the recent struggles at home, focusing instead on Romans and Danes. When we first meet Indulph he reminds his warriors that their 'sire brought oft the Roman Eagles down', while they themselves 'have caus'd the haughty DANE, / To curse the land, he try'd so oft in vain' (I. 94–96). The Danes, it transpires, are still the current enemy in the poem (not the English of 'The Hunter', and of recent, eighteenth-century history), and Indulph demands that 'whoe'er would raise his house in ALBION, shou'd/Lay the foundation in her en'mies blood' (I. 91–92). His followers are eager to comply: Duffus, representative of the nation's youth

... 'midst rocks afar,  
 heard of Denmark, and of Sueno's war.  
 My country's safety in my bosom rose;  
 For CALEDONIA's sons should meet her foes.  
 We ought not meanly wait the storm at home,  
 But rush afar, and break it 'ere it come. (I. 79–84)

Although this passage could be read as a reference to Macpherson's latent Jacobitism, with the recent uprising and the Jacobite army's march to Derby as another instance of the Scots eagerly meeting their foes afar, Macpherson here, as elsewhere, emphasises the Scots' justification for fighting: their country's safety. This is echoed in the rousing finish of Duffus's speech: 'we come to serve our country, fame, and you!' (I. 86). Every Scot is 'at once his country's soldier and her

son', with 'the patriot kindling in each gen'rous breast'. (I.106, 108).<sup>10</sup> Towards the end of this section the focus returns to the enemy at hand, again emphasising the conscious absence of England, and English foes: 'in thought each Hero sweeps the bloody plain,/And deals, in fancy, death upon the DANE' (I. 111–12). Indeed, traditional Scotland is presented as peaceful and united: Macpherson's faithfulness to historic events encourages trust in his predictions for the future of Scotland and Britain.

Similarly, Canto II presents the Scots' attention divided between sport and battle: 'now fought for food, and now for liberty:/Now met the sport of hills, now of the main,/Here pierc'd a stag, and there transfix'd a Dane' (II. 34–36). Although they prefer the play (and humble peasant life) of peacetime, they unequivocally come to their country's aid when needed: 'tho' nature's walls their homely huts inclose,/To guard their homely huts tho' mountains rose;/Yet feeling ALBION in their breasts, they dare/From rocks to rush and meet the distant war' (II. 37–40). It is important to note the use of 'dare' here; the Scots do not want or need to rush to war, but instead courageously venture forth for the sake of liberty and national honour.<sup>11</sup> The Danes, on the other hand, relish the challenge: 'haughty, he [Magnus] moves, and catching flame from far,/Looks tow'rds the SCOTS, anticipates the war;/Feels cruel joys in all his fibres rise,/And gathers all his fury to his eyes' (II. 65–68). These 'cruel joys' are noticeably absent from the Scottish side. In fact, the preference for homely pursuits extends to battle: 'not infamous their aim, o'er lands afar/To spread destruction and the plague of war;/To meet the sons of battle as they roam,/Content to ward them from their native home' (III. 33–36). Indeed, Macpherson later refers to the sport of the hills as

<sup>10</sup> This sentiment is repeated throughout the poem, for example 'carrying all their country in their breast' (II. 32).

<sup>11</sup> DeGategno reads the poem differently: he argues that in *The Highlander* Macpherson 'paints an entire nation as war-mad' (*James Macpherson*, p. 16).

‘mountain-war’ (VI. 4). The Scots are portrayed as peaceful and honourable; they are more similar to Buchanan’s Renaissance gentlemen than Ossian’s warlike savages. In traditional Scotland war is a defensive act; there is no room for Jacobite antics.

As mentioned in chapter 4, when Duffus realises that the lovers are torn between love for one another and love for their country he immediately ceases the attack: ‘it touch’d his feeling breast,/He stopt the war’ (III. 295–96). This is the second time in the poem that Duffus had the chance to kill Haco but chooses not to, and emphasises his gentle nobility and thoughtful sentimentality. Kenneth Simpson has identified ‘the voice of feeling’ as the only one in Macpherson’s writings; unlike other Scottish authors Macpherson’s poetry ‘reveals no [...] diversity’.<sup>12</sup> As the previous chapter has shown, sentimentalism is indeed a key feature of Macpherson’s writings. However, in this instance it is more than sentimentality; this time, Duffus’s decision does not just concern Haco and himself, but also the other warriors on either side. As for the Scots, Duffus explains, ‘our CALEDONIA, now reliev’d of fear,/Feels pity rising in the place of care’ (III. 297–98). Once again the Scots are here shown to be peace-loving rather than belligerent, defending their country rather than attacking. Although this added romance lends an air of myth to the traditional *Highlander*, tradition remains at the core of the poem: because the sentimentality is extended to all Scots, Macpherson is able to turn myth — Duffus’s sentimentality is not in the chronicles — into tradition. Buchanan emphasises the valour and courage of the Scots, and Macpherson translates this into an eighteenth-century version of those terms.

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<sup>12</sup> Simpson, *Protean Scot*, p. 41.



This echoes the sentiments expressed earlier in the poem, where the Scots are shown to relish the sport of the hills over going to war. This is again emphasised in the next canto, when the senate discusses future defence tactics:

No high-flown zeal the patriot hurl'd along,  
 No secret gold engag'd the speaker's tongue.  
 No jarring seeds are by a tyrant sown,  
 Nor cunning senate undermines the throne.  
 To public good their public thoughts repair,  
 And CALEDONIA is the gen'ral care. (IV. 132–37)

This is followed by the symbolic presentation of Dumbar's sword to Duffus. The 'great DUMBAR', who had once fought on Duffus's father's side, when 'beneath the royal banner, SCOTS afar/Had urg'd on Humber's banks the foreign war' (IV. 150–51), ceremoniously bestows his sword on Duffus, thus emphasising the turning-away from the old, belligerent ways to Duffus's modern peaceful ways. And, on a more prosaic level, this scene is followed by games, not battle, to reinforce this idea. As mentioned above, the ancient Caledonian heroes are recalled during the competition, forcing the reader into a similar comparison to that between Dumbar's deeds of old and Duffus's modern Caledonia: the 'antique bow' won by 'great FERGUS' when fighting the Romans goes to the most skilful archer, and 'mighty KENNETH's' buckler to the best spear-thrower. Unlike the Ossianic heroes, Fergus and Kenneth are documented by history: through their weapons tradition is extended into the present of the poem, and becomes a tangible presence yet again.

Another section that has been widely overlooked is the end of Canto IV, when Duffus relates his early life. Earlier in the poem Duffus apologised to the senate that he was but 'brought up in mountains, and from councils far,/I am a novice in the art of war' (I. 165–66). At the end of Canto IV Indulph assures Duffus and the other warriors that their deeds matter more than their reputation: 'nobler the youth, who, tho' before unknown,/From merit mounts to virtue and

renown,/Than he, set up by an illustrious race,/Totters aloft, and scarce can keep his place' (IV. 300–03). Again we can see that instead of nourishing latent Jacobite tendencies, as has been claimed by careless critics, Macpherson, in fact, seems to support quite the opposite here, and a Jacobite reading of *The Highlander* is, at best, awkward. This is especially compelling when we compare it to the following lines from the beginning of Canto V that echo the aftermath of the 1745 rising. Duffus relates a previous battle, where the warriors were faced with fighting while their homes and families were destroyed or forced to flee: 'this breathes his life thro' the impurpled wound,/While his proud villa smokes along the ground./That with the foe maintains unequal strife,/While his dear offspring fly, and dearer wife' (V. 25–28). The repeated use of distinct landmarks, such as the river Tay, in this section emphasises the traditional nature of the poem: the Scots are defending themselves, and not attacking on foreign soil; Duffus, and the new Scotland, still choose peace over war.

The prophecy in Canto V is the most pronounced argument for peace. It is also, unlike the rest of the poem, and as pointed out by Kersey, a 'political vision' in which 'the task of seeing the future is allotted to an unnamed hermit' reminiscent of Thomson and Mallet's hermit in their masque *Alfred* (1740).<sup>13</sup> Kersey reads the prophecy section, like the rest of *The Highlander*, as a Whig manifesto; a convincing if somewhat one-sided reading. Instead, this chapter views the section as less party-political, focusing instead on the wider context of Scottish-English relations and its connection with the earlier parts of the poem discussed above. The hermit instantaneously creates a bond between past, present and future: he addresses Duffus (present) as 'thy blood, which rolling down from FERGUS came,/Passes thro' time, a pure untainted stream./Albion shall in her

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<sup>13</sup> Kersey, 'Pre-Ossianic Politics', p. 66.

pristine glory shine,/And, bless herself, bless the FERGUSIAN line' (V. 145–48). The reference to Fergus provides the past context, while the prediction for Albion points to the future. This is only the second time in the poem that Duffus's royal lineage is alluded to; the first was Indulph's exclamation at the beginning of the poem: 'a face once known is in that youth exprest' (I. 77). This, of course, emphasises Indulph's earlier observation concerning merit and lineage. Indeed, although the hermit is bordering on myth — a Romantic visionary — his predictions are all true, and thus support a traditional reading of the poem.

As Kersey has pointed out, 'the Hermit's vision picks up the narrative of Scotland's mythical history where Buchanan's *Rerum Scoticarum Historia* (1582) had stopped'.<sup>14</sup> He proceeds to outline that narrative, linking the hermit's predictions to historic events. Kersey's use of 'myth', here, is of course somewhat misleading: *The Highlander* is far from mythical. Buchanan's ancient history might well be speculation, but compared to the ancient 'history' presented in the OC it is very much steeped in tangible tradition. 'Albion', which throughout the earlier parts of the poem was used synonymous with 'Caledonia' and 'Scotland', takes on a wider British meaning here: 'pale ALBION trembling, and her monarch dead' (V. 150) refers to the consequences of Charles I's execution. Granted, support for Charles — and resistance to Cromwell — was more substantial in Scotland than in England, but Charles was nonetheless a joint Scottish and English monarch, as well as a Stuart one. Furthermore, as Kersey points out, the hermit alludes to the Glorious Revolution (1688–89), William and Mary's reign and Anne's inability, as the last Stuart monarch, to produce heirs.

Yet this section of the prophecy is a little complicated:  
 Glad CALEDONIA owns their lawful sway;  
 Happy in them, in her unhappy they!  
 See each inwrapt untimely in his shroud,

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

For ever sleeping in his gen'rous blood!  
Who on thy mournful tomb refrains the tear?' (V.165–169)

could indeed, as Kersey reads it, refer to William and Mary — they, the rulers; her, Caledonia —, or to the Jacobites — they, the exiled Stuarts; her, Caledonia. But these lines could also be about Queen Anne (Anne was, after all, the monarch of the Union of 1707). Indeed, 'glad CALEDONIA owns their [that is, the Stuarts'] lawful sway;/Happy in them, in her [that is, Anne] unhappy they!' (V. 165–66). They are unhappy because, as the next line says, 'See each inwraapt untimely in his shroud' (V. 167) — all her children died young, and she was the last Stuart monarch. Overall, and whichever these lines are read, the details combine to add truth and reality to the poem: their historical accuracy underlines Macpherson's traditional — that is historical — reading of Scotland's past.

Kersey's reading of the close of the hermit's vision is problematic. The prophecy runs as follows:

Why mention him in whom th'eternal fates  
Shall bind in peace the long-discording states?  
See SCOT and SAXON coalesc'd in one,  
Support the glory of the common crown.  
BRITAIN no more shall shake with native storms,  
But o'er the trembling nations lift her arms. (V. 175–80)

Kersey rightly reads these lines as 'complicat[ing] any reading of Macpherson as a Jacobite' because Jacobitism has 'no future in Macpherson's vision of a unified 'Britain''.<sup>15</sup> However, Kersey misunderstands this passage: he reads the rhetorical question as separate from the section that follows (quoted above). The narrator's reluctance to mention 'him' by more than this cryptic couplet is, for Kersey, a clear allusion to Charles Edward Stuart: 'the Pretender is finished: "Why mention him" in a nation in which "Scot and Saxon" are happily mixed, or "coalesced in one"?''.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the use of 'shall' implies a more fatalistic future-oriented

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

meaning: ‘him in whom th’eternal fates shall bind in peace the long-discording states’ — in other words, he who brings peace to the united Britain — is George II, and not Charles Edward Stuart. It is under George II’s ‘common crown’ that ‘Scot and Saxon’ are finally — after the ’45 rising — ‘coalesc’d in one’, and under his rule that ‘Britain no more shall shake with native storms, but o’er the trembling nations lift her arms’.<sup>17</sup> The same sentiment is echoed later, when Indulph predicts that ‘posterity for ALBION’S crown may fight,/And couch ambition in the name of right;/With specious titles urge the civil war/And to a crown their guilty journey tear’ (VI. 133–36). Similar to the prophecy, Macpherson here again unambiguously takes the government’s — and tradition’s — side: the ’45 rising is seen as nothing but ambition ‘couch[ed] in the name of right’. The ‘specious titles’ are those of Charles and his father James, styled, respectively, Charles III and James IX by their followers. The Pretender belongs in mythical Scotland: on a quest to reclaim his father’s throne abroad — he had, after all, grown up in Italy — ‘Bonnie Prince Charlie’ has no part in Macpherson’s traditional Scotland.

Lastly, Macpherson anticipates the bardic — myth — version of history so popular in the OC in *The Highlander*. Towards the end of Canto V, after Duffus’s true parentage is revealed,

Harmonious bards exult the tuneful voice:  
A select band by INDULPH’S bounty fed,  
To keep in song the mem’ry of the dead!  
They handed down the ancient rounds of time,  
In oral story and recorded rhyme. (V. 294–98)

Much like the stone statues in Canto I, and the prized objects in Canto IV, the ‘mem’ry of the dead’ is preserved by the bards in ‘ancient round of time, in oral story and recorded rhyme’. They sing ‘exploits of heroes, and of antient kings’ (V.

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Howard Weinbrot, who also reads these lines as pro-Union (*Britannia’s Issue: The Rise of British Literature from Dryden to Ossian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 540). Kidd also notes that ‘a British allegiance coexists with a conventional Scottish identity’ here (‘Macpherson, Burns and the Politics of Sentiment’, p. 29).

300), such as Fergus and Gregorius. Because of recent events, however, the bardic tales also include ‘valiant DUFFUS, and the slaughter’d DANES’ (V. 312). Much as in *The Highlander* itself, ‘the battle lives in verse; in song they wound;/ And falling squadrons thunder on the ground’ (V. 313–14). With the bards’ song — the poem within the poem — *The Highlander* thus becomes both myth and tradition: it portrays events taken from tradition, but at the same time mythologises them in the bards’ version.

#### ‘THE HUNTER’: TRADITION MYTHOLOGISED

‘The Hunter’, the draft version of *The Highlander*, presents a mixture of tradition and myth, and thus again combines aspects of *The Highlander* with aspects of the OC (see chapter 4). In *Acts of Union*, Leith Davis argues that ‘The Hunter’ reflects the tension between primitivism and cosmopolitanism: the poem ‘accept[s] the demise of Highland society as the way to prosperity and lament[s] its passing’.<sup>18</sup> This tension can be seen as representative of the divide between myth and tradition, with primitivism, and its associated vision of history, typifying myth, and enlightened cosmopolitanism epitomising a view of history based on tradition.

Unlike *The Highlander*, which opens with the narrator giving an account of the poem he is about to ‘sing’ (I. 1), ‘The Hunter’ consciously begins with a glorification of the past: ‘once on a time, when Liberty was seen/To sport and revel on the northern plain’ (I. 1–2). Liberty and ambition are the two main themes both of ‘The Hunter’ and of *The Highlander*, but in ‘The Hunter’ they form an integral part of the story. The ‘once upon a time’ opening implies at once a temporal distance between the action of the poem and the writer’s present.

<sup>18</sup> Leith Davis, *Acts of Union: Scotland and the Literary Negotiation of the British Nation, 1707–1830* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 78.

Indeed, the poem is set in the same period as *The Highlander*, with its feudal battles, Viking attack and romance circumstances. It suggests that liberty, although a feature of Scottish society in this distant past, is no longer ‘seen [...] on the northern plain’ in Macpherson’s present; incidentally, even within the limited time-frame of the poem itself liberty has been replaced by ambition. This immediately places the poem in the realm of myth: the personification of liberty emphasises the poem’s difference from *The Highlander*, which is so full of traceable events; the opening is reminiscent of bardic poetry, not epics or histories.

‘The Hunter’ opens with a description of the simple life Donald led before the fairy instilled ambition in him:

There lived a youth, and DONALD was his name.  
To chace the flying stag his highest aim;  
A gun, a plaid, a dog his humble store;  
In these thrice happy, as he wants no more.  
The flesh of deer his food; the heath his bed;  
He slept contented in his tartan plaid. (I. 5–10)

Although this description is similar to passages in *The Highlander*, its condensed and emphasised depiction of Scottishness is far more mythical than the corresponding passages from Macpherson’s later poem. In *The Highlander* they provide a colourful background setting for the (mostly) historically accurate plot, lending credibility to the events of the poem through their gentle depiction of Scottishness. In this passage from ‘The Hunter’, on the other hand, the list of Scotticisms takes on a more mythical significance. The items and actions depicted here are those that the later tourists came to expect in Scotland: stags, guns, plaids, heath, tartan, and contented poverty; a ‘nostalgic plea for the traditional Highland way of life, at a time when it was being destroyed’, as Fiona Stafford has observed.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the opening of the poem immediately calls on elements of the myth.

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<sup>19</sup> Fiona Stafford, *The Sublime Savage: A Study of James Macpherson and the Poems of Ossian* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988), p. 53.

While ‘The Hunter’ has attracted even less critical attention than *The Highlander*, those critics that do concern themselves with the poem inevitably focus on either the similarities between ‘The Hunter’ and *The Highlander*, or on the following passage, depicting Edinburgh:

On rocks a city stands, high-tower’d, unwall’d,  
 And from its scite the hill of Edin call’d,  
 Once the proud seat of royalty and state,  
 Of kings, of heroes, and of all that’s great;  
 But these are flown, and Edin’s only stores  
 Are fops, and scriveners, and English’d whores. (I. 137–42)

Even in the medieval present of the poem Edinburgh is portrayed as immoral and degenerate — a remarkable contrast to the dome of state that houses the senate in *The Highlander*. Stafford sees this section as an example of Macpherson’s ‘disgust at the decline of Scottish glory in the face of the degenerate English’, but it is not so much the English themselves that Macpherson is criticising here: he attacks ‘English’d’ Scots that have forsaken their own roots for southern manners and style. The section is also telling in regard to the inner-Scottish distinction between Highlands and Lowlands: ‘heroes, and [...] all that’s great’ are no longer present in Edinburgh, yet they clearly still exist in the Highlands, as Donald himself shows; he is the perfect example of a heroic, noble Highland warrior. The link to the present — of the poem, as well as of Macpherson — also provides a link with tradition: ‘English’d’ Scots are the concrete antithesis of mythical Highlanders. The contrast between anglicised Lowlands and Scottish Highlands thus emphasises the opposition between myth and tradition in the poem: the mythical Highlands are seen as preferable to the traditional Lowlands. This is not the same tradition as in *The Highlander*, but instead a response to eighteenth-century attitudes to Scottishness and Englishness.

There is a correlation between different kinds of history: primitivism is associated with mythic Scotland, as shown in the opening passage quoted above,



and ambition with traditional Scotland, as exemplified by this following passage (as well as the description of Edinburgh). Donald has just been instilled with ambition by the fairy, and suddenly his primitive, pastoral idyll is despicable and odious to him:

In Donald's eye now fade the blissful scenes:  
The rough brow'd rocks, the sloping hills and plains,  
Delight no more; no chace, no winged fowl,  
No goat, no cattle, cheer the troubled soul;  
The hut is hateful, and the fields of corn  
Contract their bounds, and promise no return.  
All is one blank — O envy'd, envy'd state,  
The hunter cries, of all the happy great! (II. 1–8)

Some of the more prominent Scottish insignia remain unaffected by this: ‘around his limbs the spangled plaid he throws;/About his waist the rough broad cincture flies;/The plaid hangs plaited down his brawny thighs/Straight down his side the temper'd dagger hung’ (II. 38–41). In the same way that George IV's tartan extravaganza of 1822 and the Waverley novels cashed in on these outward signs of Highland Scottishness, Macpherson allows Donald, a good half-century earlier, to do the same. He leaves Want, Poverty, Famine, Hunter, Pain and Cold (II. 63–66) — personified drawbacks of Highland primitivism — for the ‘throne of regal Scotia’, where ‘the English thunder at the palace gate’ (III. 5–6), but are, of course, successfully repelled by Donald and his comrades. Macpherson thus emphasises mythical aspects over more traditional, that is real, Highland problems.

In ‘The Hunter’, Macpherson takes a decidedly anti-English, and anti-Union, stance. The king addresses his warriors as ‘professed foes/Of hateful slavery and th’aspiring Rose’ (III. 11–12), reminding them that ‘our country's enemy is still our foe’ (III. 20). This foe is unmistakably southern: ‘in sable walls the embattled English stand/In close array. To-morrow they prepare/To hurl against our walls the stormy war’ (III. 24–26). Much like in *The Highlander*, ‘his

country's love each generous bosom warms' (III. 35), but unlike in the later poem the king's cry for the Caledonian chiefs and heroes to rise (III. 27) kindles not unity, but civil war. In a rousing pre-battle *parlement* the English warriors accuse the Scots of being a 'nation full of fraud and guile' (IV. 39). Yet despite this taunting derision Macpherson makes it clear, as in *The Highlander*, that the Scots are only fighting to protect their country: 'to save their country is their only care' (IV. 92). Mythical Scotland, like the traditional version in *The Highlander*, is patriotic.

Like *The Highlander*, 'The Hunter' also contains a prophecy, but in the earlier poem it is uttered by the dying English king:

Long SAXONS shall for SCOTTISH liberty,  
 Enwrap in death, far from your country lie.  
 The hill-descended shall retain the prize,  
 Until a race, deep-versed in policies,  
 Shall sprout from SAXON trunk, and schemes unfold,  
 To change their steely points to fusil gold;  
 Then shackled on his heath, the hill-born swain  
 Shall crawl along, and move his hard-bound limbs with pain.  
 Fair Liberty to them shall lose her charms,  
 And SCOTS shall tremble at the sight of arms. (IV. 179–88)

Leith Davis argues that Macpherson here 'suggests that English "policies" turns the once fearsome Scots into base slaves, dependent on monetary gain', with the Scots themselves 'responsible for their downfall'.<sup>20</sup> However, while the passage hints at the Union of 1707, and the monetary clauses of the Union contract that relieved the Scots of their Darien debt, it is less concerned with the Scots' economic bondage, and more with their subjugation by the English in the '45 rising, and the aftermath of that war, which made the Scots 'tremble at the sight of arms'. In fact, in the next canto Macpherson explicitly rejects Davis's suggestion: 'Eternal honour shall the hero have,/Who saves his country, nor is basely sold/To sordid interest and the love of gold' (V. 96–98). 'The Hunter', then, is a blend of myth and tradition, much as it is a blend of epic and romance. It sets up a

<sup>20</sup> Davis, *Acts of Union*, pp. 78–79.

distinction between mythical Highlands and traditional Lowlands. The celebration of traditional Scotland in *The Highlander* is restricted to myth in ‘The Hunter’.

#### OTHER SCOTTISH WORKS OF THE PERIOD

The 1750s saw the publication of a number of Scottish works that explored Scottish identity. Among them, David Mallet’s *Britannia* (1755), John Home’s *Douglas* (1756) and William Wilkie’s *Epiogoniad* (1757) are singled out here because they explore the themes set out in the previous sections of this chapter: *Britannia* celebrates British freedom but emphasises war, *Douglas* portrays Scottish bravery against the invading Danes but its plot is entirely imaginary, and the *Epiogoniad* shares *The Highlander*’s epic style and contains a preface that analyses the connection between subject matter and form.

Like Macpherson, Mallet was a Scotsman who spent most of his adult life in London. Unlike Macpherson, however, Mallet never faced accusations of Jacobitism, Scotticism and favouritism, because by the time of the last Jacobite uprising, in 1745–46, Mallet had lived in London for just over twenty years, and in that time he had fought for the government, written pro-Hanoverian masques, and changed his name from Malloch to the more English-sounding Mallet. Johnson thought him ‘the only Scot whom Scotchmen did not commend’.<sup>21</sup> *Britannia: A Masque*, Mallet’s only notable production of the 1750s, was performed as an after-piece at Drury Lane in 1755 and on numerous occasions over the next few years. The masque is, essentially, a call to arms; this has been seen as not surprising for an author ‘eager to serve the government’ at a time when Britain

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<sup>21</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets; with Critical Observations on their Works*, 4 vols (London: C. Bathurst, J. Buckland, W. Strahan et al., 1783), III, p. 403.

was yet again engaged in wars on the Continent and in North America.<sup>22</sup> However, *The Highlander* is also a product of the Seven Years' War, but explicitly values peace over war.

*Britannia* is a glorious celebration of British unity, nationhood and solidarity. In that it is similar to *The Highlander*, which, as we have just seen, also values Britishness over faction and discord. *Britannia*'s encompassing vision of British courage, and its blatant call-to-arms, are universally British: 'all free-born souls must take Bri-ta-nia's part,/And give her three round cheers, with hand and heart'.<sup>23</sup> This is emphasised throughout the masque: the Prologue implores all to be 'true to yourselves, your Country, and your King' (Prologue, l. 45), and in Scene IV a recruiting sergeant assures Britannia 'That the Brave and the Free — such, BRITONS, are we —/Live but for their Country and King' (p. 6). In *The Highlander*, Duffus answers this supplication: 'we come to serve our country, fame, and you [King Indulph]' (I. 86). However, while Duffus and his men aid the king in defending the country from foreign invaders, *Britannia* is not merely concerned with defence. Here, the focus lies in preserving freedom abroad: 'Resume the trident of the main;/Or, gaily-dreadful on the plain,/Shine out again in arms!' (p. 2). This is repeated later in the masque, in a song that asks 'What can a world, a world in arms,/At sea, on land, to me oppose,/When British bosoms, British hearts inclose?' (p. 3). At the rousing finish of the masque, war is celebrated over peace: 'Soon these peaceful shores to wonder,/At the cannon's mortal thunder: 'Tis the music BRITONS love' (p. 13). In contrast, *The Highlander* ends in peace: Duffus 'O'er ALBION's rocks exerted his command,/And stretch'd his scepter o'er

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Dougal MacMillan, 'David Garrick, Manager. Notes on the Theatre as a Cultural Institution in England in the Eighteenth Century', in *Studies in Philology* 45:4 (1948), 630–64 (p. 642).

<sup>23</sup> All quotations from *Britannia* are taken from *Britannia: A Masque. Acted at the Theatre-Royal in Drury Lane. By David Mallet* (London: A. Millar, 1755). This quotation is from the Prologue, ll. 40–41.

a willing land’ (VI. 271–72). Only in mythical Scotland — that of the OC — is war celebrated; traditional Scotland, particularly in *The Highlander*, leaves no room for this.

As we have seen above, the traditional Scotland of *The Highlander* encourages a common British mindset that focuses on past battles and present peace. *Britannia* celebrates the opposite: throughout the masque Mallet implores his audience — ‘all [Britannia’s] sons’ — to ‘do their sacred country right’ by letting ‘BRITAIN then provoke the fight’ (pp. 2, 4). This is echoed by the sailor in Scene VII, who longs for foreign wars:

War and danger now invite us:  
Blow, ye winds; for BRITAIN blow!  
Every gale will most delight us,  
That wafts us soonest to the foe! (p. 13).

Indeed, when Britannia herself urges on her sons, the implication is attack: ‘Oh would my jarring sons unite,/To do their sacred country right’ (p. 2). In *The Highlander* Magnus, one of the besieging Vikings, ‘pours on the Mountain-chiefs his warrior-might’ (II. 134), but in Mallet’s masque Britannia herself ‘bids the storm of battle glow,/And pours it’s thunder on her foe’ (p. 2). The conclusion of the masque emphasises this: Britannia instructs her subjects to ‘Go then: the call of glory attend:/At home, abroad, your country’s rights defend’ (p. 14). Its offensive message, and personification of abstract Britannia, places the masque in the realm of myth, more akin to the OC’s battles on foreign soil than *The Highlander*’s emphasis on peace.

Home’s *Douglas*, first performed in Edinburgh in 1756 and then in London the following year, was — and still is, in the sparse criticism that addresses it — known as ‘our Scottish play’, and is generally heralded as a somewhat dull, but historically important work because of its Scottish, and thus politically risky,

content.<sup>24</sup> Some critics have even gone as far as blaming the apparent ‘failure’ of the play in London on the ‘encouragement which *Douglas* gave to Scottish interests in a national drama’.<sup>25</sup> However, compared to other works of the period *Douglas* is neither intensely Scottish, nor particularly nationalistic. Apart from a handful of references to Scotland in the play itself — ‘our Scottish youth’ (I. 42), ‘Tiviot’ (I. 84), ‘Grampian hills’ (II. 42), ‘our Scottish king’ (II. 79), ‘Carron’ (III. 197), ‘chieftains of the north’ (III. 283), ‘Lothian’, ‘Bass’, ‘Edina’ (III. 285–89), ‘Caledonian sword’ (III. 306), ‘troops of Lorn’ (IV. 104), ‘Caledonia’s dames’ (IV. 310), ‘Caledonia’s land’ (IV. 411) — the most remarkable, and possibly the most critically fruitful, discourse of national identity, occurs in the two prologues of the play, one Scottish and the other English.<sup>26</sup>

The English prologue is concerned with Britishness. Its opening line ‘In ancient times, when Britain’s trade was arms’ sets the tone for the prologue as a whole, focussing on Britishness and militarism. It constructs this frame of Britishness from a dichotomy between English and Scottish heroism, comparing ‘gallant Piercy’ with ‘proud Douglas’ (ll. 4, 17). The prologue presents both Scots and English as equally valiant, heroic and courageous, despite their ancient rivalry: ‘such illustrious foes/In rival Rome and Carthage never rose’ (ll. 5–6). Yet it also highlights the ancient unity between Scots and English: ‘When Piercy wrong’d, defy’d his prince of peers,/Fast came the Douglas with the Scottish spears;/And, when proud Douglas made his King his foe,/For Douglas, Piercy bent his English bow’ (ll. 15–18). In fact, the prologue assures us, ‘from age to age

<sup>24</sup> ‘Our Scottish play’ is taken from the pamphlet *Advice to the Writers in Defence of Douglas* (Edinburgh: [no publisher], 1757).

<sup>25</sup> Gerald Parker, ‘Critical Introduction’ to John Home, *Douglas*, ed. by Gerald Parker (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1972), p. 8.

<sup>26</sup> All quotations from *Douglas* are taken from Home, *Douglas: A Tragedy* (Edinburgh: J. Beugo, 1792). Manning points out that in the opening scene ‘Lady Randolph [...] laments the ancient feud which precipitates the downfall of the *Douglas* family as a civil war between ‘sister kingdoms’ on either side of an ‘ideal line, /By fancy drawn,’ who refuse to ‘unite their kindred arms’ (‘Post-Union Scotland and the Scottish Idiom of Britishness’, p. 46).

bright shone the British fire,/And every hero was a hero's sire' (ll. 7–8), emphasising unity and Britishness.

However, later on the prologue shifts to the content of the play itself:

This night a Douglas your protection claims;  
A wife! a mother! Pity's softest names:  
The story of her woes indulgent hear,  
And grant your suppliant all she begs, a tear.  
In confidence she begs, and hopes to find  
Each English breast, like noble Piercy's, kind. (ll.23–28)

The concern here is clearly more domestic than what was to be expected from the rest of the prologue: Lady Randolph is set up as the main character, not the play's eponymous hero, Douglas. Hawes argues that the eighteenth-century public longed for the conflict between the masculine civic virtue of classic antiquity and the more effeminate refined present.<sup>27</sup> *Douglas*, it would seem from the English prologue, caters to this need, as well as to the 'pathetic and the neo-classical tendencies which informed English tragic drama from 1660–1800'.<sup>28</sup> The English Prologue evokes neither mythical nor traditional Scotland, but instead focuses on pan-British issues: courage, valour, heroism.

The Scottish prologue, on the other hand, moves away from British domesticity towards a more classically-oriented comparison between Scotland and ancient Greece. Scotland is portrayed as rugged and poor, yet, at the same time, perpetually renowned: 'she gain'd a name/That stands unrivall'd in the rolls of fame' (ll. 5–6). The theme of fame is carried through the prologue: it focuses on Douglas, 'the hero' 'of all the world renown'd' (ll. 22, 23). The Scottish prologue is also decidedly more personal than the English, using the second person singular/plural to engage the audience and to predispose them favourably: 'the hero of

<sup>27</sup> Cf., for example, Clement Hawes, 'Johnson's Cosmopolitan Nationalism', in *Johnson Re-Visioned: Looking Before and After*, ed. by Philip Smallwood (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2001), 37–63 (p. 52).

<sup>28</sup> Parker, 'Critical Introduction', p. 1

your native land'; 'oft have your fathers' (ll. 22, 25). The emphasis on classical heroic culture in the Scottish prologue, and its reference to the 'bard's reward' and the 'tragic Muse' (ll. 14, 15), place both the idea of Scotland and the version of the past portrayed in the play on the side of myth: it is firmly based in literary representations of the past. *Douglas* only contains one distinct — and datable — historical reference: when talking about the hermit in Act IV, Norval mentions that he fought with 'bold Godfredo' (IV. p. 42) in his youth. Godfredo is Godefroy de Bouillon, an eleventh-century French nobleman.<sup>29</sup> This places the action of the play firmly in the late eleventh or possibly even early twelfth century, long after the Danish invasions of Scotland had ended. Because this single historical reference — the play's only traceable element — is historically inaccurate, the play moves from the traditional set-up of the Scottish prologue to mythical, imaginary Scotland.

*Douglas* has on occasion been compared to Macpherson's *Highlander*, and indeed there are certain parallels between the two works: their heroes were brought up in obscurity and their true identity is discovered half-way through the works; both are set against the backdrop of a Danish attack on Scotland. Most notably, both are literary interpretations of a Scottish past. Yet, while *Douglas* offers a mythical Scotland, *The Highlander*, as we have seen, is much more traditional, with its clearly traceable sources. The OC, on the other hand, despite their differing content, are much more in line with *Douglas*'s portrayal of ancient Scotland: *Douglas* contains a number of highly emotional scenes of despair and misery, anticipating Ossianic gloom and melancholy far more than *The Highlander*'s joyful romance. In fact, the play opens with one of Lady Randolph's wretched soliloquies, which immediately sets the mood for the rest of the play: 'Ye woods

<sup>29</sup> Parker, 'Commentary', in *Douglas* (1972), p. 83. He was familiar to British readers as Goffredo from Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* (1581).



and wilds, whose melancholy gloom/Accords with my soul's sadness, and draws forth/The voice of sorrow from my bursting hart' (I. 1–3). The play is peopled with 'departed ghosts' (I. 8), and Lady Randolph even considers herself 'the last of all my race' (I. 87), fated to 'dwell in this world of woe, condemn'd to walk/Like a guilt-troubl'd ghost, my painful rounds' (I. p. 16). The play is thus much closer in outlook to the mythical OC.

Wilkie has often been heralded as the 'Scottish Homer', yet this epithet is a little misleading: his most famous piece, the *Epigoniad* (1757), is entirely classical in content, and unlike Home's *Douglas* contains not even cursory Scottishness. Wilkie's poem, with its heroic couplets and ancient Greek heroes, is as far removed from Scotland as Macpherson's works are from Greece and Rome, yet their shared 'Scottish Homeric' reputation links the two authors, and their works.<sup>30</sup> With Wilkie it is the author himself, not his works, that earns him the title: he is the Scottish Homer because *he* is Scottish, not because the works are. With Macpherson and, to a certain extent, John Home, it is both the author and their works that justify this epithet. The *Epigoniad* contains a lengthy Preface, in which Wilkie sets out both a theory of genre and one of poetic origins. In this Preface Wilkie directly addresses the distinction between myth and tradition, and develops a theory thereof that helps us understand both how these issues were understood in our period, and how writers used them in their works.

Wilkie is aware of the underlying tension between history and historical fiction: 'some will object to the choice of the subject, That it is taken from the

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<sup>30</sup> Cf., for example, Ernest C. Mossner, who describes Wilkie as 'the first Scottish Homer', and Macpherson as the second one (*The Forgotten Hume: Le Bon David* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), p. 82). Incidentally, John Home is 'the Scottish Shakespeare' (ibid.). John Price compares Wilkie's Greek setting to the OC's Scottish background: 'Wilkie's choice of a Grecian theme for his epic probably ensured that it would not be recognized as a genuine Scottish classic, while Macpherson's ingenious combination of the old and the new in an ineluctably Scottish context would have predisposed his audience to accept the work as genuine' ('Ossian and the Canon in the Scottish Enlightenment', in *Ossian Revisited*, ed. by Howard Gaskill (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), 109–28 (p. 121)).

history of an age and nation, the particular manners of which are not now well known, and therefore cannot be accurately described' (iii).<sup>31</sup> This anticipates the authenticity debate surrounding the OC by at least a good half decade, yet Wilkie's obvious need to justify his choice of subject — history that is so ancient it cannot possibly be 'accurately described' — shows an awareness of the public's expectations of historical writing. In fact, Wilkie argues, 'subjects for epic poetry ought always be taken from periods too early to fall within the reach of true history' (vi) because 'the proper business of Epic poetry is to extend our ideas of human perfection' (vi), and thus only incidentally to present 'true' history, or indeed one's own history. One of the current assumptions Wilkie wrote — and argued — against was that he had 'done wrong in choosing for [his] subject a piece of history which has no connection with present affairs' (vi). Yet, as we have just seen, for Wilkie this is precisely the point of writing epic poetry: we are led to 'admire past times, especially those which are most remote from our own' (viii), and it is precisely this distance that enables us to learn from the past. This 'principle', as he calls it, is what distinguishes 'poetical fiction' from 'true history' (viii): it is a 'prejudice so favourable to poetical fiction', but one that 'true history effectually destroys' (viii). For Wilkie, epic poetry thus ought to be mythical and not, like *The Highlander*, based on traceable sources.

The Preface continues to explore the distinction between historical fiction and history writing by discussing it in the context of literary genres and their sources. In a reversal of the terminology employed in this chapter Wilkie argues that he 'would have it understood as a rule, That the subjects of Epic poetry should be taken from tradition only' (xiii), with tragedy being limited to 'true history' and comedy to 'living examples' (xiii). His usage of 'tradition' here

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<sup>31</sup> All quotations from Wilkie's Preface are taken from the 1757 edition of *The Epigoniad* (Edinburgh: Hamilton, Balfour and Neill).

corresponds to our usage of ‘myth’: fictitious instances of the past expressed in contemporary poetry that may or may not portray the past accurately. ‘Tradition’, he says, ‘is the best ground upon which fable can be built, not only because it gives the appearance of reality to things that are merely fictitious, but likewise because it supplies a poet with the most proper materials for his invention to work upon’ (xxxv–xxxvi). ‘Reality’ and ‘invention’ are key here: myth is myth precisely because the reality portrayed through it is invented, which is why it lends itself to historical fiction. Wilkie’s generalisation is perhaps a little rash: as we have seen, *Douglas* — most certainly a tragedy — presents a rather fictitious Scottish past, far more ‘invented’ than *The Highlander*, which is, of course, an epic, but a far less fictitious one than the *Epigoniad*. *The Highlander*’s reliance on historic material stands in direct opposition to Wilkie’s distinction, but in its comic, that is happy, ending, Macpherson’s poem can confidently base itself on Wilkie’s ‘living examples’.

The relationship between classicism, history and contemporary issues of the 1750s has been analysed by Susan Stewart, one of the few relatively recent critics to comment on the *Epigoniad* and other epics of its period:

these works simultaneously historicise the classical and classicize the historical, justifying the classical heroism of Xerxes (*Leonidas*) and Diomedes (*Epigoniad*) by imposing a Protestant morality, and legitimating the classical status of Britain through stories about the founding of the nation, about the legendary kings of its prehistory, and about the inheritance of “freedom” duly protected by Elizabeth and the prince of Orange.<sup>32</sup>

The *Epigoniad* is, of course, an attempt to do this: to intermingle and interrelate the classical and the historical. Yet it does not legitimise Britain’s classical status because it does not involve either its founding myths or traditions. Wilkie’s choice of classical subject matter allows him to adhere to foreign semi-history — his

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<sup>32</sup> Susan Stewart, *Crimes of Writing: Problems in the Containment of Representation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), pp. 76–77.

tradition, our myth — without having to involve himself in British history, and thus ultimately to avoid a choice between a Scottish, English or British focus for his depiction of the past.

#### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: SCOTLAND'S SCHIZOPHRENIC SELF

Unlike Macpherson's earlier works, the OC are firmly mythical.<sup>33</sup> In fact, they epitomise what Peter Womack has called 'the romance of the Highlands': 'bens and glens, the lone shieling in the misty island, purple heather, kilted clansmen, battles long ago, an ancient and beautiful language, claymores and bagpipes'<sup>34</sup>. Coupled with tartan and Bonnie Prince Charlie this idea of the romantic Highlands was gradually extended to include and denote the whole of Scotland — Lowlands and Highlands — and in particular bagpipes and tartan functioned as 'identifiers of any Scot' and to 'represent the Scottish nation as a whole'.<sup>35</sup> Most of these identifiers are Ossianic: they were what the tourists sought in Scotland from the 1770s onwards (see chapter 7).<sup>36</sup> Indeed, as Robert Crawford has noted, Ossian 'invents the Romantic vision of Scotland'.<sup>37</sup> Modern Scotland's national identity is undeniably Ossianic, and it is principally and primarily due to

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. Sandro Jung: 'Macpherson's Ossianic works advertised themselves, and were read, as religious, cultural, and mythic relics' (*The Fragmentary Poetic: Eighteenth-Century Uses of an Experimental Mode* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 2009), p. 102).

<sup>34</sup> Peter Womack, *Improvement and Romance: Constructing the Myth of the Highlands* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16, 144.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Robert Clyde, who observes that 'the themes that were discussed by travellers prior to the Romantic movement, such as poverty, idleness and rebelliousness that were thought to be inherent in the clan system, were supplanted by a new emphasis on Gaeldom as a mysterious and magical place inhabited by a noble race of hardy mountaineers' (*From Rebel to Hero: The Image of the Highlander, 1745–1830* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1995), p. 99).

<sup>37</sup> *The Modern Poet: Poetry, Academia and Knowledge since the 1750s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 44.

the popularity of the OC, and their absorption into this myth, that the Highlands became ‘romantick’.<sup>38</sup>

The OC abound in references that fashion the mythical part of Scottish identity. In the first *Fragment* alone we find deer, wind, rock, stream, mountain, mist, oak, chase, wars, hill, moon, dread, hunter, heath. There are also disembodied voices barely heard (‘What voice is that I hear? that voice like the summer wind’), remembrances of the past (‘No more I tread the hill. No more from on high I see thee’) and memorialisation of heroes (‘Grey stones, and heaped-up earth, shall mark me to future times. [...] My fame shall live in his praise’).<sup>39</sup> The style of the OC — their rhythm, their form, their unfamiliar compounds and names — marks them as foreign and ancient. As Hugh Blair points out in the Preface to the *Fragments*, ‘tradition, in the country where they [the OC] were written, refers them to an æra of the most remote antiquity: and this tradition is supported by the spirit and strain of the poems themselves’.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, while the antiquity of the extant Ossianic poems and stories are part of Scotland’s traditional heritage, the OC — what Macpherson turned them into — become a stock catalogue of Scotticisms. The Collections’ repetitiveness — their plot, motifs and expressions — and their fragmented nature makes them at once recognisably Scottish and historically vague.<sup>41</sup> It is this vagueness that made the OC representative of Scotland; without fixed location they became synonymous with

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. Matthew Wickman, who uses ‘romantick’ to signify this process (*The Ruins of Experience: Scotland’s “romantick” Highlands and the Birth of the Modern Witness* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

<sup>39</sup> *PoO*, p. 7.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Hugh Trevor-Roper, who stresses the repetitive nature of the OC in his condemnation of Macpherson: ‘the context is an unchanging background of bleak crags, twisted oak trees, purple heather, raging storms and misty islands’ (*Invention of Scotland*, p. 103).

the country at large.<sup>42</sup> Blair's tradition is our myth: the historical inaccuracy of the OC epitomises the myth, and distinguishes its representation of Scottish identity from that of *The Highlander*.

Scottish identity can be divided into actual, graspable, embodied elements — such as tartan and bagpipes — and abstract, intellectual, imaginary ones — such as grand scenery, sublime mountains and the 'last of the race' mentality. The first kind contains all those actual Scotticisms that were outlawed in the wake of the '45. The second kind, on the other hand, is Ossianic, and singled out as representative of Highland scenery: 'tumult and wild grandeur are the distinctive pleasures of Highland landscape'.<sup>43</sup> By the time Gilpin toured Scotland in 1776, the OC 'had already been represented to the gentlemanly view as part of a carefully controlled myth of national character'.<sup>44</sup> And it is indeed myth that distinguishes this second kind from the first, traditional kind: as Simpson points out, 'only the American Indians have been subjected to more immediate and more

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. Susan Manning, who emphasises the fragmented nature of the OC as an attempt to 're-establish[...] lost links, associations with a previously whole, now ruined but desired national life', and notes that the OC are 'bereft of reference: historical events and local conditions were elided' (*Fragments of Union: Making Connections in Scottish and American Writing* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 148, 149). Also Kidd, who points out that 'the Ossianic epics, whose conjectured fragments Macpherson's knit together, encapsulated the values of a sentimental eighteenth century, though also capturing a primitivist conception of the beliefs of an uncorrupted third century A.D.' ('Macpherson, Burns and the Politics of Sentiment', p. 35). Also Paul Baines, who notes that the OC 'saturat[ed] an actual landscape with the poetic immanence of Ossian' ('Ossianic Geographies: Fingalian Figures on the Scottish Tour, 1760–1830', in *Scotlands* 4:1 (1997), 44–61 (p. 44)). Ian Duncan et al. see the myth as 'more or less reactionary "inventions of tradition"'; a tradition in which they include Ossian and Scott as well as more modern Scottish cultural phenomena (Ian Duncan, with Leith Davis and Janet Sorensen, 'Introduction', in *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism*, ed. by Leith Davis, Ian Duncan, Janet Sorensen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1–20 (p. 1)). What they misleadingly refer to as 'tradition' is, of course, not the tradition this chapter distinguishes from the more tourist-fied myth, but indeed an instance of that myth.

<sup>43</sup> Womack, *Improvement and Romance*, p. 37. While most critics agree that the OC did much to commence, emphasise and perpetuate the Highland myth, Tim Fulford argues that 'Ossian [...] misconstru[ct]ed the Highland culture' that Johnson, and his fellow English travellers and thinkers, idealised (*Landscape, Liberty and Authority: Poetry, Criticism and Politics from Thomson to Wordsworth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 152–53). Womack dates the Highland myth precisely: it began after the defeat of the Jacobite troops at Culloden in 1746, and ended in 1810/11, when it had been incorporated into public conscience by publications such as Scott's *Lady of the Lake* (Womack, *Improvement and Romance*, p. 2).

<sup>44</sup> Tim Fulford, *Landscape, Liberty and Authority*, pp. 152–53.

intense mythologising' than the (Highland) Scots.<sup>45</sup> Clement Hawes also connects eighteenth-century cultural nationalism with myth-making. He argues that Johnson generally, but particularly with regard to the OC, 'saw that the project of cultural nationalism tended towards mythmaking gestures'.<sup>46</sup> Unlike Fulford, however, Hawes seems to use 'myth' here the way we understand myth — as the tourist side of the more political 'tradition', which is intimately connected with the OC.

While poets and scholars were both proponents of Scotland's split identity, the outcome of their (re-)imagination of post-Union identity was very different: from the 1760s the poets' contribution tended to strengthen the myth, and the scholars' findings helped to build the tradition. Indeed, as Duncan points out, 'we can read it in the ostensibly antithetical literary projects [...] of James Macpherson and Adam Smith: the poetic fabrication of a legendary national past, the scientific invention of political economy'.<sup>47</sup> This contrast, of course, highlights the distinction between myth and tradition. The past that was created by the OC was necessarily never 'real' or reconstructed out of anything more tangible than (imagined) memories. This is why the OC are mythical; tradition relied on more material sources: antiquarian research and chronicles. Despite the noted 'animosity between the "philosophical" historians of the Establishment and their "antiquarian" counterparts', both philosophical and antiquarian historians occupied the space of tradition, and, despite the animosities between them, established a new, source-based, past for Scotland.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Simpson, *Protean Scot*, p. 46

<sup>46</sup> Hawes, 'Johnson's Cosmopolitan Nationalism', p. 44.

<sup>47</sup> Ian Duncan, 'The Pathos of Abstraction: Adam Smith, Ossian, and Samuel Johnson', in *Borders of Romanticism*, 38–56 (p. 40).

<sup>48</sup> Susan Manning, 'Antiquarianism, the Scottish Science of Man, and the Emergence of Modern Disciplinarity', in *Borders of Romanticism*, 57–76 (p. 59).

Some critics use overarching concepts to combine ‘myth’ and ‘tradition’. Duncan, for example, notes that the theme of the ‘lost ancestral nation’ is one that pertains to both poetic and antiquarian revivals.<sup>49</sup> However, ideas about what this lost nation was, how it is relevant to modern Scotland and Britain, and what it is based on, are vastly different depending on whether they stem from myth or tradition. Macpherson’s works exemplify this: the OC are backwards- and inwards-looking, and, in their melancholic focus on death, defeat and loss ultimately negate any future hope (which is why they appealed to post-’45 Whig circles). *The Highlander*, on the other hand, and even ‘The Hunter’, while also firmly based in the past, prominently feature predictions for the future; not just for the future of the characters and their descendants, but for the future of Scotland and Britain. While the OC are indeed an ‘invention of lost cultural origins’, Macpherson’s earlier works are not: they reiterate the same cultural origins already established by their sources.<sup>50</sup>

For many eighteenth-century travellers the Highlands represented that ‘lost’ past, and they hoped their travels would allow them to step back in time and experience it for themselves. Though the Highlands are inevitably seen, felt and marketed as past, this pastness is as imaginary as the basis of the tourist myth. The pastness of the Highlands, it appears, was cherished more by eighteenth-century writers, artists and tourists than historians: ‘eighteenth-century historiography repudiated Scotland’s past as violent, fanatical, object-ideologically antithetical to post-Union civil society’; a future-oriented society that left no room for a supposed primitive fringe.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Duncan, ‘Pathos of Abstraction’, p. 39.

<sup>50</sup> Davis, Duncan, Sorensen, ‘Introduction’, p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> Duncan, ‘Pathos of Abstraction’, p. 39.



Myth and tradition form the basis of modern Scottish identity, and Macpherson's works — early poems and OC — are critical to its formation. As Leith Davis notes, 'Macpherson's poems and later prose works became common cultural property that helped construct the imagined community of Britain, reflecting and reinforcing the changing hegemonic relationship between England and Scotland'.<sup>52</sup> As we have seen Macpherson's early poetry, in particular *The Highlander*, is very different from the OC: their versions of Scotland and its past are intimately connected with their sources. *The Highlander* portrays a traditional version of Scotland, albeit in Augustan heroic couplets, precisely because it is based on chronicles and histories, while the OC necessarily invoke Scotland's mythical past because of the way they were compiled. 'The Hunter', on the other hand, combines both, just as it combines elements of epic and romance. As John MacQueen noted, 'it was a comparatively short step from the partially legendary traditional history of Scotland [in *The Highlander*] to the wholly legendary material of the Fenian cycle [in the OC]'.<sup>53</sup> The exclusive focus on the OC in modern works on Scottish identity has led to the division between mythical and traditional Scotland, and this chapter has filled in the background — Scottish identity as explored in the 1750s — needed to understand why this division arose.

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<sup>52</sup> Davis, *Acts of Union*, p. 77.

<sup>53</sup> John MacQueen, *The Enlightenment and Scottish Literature. Volume One: Progress and Poetry* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1982), p. 91.

CHAPTER 6 — EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY HISTORIOGRAPHY:  
BIOGRAPHICAL & PHILOSOPHICAL HISTORIANS

That a writer of the stamp of James Macpherson should have been destined to approach history at all was, I think, a remarkable freak of nature.<sup>1</sup>

(Arthur Parnell)

As we have seen in the previous chapters, Macpherson was thoroughly interested in the past. From Chapter 1 and the discussion of sources and originality in Chapter 4 to the exploration of myth and tradition in Chapter 5, the past links the different aspects of this thesis. Despite critics' general disinterestedness in both Macpherson's poetical works and his histories, and contrary to Parnell's statement above, Macpherson was, first and foremost, a historian.<sup>2</sup> In fiction or more traditional histories, verse or prose, Macpherson's works are unanimously set in the past — from the medieval *Highlander* and the third-century OC to his actual histories: the Celtic *Introduction to the History of Great Britain and Ireland* (1771), the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century *Papers Containing the Secret History of Great Britain* (1775) and finally *The History of Great Britain from the Restoration to the Accession of the House of Hanover* (1775).

While the contents of his library have not been preserved, we do know that he was familiar with historical writings.<sup>3</sup> This thesis has looked at Macpherson's use of the past in different ways: how he turned historical sources

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Parnell, 'James Macpherson and the Nairne Papers', in *English Historical Review* 12:46 (1897), 254–84 (p. 274).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Ian Haywood argues that Macpherson, and particularly the OC, were 'intimately related' to eighteenth-century historiography (*The Making of History* (London: Associated University Presses, 1986), p. 1). Also cf. Fiona Stafford who comments on this 'historical emphasis' in the concluding chapter of *The Sublime Savage: James Macpherson and the Poems of Ossian* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989), p. 151. D.B. Horn is the only critic to fully appreciate Macpherson's histories, and to view them separately from his poetical works ('Some Scottish Writers of History in the Eighteenth Century', in *The Scottish Historical Review* 40:129 (1961), 1–18).

<sup>3</sup> As chapter 4 has shown, *The Highlander* is based on Fordun's *Chronicle* and Buchanan's *History*. Macpherson also refers to historians throughout his annotations of the OC, and, as this chapter will show, is acutely aware of his predecessors in the introductions and prefaces to his histories.

into fiction, and how he used the past to promote Scottish identity within a wider British context. *The Highlander* in particular has been examined as a commentary on the present and a celebration of (Highland) Scottishness in the context of Union, Britain and Enlightenment.

In this current chapter Macpherson is shown as a traditional biographical historian; it fills the gap between Macpherson the poet and Ossianist (as covered by Fiona Stafford and James deGategno) and political opportunist (as covered by John Maclean).<sup>4</sup> Macpherson's histories were all produced in the 1770s during the great era of Scottish history writing, but they differ in character from those of the philosophical historians: they are not progressivist, conjectural or stadial. Indeed, Macpherson's works are situated outside the currents of development traced by the recent academic literature on historical writing in the eighteenth century, such as Karen O'Brien, Mark S. Phillips or J.G.A. Pocock. Even though scholars frequently allude to the OC as evidence of a general interest in sentimental, stadial or primitivist views of the past, Macpherson is, in fact, a biographical historian, concerned with documenting the deeds of great men.

This chapter examines a selection of mid-eighteenth-century British historians and compares Macpherson's three histories with those of his predecessors and contemporaries. The historians are Henry St John, 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount Bolingbroke, David Hume, William Robertson, Hugh Blair, Adam Smith and Dugeld Stewart. They are shown to be, in turn, biographical, professional and philosophical historians, with philosophical ones divided into authentic and conjectural approaches. Macpherson's histories show that he was more than a

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<sup>4</sup> Fiona Stafford, *The Sublime Savage: James Macpherson and the Poems of Ossian* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988); James deGategno, *James Macpherson* (Boston: Twayne, 1989); John N.M. Maclean, *The Early Political Careers of James 'Fingal' Macpherson (1736–1796) and Sir John Macpherson, Bart. (1744–1821)* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1967).

forger of ancient poetry: his works counteract the idea of a simple chronological development in historical writing. Instead of fitting in with his contemporaries' emphasis on progress and conjecture, Macpherson was a biographical historian: un-Enlightenment and un-Romantic, just as he was an un-Enlightenment and un-Romantic poet.<sup>5</sup> Like Karen O'Brien's *Narratives of Enlightenment*, this chapter is not concerned with the rise of historicism or progress-based history, but instead considers both Macpherson's, and the other writers', theories of history writing — their philosophies of history.<sup>6</sup>

What unites the eighteenth-century writers is that they explicitly set out their reasoning behind writing histories: how and why they approached their subjects. While this chapter, unlike the rest of the thesis, is focused on Macpherson's non-poetical works, it combines, through the prefaces and introduction to his histories, the search for sources or origins from chapter 4 and distinctions between fictitious and more genuine representations of the past from chapter 5. This chapter thus extends the aesthetic considerations of chapter 4 and the thoughts on Scottish identity from chapter 5 to Macpherson's prose works, all the while picking up where the Introduction left off: at the distinction between fiction and history. This chapter is divided into a brief exposition (pp. 184–85), eighteenth-century historiography (pp. 185–95), Macpherson's histories (pp. 195–

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<sup>5</sup> For the general notion of historical literature as counteracting notions of progress see Ruth Mack, *Literary Historicity: Literature and Historical Experience in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009): "The Enlightenment of *Literary Historicity* [...] is one that, far from subscribing to some unqualified notion of history as "progress," asks insistently about how the past bears on the present and about what qualifies people to be modern, historical subjects" (p. 2).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Karen O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment: Cosmopolitan History from Voltaire to Gibbon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 1. The philosophy of historians is also the focus of *History and the Enlightenment*, the recent posthumous collection of Hugh Trevor-Roper's essays (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010). As its editor, John Robertson, explains, 'history written without a philosophy, Trevor-Roper believed, is liable to lose its sense of purpose, and to lapse into antiquarianism [...] In every case it was the presence of a philosophy which made their [the historians who are the subjects of the essays] works worth studying, for without a philosophy, these essays argue, no great, or even interesting, history can be written' (p. xxii). This thesis uses 'philosophy of historians' not in the sense that Trevor-Roper did, as historians' convictions and ideological framework, but in the sense of their philosophy and theories of the writing of history.

209), and a conclusion (to this chapter, as well as the thesis) on history, Britishness and tradition (pp. 209–12).

## EXPOSITION

History writing was very popular in the eighteenth century: as Ian Haywood points out, despite the absence of ‘professional historians’ as such, most writers turned to history writing sooner or later.<sup>7</sup> The new historians, the ‘philosophical’ ones as Hugh Trevor-Roper termed them, went beyond gathering facts and listing examples: they ‘looked for explanation’ to interpret both.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the interpretation of facts to facilitate our understanding of the past and, ultimately, the present, is the reason ‘most generally accepted’ in the eighteenth century for the study of history.<sup>9</sup> However, it has been noted that despite this explosion of historical writing histories were still very much sectarian, that is English or Scottish: as Pocock has noted, ‘no true history of *Britain* has ever been composed’.<sup>10</sup> While Enlightenment historians moved more and more towards England, and ‘English ideas of [...] liberty’ (Murray Pittock), Macpherson consciously wrote a *History of Britain*.<sup>11</sup> In fact Macpherson is not as much a philosophical historian as a biographical historian: portraying the past through the

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. *The Making of History*, p. 15. This is echoed by Hugh Trevor-Roper, who remarked that ‘it was the task of the eighteenth century’ to take up history writing after ‘a century of slumber’. Trevor-Roper, ‘The Historical Philosophy of the Enlightenment’, in *History and the Enlightenment*, 1–16 (p. 2). However, Hume (of course) became a professional historian: he was able to live off the profit from his *History of England*.

<sup>8</sup> Trevor-Roper, ‘Historical Philosophy’, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Horn’s reasons are curiosity about the past, a better understanding of the present, and importance for the future (cf. ‘Some Scottish Writers’, p. 2).

<sup>10</sup> J.G.A. Pocock, ‘British History: A Plea for a New Subject’, in *The Journal of Modern History* 47:4 (1975), 601–28 (p. 603) (Pocock’s italics).

<sup>11</sup> Murray Pittock, *Inventing and Resisting Britain: Cultural Identities in Britain and Ireland, 1685–1789* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), p. 141. Cf. Mark S. Phillips, *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740–1820* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 38: ‘the failure of England to produce a suitable national history beckons to [Hume], offering the promise that a literary Scotsman of no particular political connection might reasonably make his mark as a historian of England’.

great men and women who changed its course.<sup>12</sup> His aim is not to offer a better understanding of the present but, like earlier historians, to emphasise Britain's greatness — past and, by implication, present — by studying, and promoting, its heroes. His histories continue the trend established in his poetical works: to chronicle the deeds of heroes.

#### EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY HISTORIOGRAPHY

Philip Hicks observes that 'by the middle of the eighteenth century, Englishmen [and Scots, one might add] had complained for over two centuries about the quality of their historical writing'.<sup>13</sup> One such — an early British work of historical theory — is Bolingbroke's *Letters on the Study and Use of History*. Written in France in the 1730s, the *Letters* were not published (and thus publicly available) until 1752. It was during his earlier stay in France (1715–25), when he had been exiled following a spell as Secretary of State, that Bolingbroke turned from politics to history and philosophy.<sup>14</sup> Over the course of eight letters addressed to Lord Hyde — Clarendon's great-grandson — Bolingbroke sets out the 'rules that seemed to me necessary to be observed in the study of history'.<sup>15</sup>

The most important one of these (which he derives of, explicitly, by way of Dionysius of Halicarnassus) is that 'history is philosophy teaching by examples' (p. 14). Unlike more philosophical writing, the examples contained in

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<sup>12</sup> In this he follows the classics; cf. George H. Nadel, 'Philosophy of History Before Historicism', in *Studies in the Philosophy of History: Selected Essays from History and Theory*, ed. by George H. Nadel (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 49–73.

<sup>13</sup> Philip Hicks, *Neoclassical History and English Culture: From Clarendon to Hume* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Isaac Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and his Circle: The Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 14.

<sup>15</sup> Henry St John, 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount Bolingbroke, *Letters on the Study and Use of History* (London: A. Millar, 1752), p. 3. Clarendon is, of course, the author of the hugely popular *History of Rebellion and Civil Wars in Ireland* (1720). Bolingbroke's rules are 'very different from those which writers of the same subject have recommended, and which are commonly practised', making Bolingbroke's *Letters* a useful starting point for mid-century historiography (p. 3). All references to the *Letters* are taken from this edition and will be given in parentheses in the text.

historical writings — of great men, events, causes and effects — ensure that history ‘speaks to our passions always’, and that the study of it results in ‘constant improvement in private and in public virtue’ (pp. 13, 14). Examples link Bolingbroke to later, empiricist historians. But while Bolingbroke, like the other historians discussed in this chapter, advocates empiricism as a way of authenticating history. He also, like Macpherson, recognises the importance of case studies as paradigms; the ‘proper and principal use of the study of history’ is to learn about the past in order to understand the present (p. 56).

Bolingbroke places history writing at the centre of human thought.<sup>16</sup> It is this principle that ‘carries us forward and backward, to future and to past ages’ (p. 10). The core of this are examples, which allow us to immerse ourselves in the past; because they are told comprehensively — that is, either relating events from start to finish or lives in their entirety. Examples enable us to be ‘cast back, as it were, into former ages: we live with the men who lived before us, and we inhabit countries we never saw’ (p. 34). Indeed, Bolingbroke’s emphasis is on people, not events:

Man is the subject of every history; and to know him well, we must see him and consider him, as history alone can present him to us, in every age, in every country, in every state, in life and in death. History therefore of all kinds, of civilised and uncivilised, of ancient and modern nations, in short all history, that descends to a sufficient detail of human actions and characters, is useful to bring us acquainted with our species, nay with ourselves (p. 137).

This is why history is, ultimately, philosophy teaching by examples: it is the study of man(kind) as illustrated by case studies. Bolingbroke is thus, ultimately, a biographical historian, and like Macpherson a chronicler of lives.

Elsewhere in the *Letters* Bolingbroke debates early history and the origins of history writing. He notes that:

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<sup>16</sup> It is ‘inseparable from human nature, because it seems inseparable from self-love’ (Bolingbroke, *Letters on the Study and Use of History*, p. 10)

rude heaps of stones have been raised, and ruder hymns have been composed, by nations who had not yet the use of arts and letters. To go no farther back, the triumphs of Odin were celebrated in runic songs, and the feats of our British ancestors were recorded in those of their bards (p. 12).

Bolingbroke's association between bardism and early history writing anticipates the debate about the authenticity of the OC in the 1760s and '70s. Indeed, unlike later writers who use examples to authenticate their histories, Bolingbroke sees authenticity as a prerequisite for case studies: 'history must have a certain degree of probability, and authenticity, or the examples we find in it will not carry a force sufficient to make due impressions on our minds, nor to illustrate nor to strengthen the precepts of philosophy and the rules of good policy' (p. 113). Bolingbroke thus negates conjectural history: it is only philosophy teaching by examples if the examples are genuine. Early history, Bolingbroke argues, is always necessarily conjectural and can never, as such, provide authentic history.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, much like Young's early originals discussed in chapter 4, Bolingbroke's bardic histories are unreliable because their authenticity cannot be reliably proven.<sup>18</sup> Bolingbroke's examples thus require authenticity; Macpherson similarly is very careful to avoid conjecture (perhaps due to the authenticity debate).

Ancient history is thus much more similar to fiction than Bolingbroke's *exempla* history. For Bolingbroke both history and fiction have to contain at least a semblance of truth in order to be valid:

these impressions cannot be made, nor this little effect be wrought, unless the fables bear an appearance of truth. When they bear this appearance, reason connives at the innocent fraud of imagination; reason dispenses, in favour of probability, with those strict rules of criticism that she had established to try the truth of fact: but, after all, she receives these fables

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<sup>17</sup> 'The nature of man, and the constant course of human affairs, renders it impossible that the first ages of any new nation which forms itself, should afford authentic materials for history'. Any such remains of early history are nothing but 'dark and uncertain traditions' (p. 59). Like Wilkie, Bolingbroke uses 'traditions' contrary to this thesis.

<sup>18</sup> He categorically negates the possibility of any such 'authentic materials': 'we have none such concerning the originals of any of those nations that actually subsist' (p. 59).



as fables; and as such only she permits imagination to make the most of them. If they pretended to be history, they would be soon subjected to another and more severe examination (p. 96).

The difference is probability: ‘what may have happened, is the matter of an ingenious fable: what has happened, is that of an authentic history’ (p. 96). This resembles Aristotle’s distinction between poetry and history closely: ‘it is not the poet’s function to describe what has actually happened, but the kinds of thing that might happen’.<sup>19</sup> However, Bolingbroke’s emphasis on ingenuity and authenticity brings his observations much closer to Macpherson’s historical writings; ingenuity implies a level of cunning and originality, and authenticity requires not only ‘what has actually happened’, but also a judgment on sources and origins. Bolingbroke’s probability is not the probability of later historians who fill in the gaps with likely conjectures, but instead a touchstone of authenticity.

David Hume is most famous as a historian for his six-volume *History of England* (1754–62), which ends where Macpherson’s history begins.<sup>20</sup> Unlike other historians in this chapter, Hume is very much a professional historian: he was able to live off history writing.<sup>21</sup> ‘For over sixty years’, Trevor-Roper noted, ‘Hume dominated the interpretation of English history. He was the first of the “philosophical historians”’.<sup>22</sup> The *History* itself is, of course, an actual history, and not a historiographical treatise; instead, Hume’s earlier *Essays, Moral and Political* (first published 1741) contain numerous references to the practice of history

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<sup>19</sup> Aristotle, ‘Poetics’, in *Classical Literary Criticism*, ed. by Penelope Murray, T.S. Dorsch (London: Penguin, 2000), 57–97 (p. 68 (1451a)).

<sup>20</sup> As we shall see later in this chapter, Hume singled out Macpherson as one of his possible successors when his publisher sought to continue the *History*.

<sup>21</sup> Indeed, ‘Hume’s writings testify abundantly to his deep, wide-ranging, and lifelong interest in history’ — an interest that was, unlike Macpherson’s, professional (Claudia M. Schmidt, *David Hume: Reason in History* (Philadelphia, PA: Penn University Press, 2003), p. 377).

<sup>22</sup> Trevor-Roper, ‘David Hume, Historian’, in *History and the Enlightenment*, 120–28, p. 120. Trevor-Roper observes that ‘the Scots may boast of having produced the Scottish Enlightenment, but the fact remains that all of its great figures took pains to dissociate themselves from their own literature and associate themselves with England’. (David Hume, ‘Historian’, p. 123). Macpherson, of course, did not: his *History* is a *History of Britain* (as was Hume’s originally).

writing. The humorous ‘Of the Study of History’, which was included in editions of the *Essays* from 1741 to 1760, is perhaps the most directly historiographical. It is a short lighthearted treatise that encourages ‘female readers’ to take up the study of history.<sup>23</sup> He advocates history writing because it is both instructive and educational; because, as chapter 4 has shown, it provides both *prodesse* and *delectare*.<sup>24</sup> Two ‘particulars’, he says, make the study of history worthwhile: firstly, ladies will learn that ‘our sex, as well as theirs, are far from being such perfect creatures as they are apt to imagine’, and secondly, that ‘Love is not the only passion, which governs the male-world, but is often overcome by avarice, ambition, vanity, and a thousand other passions’ (pp. 563–64). Hume is concerned with the ends of history writing — instruction and delight — and not form here.

While valuable in itself, history is indispensable for other branches of learning: it ‘opens the door to many other parts [of knowledge], and affords materials to most of the sciences’ (p. 566). Like Bolingbroke before him, Hume here values the extensive overviews that history can provide:

if we consider the shortness of human life, and our limited knowledge, even of what passes in our own time, we must be sensible that we should be for ever children in understanding, were it not for this invention, which extends our experience to all past ages, and to the most distant nations; making them contribute as much to our improvement in wisdom, as if they had actually lain under our observation (p. 56–67).

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<sup>23</sup> David Hume, ‘Of the Study of History’, in *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987), 563–68 (p. 563). All references to ‘Of the Study of History’ are taken from this edition and will be given in parentheses in the text.

<sup>24</sup> While these remarks are, of course, lighthearted advice for ladies, the essay does, in fact, address the virtues of history writing in a more serious manner. History, Hume argues, is useful because it instructs and delights: ‘history is a most improving part of knowledge, as well as an agreeable amusement’ (p. 566). In fact, ‘what more agreeable entertainment to the mind’ is there, Hume asks, ‘than to be transported into the remotest ages of the world, and to observe human society, in its infancy, making the first faint essays towards the arts and sciences?’ (p. 565). Indeed, like Bolingbroke before him Hume is interested in history writing because it enables him to experience the past. Cf. Haywood, *Making of History*, who argues that Hume’s emphasis on experiencing the past here and elsewhere is an extension of Locke’s empiricism, with the addition of ‘written and spoken testimonials’ (pp. 29–30). Unlike Bolingbroke, though, Hume does not focus on biographical examples. Here, he is concerned with the results of history writing, not the content.

Thus, and this is what Bolingbroke had also stressed, ‘a man acquainted with history may, in some respect, be said to have lived from the beginning of the world, and to have been making continual additions to his stock of knowledge in every century’ (p. 567). Unlike other kinds of study, the study of history concerns the human condition — its passions, affairs and conduct. Unlike Bolingbroke, who drew the same distinction between history and fiction that Aristotle had drawn, Hume emphasises respectability: only those who make respectable decisions about their sources — those we can trust — are true historians.<sup>25</sup> For Hume authenticity lies in the source, but for Bolingbroke authenticity rests with the historian.

Throughout the *Essays* Hume returns to history writing. He praises objective history, and the writers thereof; that is how sources are authenticated.<sup>26</sup> Objective historians are the writers of civil history, which, along with civil liberty, is the focal point of many of Hume’s essays in the volume. Civil history is the history of human interactions; it allows us to compare the present to the past and learn from it.<sup>27</sup> Biographical historians are necessarily most interested in civil history, but unlike philosophical historians are less concerned with causes and effects.

Cultural history, on the other hand — the ‘history of the arts and sciences’ — is a subject that requires a great deal of care; unlike civil history its causes and effects are far more difficult to determine accurately, and thus

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<sup>25</sup> Virtue is important to Hume here: later in the essay he argues that unlike poets, who reach the passions but often ‘become advocates for vice’, or philosophers, whose ‘speculations’ are often unreal, historians ‘have been, almost without exception, the true friends of virtue, and have always represented it in its proper colours, however they may have erred in their judgments of particular persons’ (p. 567).

<sup>26</sup> ‘Those who employ their pens on a political subject, free from party-rage, and party-prejudice, cultivate a science, which, of all others, contributes most to public utility, and even to the private satisfaction of those who addict themselves to the study of it’ (Hume, ‘Of Civil Liberty’, in *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, 87–96 (p. 87)).

<sup>27</sup> ‘In *civil* history, there is found a much greater uniformity than in the history of learning and science, and that the wars, negotiations, and politics of one age resemble more those of another, than the taste, wit and speculative principles’ (Hume, ‘Of Eloquence’, in *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, 97–110 (p. 97)).

objectivity is not always easy. Cultural history is closely linked with taste and aesthetics; interest in primitivism encouraged research into the history of literature much like a period that favoured classicism also favoured neo-classic verse. As we have seen above, only the study of history allows for a thorough knowledge of human nature; all good critics, by extension, must be good historians, and vice versa.<sup>28</sup> Macpherson adopted this thorough approach in his histories and poetical works: his ‘sound judgment’ is evident from his careful treatment of sources both in *The Highlander* and in his *History of Britain and Original Papers*.

Other Enlightenment Scots commented on the theory and practice of history writing more fully than Hume. William Robertson furnished his *History of Scotland, During the Reigns of Queen Mary and King James VI. Till the Accession to the Crown of England* (1759) with both a Preface and a ‘Review of the Scotch History previous to that Period’. He assures us that his history is different from earlier histories: ‘I have departed, in many instances, from former Historians’ because he has ‘placed facts in a different light’ and has ‘drawn characters with new colours’.<sup>29</sup> In other words, Robertson’s work is different because he is selective — and does not, like the biographical historians, give as full an account as possible. He is, in other words, a philosophical historian.<sup>30</sup>

Like Hume and Bolingbroke, Robertson is also concerned with authenticity: he also stresses that as his *History* is published with the papers that it is taken from (papers, one presumes, not previously accessible), he has the ‘evidence,

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<sup>28</sup> This is because ‘in order to judge aright of a composition of genius, there are so many views to be taken in, so many circumstances to be compared, and such a knowledge of human nature requisite, that no man, who is not possessed of the soundest judgment, will ever make a tolerable critic in such performances’ (Hume, ‘Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion’, in *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, 3–8 (p. 6)).

<sup>29</sup> William Robertson, *The History of Scotland, During the Reigns of Queen Mary and King James VI. Till the Accession to the Crown of England. With a Review of the Scotch History previous to that Period; And an Appendix containing Original Papers* 2 vols (London: A. Millar, 1759), I, p. iii.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Gilbert Stuart, for example, who notes that Robertson ‘selects those portions of the Scottish History which he can adorn, but does not place the whole before the eye’ (*Critical Observations Concerning the Scottish Historians Hume, Stuart, and Robertson* (London: Evans, 1782), p. 37).

on which, at the distance of two centuries, I presume to contradict the testimony of contemporary, or of less remote Historians'.<sup>31</sup> For Robertson evidence is necessarily written; he is not a conjectural historian. Indeed, Robertson emphasises that 'every thing beyond that short period, to which well attested annals reach, is obscure', which leaves room for 'invention' and 'events, calculated to display [a nation's] own antiquity, and lustre'.<sup>32</sup> History is clearly the realm of truth; invention, therefore, must belong in the land of fiction. Robertson here echoes Bolingbroke's (and Aristotle's) distinction between fiction and history: his insistence on 'proof' expands Bolingbroke's authenticity.<sup>33</sup> Although Robertson is a philosophical historian, he is an authentic historian and not a conjectural one. Macpherson resembles him in this search for authenticity.

Hugh Blair devotes a number of his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (published 1783) to history writing. Initially, he groups poets and historians together (lecture XXXV), and discusses the differences between ancients and moderns: 'Among the Antients, we find higher conceptions, greater simplicity, more original fancy. Among the Moderns, sometimes more art and correctness, but feebler exertions of genius'.<sup>34</sup> Like other writers, Blair also emphasises authenticity and objectivity when it comes to historical writing: 'The primary end of History is to record Truth, Impartiality, Fidelity, and Accuracy', which are the 'fundamental qualities of an Historian' (XXXV, p. 397). A historian *must* be impartial: 'contemplating past events and characters with a cool and dispassionate

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<sup>31</sup> Robertson, *History of Scotland*, p. iii.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> However, Robertson admits that while all good history is a 'record of truth', used to 'teach wisdom', it 'often sets out with retailing fictions and absurdities'. And the Scots are particularly prone to that: they 'rely[...] upon uncertain legends, and the traditions of their bards, still more uncertain' (*ibid.*, p. 2).

<sup>34</sup> Hugh Blair, 'Lecture XXXV', *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), p. 394. All references to Blair's *Lectures* are taken from this edition and will be given in parentheses in the text.

eye, [he] must present to his Readers a faithful copy of human nature' (XXXV, p. 397). Blair is thus, like Robertson (and, as we shall see, Smith), focused on truth and impartiality; his focus is on instruction through causes and effects, which makes him a philosophical historian.

Like Bolingbroke, Blair emphasises the importance of comprehensive history:

in the conduct and management of his subject, the first attention requisite in an Historian, is to give it as much unity as possible; that is, his History should not consist of separate unconnected parts merely, but should be bound together by some connecting principle, which shall make the impression on the mind of something that is one, whole and entire. [...] Whether pleasure or instruction be the end sought by the study of History, either of them is enjoyed to much greater advantage, when the mind has always before it the progress of some one great plan or system of actions; when there is some point or centre, to which we can refer the various facts related by the Historian (XXXV, pp. 397–98).

Unlike Bolingbroke, though, Blair is not a biographical historian: his unity is not tied to examples but instead dependent on structure: a skilled writer 'trace[s] all the secret links of the chain, which binds together remote, and seemingly unconnected events' (XXXV, p. 398). On the part of the historian, this requires 'a thorough acquaintance with human nature' and 'political knowledge, or acquaintance with government'; the first to understand (and write about) individuals, and the latter for societies (XXXVI, p. 402). Not, we note, dedication to examples, which highlights Blair as a philosophical historian akin to Robertson. Conjecture is absent from his historical lectures and confined to those on early poetry.

Adam Smith also considered history writing in some of his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (particularly XVII, XVIII, XIX of January 1763). In lecture XVII, Smith discusses the narratology of historical writing and draws a distinction between narrative and didactic history writing: 'When we narrate transactions as they happened', he says, 'without being inclined to any party, we

then write in the narrative *Stile*'.<sup>35</sup> This objective writing, previously advocated by Hume, becomes didactic writing when the historian not only lays down the facts, but instead 'sets himself to compare the evidence that is brought for the proof of any fact and weighs the arguments on both Sides' (XVII, p. 90). For Smith, effectual history writing relates facts, depicts causes and events and, above all, lets us learn from the past. Smith is thus a thoroughly philosophical historian: his focus is on objectivity and causes and effects, and he uses examples to 'point[...] out to us by what manner and method we may produce similar good effects or avoid similar bad ones' (XVII, p. 90).

Smith also values authenticity: 'the facts must be real, otherwise they will not assist us in our future conduct, by pointing out the means to avoid or produce any event' (XVII, p. 91). This echoes Bolingbroke's insistence on authentic examples as the only means to convey historical truths efficiently. Unlike earlier historians though, Smith allows conjecture to take the place of fact for early history. 'In the ancient times', Smith explains in lecture XIX, poetry and history overlapped: 'the Poets were the first Historians of any' (XIX, p. 104). Smith's understanding of early-poetry-as-history is familiar: bards, mythological history, exploits of the gods, military heroes all feature in his description (XIX, p. 104). Unlike the other writers that have featured in this chapter so far, Smith does not question the authenticity of early history writing. Authenticity only becomes important when poets and historians diverged, that is when verse and prose become distinctly associated with the two genres.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Adam Smith, 'Lecture XVII (05 January 1763)', in *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985), p. 89. All references to Smith's *Lectures* are taken from this edition and will be given in parentheses in the text.

<sup>36</sup> In this Smith of course echoes Aristotle: 'the difference between the historian and the poet is not that the one writes in prose and the other in verse [...]. The difference is that one tells of what has happened, the other of the kinds of things that might happen' (*Poetics*, p. 68 (1451a–b)).

Dugald Stewart, who coined the term ‘theoretical or conjectural history’, is a philosophical historian and is interested in the development that led from the beginnings of civilisation to its current, eighteenth-century incarnation.<sup>37</sup> Unlike Smith, though, Stewart is thoroughly conjectural: he moves back beyond the first ‘recordings’ of poets, to that elusive early state when collecting facts and retelling events had not yet become a communal pursuit. It is here that history becomes speculative: ‘in this want of direct evidence, we are under a necessity of supplying the place of fact by conjecture’ (p. 293). It is this kind of history — of ‘philosophical investigation’, as Stewart calls it — that he styles ‘theoretical or conjectural history’ (p. 293). Where for Bolingbroke and others veracity of facts was one factor to distinguish fiction from history, for Stewart it is not authenticity, but likelihood or probability, that makes speculation history; speculation that, depending on its form, might well be history in verse.

As we have seen, there is a notable progression in eighteenth-century historiography from biographical to professional to philosophical, and within this last category from authentic to conjectural. As the next section will show, Macpherson bucked this trend and wrote authentic biographical histories, as well as authentic historical, that is traditional, poems.

#### MACPHERSON’S *HISTORIES*

It has been noted that ‘some critics, especially in France, argued that Englishmen had failed in the most exalted prose genre, history, as well as the most

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<sup>37</sup> He observes that ‘when, in such a period of society as that in which we live, we compare our intellectual acquirements, our opinions, manners, and institutions, with those which prevail among rude tribes, it cannot fail to occur to us as an interesting question, by what gradual steps the transition has been made from the first simple efforts of uncultivated nature, to a state of things so wonderfully artificial and complicated’. (Dugald Stewart, ‘Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith, LL.D.’, in Smith, *Essays on Philosophical Subjects* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980), p. 292). All references to Stewart’s *Account* are taken from this edition and will be given in parentheses in the text.



prestigious genre, epic'.<sup>38</sup> Scotsmen, however, succeeded in both, and one Scotsman in particular succeeded in both genres: James Macpherson. As Arthur Johnston noted half a century ago, Macpherson 'expressed [his] genius most forcefully in the context of the past', and throughout his life wrote histories in verse and prose.<sup>39</sup> Macpherson was very much a biographical historian; while other historians of the period were interested in the social and cultural contexts of the situations they portrayed, Macpherson focused on the actions of heroes. In all his historical works — early poetry, OC, later histories — Macpherson explored the past, particularly that of Scotland, through the stories of individuals.

Hicks sets out three criteria that differentiate Enlightenment historians from earlier, 'neo-classic' ones: Enlightenment historians are philosophical historians interested in causes and effects; they are professional academics, not statesmen; they did not have to be of a particular social standing (which earlier historians needed to access sources).<sup>40</sup> Although Macpherson's historical works were published at the height of the Scottish Enlightenment, he was not an Enlightenment historian: he was a biographical historian, narrating political and military achievements and chronicling lives; he was an amateur historian, spending most of his adult life in politics as a pamphleteer, Indian agent and, finally, MP; he gained access to the *Original Papers; Containing the Secret History of Britain, from the Restoration to the Accession of the House of Hanover* as well as the OC.<sup>41</sup>

Without the social standing that came from both his supporters in Edinburgh and his father's role within the clan, as tacksman and brother of the

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<sup>38</sup> Hicks, *Neoclassical History*, p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> Arthur Johnston, *Enchanted Ground: the Study of Medieval Romance in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Athlone, 1964), p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> Hicks, *Neoclassical History*, pp. 1, 5.

<sup>41</sup> Macpherson was not the first historian to do so. Robertson had included 'Original Papers' with his *History* in 1759, as had John Dalrymple in his *Memoirs of Great Britain and Ireland* (1773). However, neither of them published the papers, or sources, separately.

chief, Macpherson would have encountered more difficulties when he collected material for the OC on his two Highland tours. Indeed, Hugh Trevor-Roper suggests that clannishness aided Macpherson's collection efforts.<sup>42</sup> DeGategno misunderstands the connection between history writing and social mobility. He argues that 'to Macpherson the thought of associating with such men [of letters] seemed the height of respectability. Never wholly confident of his genius, never secure even as a man of distinction, Macpherson was moved to seek the prestige worn so easily by Hume, Kames, Ferguson [et al.]'.<sup>43</sup> Yet, as we have seen above, to be a good historian one had to be well connected, as without connections access to sources could — and would — be limited. Indeed, Horn reminds us that 'it is important to remember that in the eighteenth century access to the royal archives and the State Paper Office was closely guarded', and that private collections, and access to them, thus became very important.<sup>44</sup> And at the time of the *Introduction*, let alone the two later histories, Macpherson was fairly well connected: a recognisable household name, with a state pension from his American adventure, supervising the government's newspapers and working as a political correspondent for the (Tory) government and as its leading writer under numerous administrations.

Indeed, Macpherson was very much a classicist who fits O'Brien's distinction of 'look[ing] for constancies and continuities in the past' instead of 'disaggregat[ing] history into periods and stages, specifying the forms of polity, culture and even consciousness which differentiated one era from the next'.<sup>45</sup> Unlike the Enlightenment historians featured above, whose confidence in the

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<sup>42</sup> Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The Invention of Scotland: Myth and History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 96ff.

<sup>43</sup> DeGategno, *James Macpherson*, p. 136.

<sup>44</sup> Horn, 'Some Scottish Historians', p. 10.

<sup>45</sup> O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment*, p. 10.

progress of their age allowed them to portray, but ultimately dismiss, the past, Macpherson's celebration of former times is just that: a celebration, not of improvement, but of chivalry, heroism and Britishness. Macpherson thus counteracted Enlightenment trends throughout his career, from the neo-classical *Highlander* and the primitive OC to his biographical histories.

DeGategno suggests that Macpherson became interested in history writing in the late 1760s, when he 'believed that the writing of history would enable him to reclaim a reputation for accuracy and veracity'.<sup>46</sup> Yet his three histories — the *Introduction* (1771), the *Original Papers* (1775) and the *History of Great Britain* (1775) — were by no means his first historical undertakings: both *The Highlander* and the OC are historical works, and although their form is different their content is decidedly historical.<sup>47</sup> Both chronicle the deeds of great men: while the OC display a greater variety of characters and stories, thus, in the vein of more modern histories, setting the scene and allowing the reader to build up a more complete picture of events, *The Highlander* focuses on the exploits of a single hero, Duffus, in the style of older, biographical histories. Duffus is the case study example that Bolingbroke, amongst others, required.

The *Introduction to the History of Great Britain and Ireland* (1771) is the earliest of Macpherson's histories, and (Fiona Stafford's words) 'Macpherson's final contribution to Celtic Studies'.<sup>48</sup> It is, essentially, a history of Celtic antiquity, and a companion piece to the OC. Hume endorsed it, stating that it 'contains a great

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<sup>46</sup> DeGategno, *James Macpherson*, p. 136. This echoes Earnest Mossner section on Macpherson in *The Forgotten Hume*, where he calls Macpherson a 'new historian' in the context of the *Introduction* (Earnest C. Mossner, *The Forgotten Hume: Le Bon David* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), p. 92).

<sup>47</sup> However, Macpherson was by no means seen as a historian, successful or otherwise, by early critics: Earnest Mossner, for example, quotes Hume as claiming that Macpherson 'has the most anti-historical Head in the Universe' before assuring us that 'there will be few to disagree with that expert judgment' (Mossner, *Forgotten Hume*, p. 92.)

<sup>48</sup> Stafford, *Sublime Savage*, p. 151.

deal of genius and good writing'.<sup>49</sup> The *Introduction* went through three editions in three years, in London and Dublin simultaneously. Each edition contained a longer preface than the previous, where Macpherson set out his mode of working and anticipated (and later responded to) criticism levelled at the work. The 1771 Preface, just over three pages long, opens with a coy acknowledgement, perhaps founded in the mixed reception of his other experiment in antiquarianism, the OC, that 'inquiries into antiquity are so little the taste of the present age, that a writer who employs his time in that way deceives himself if he expects to derive either much reputation or any advantage from his work'.<sup>50</sup> The cause of this lies in the fact that the public 'seem[s] to wish for no information from a province which we have been taught to assign to fiction and romance' (p. i). The province of fiction and romance is, of course, the realm of the OC, though not that of *The Highlander*, which is set in later (chronicled) medieval times: from the beginning the OC were advertised as 'remains of ancient Scottish poetry', *not* bardic history.<sup>51</sup> Macpherson carefully avoids conjecture: he insists on authenticity.

Because an enquiry into British antiquity, such as Macpherson's, is always, at least to a certain extent, going to depend on more fanciful histories and more factual fiction, it can never produce the same sort of history writing that

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<sup>49</sup> Hume to Col. Alexander Dow, Letter 480, 1772, in *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. by J.Y.T. Greig, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1932), II, p. 267. Of course, like the OC, the *Introduction* was criticised for being inauthentic and fanciful. John Pinkerton, himself a Scottish historian and antiquary, thought it 'empty vanity, shallow reading, vague assertion, and etymological nonsense'. Hume, on the other hand, though not exactly a staunch supporter of Macpherson in the case of the OC, thought the *Introduction* 'well written' and commended Macpherson's genius' but did not agree with Macpherson's version of the origins of Celtic culture. And Gibbon used the work as his source on Celtic antiquity in the *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–88), openly acknowledging it, along with John Macpherson's *Dissertation* (All quoted in DeGategno, *James Macpherson*, p. 136). Also cf. T. Bailey Saunders, *The Life and Letters of James Macpherson: Containing a Particular Account of His Famous Quarrel with Dr. Johnson, and a Sketch of the Origin and Influence of the Ossianic Poems* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1894), p. 219. Also see Trevor-Roper, 'Gibbon's Last Project', in *History of the Enlightenment*, 161–75 (p. 164).

<sup>50</sup> James Macpherson, 'Preface' to *An Introduction to the History of Great Britain and Ireland* (London: T. Becket and A. de Hondt, 1771), p. i. All references to Macpherson's 'Preface' to the *Introduction* are taken from this edition and will be given in parentheses in the text.

<sup>51</sup> Blair, 'Preface' to the *Fragments, PoO*, p. 5.

modern histories offer. Macpherson's reason for writing the *Introduction*, explicitly given in the Preface, is therefore quite unambitious: 'private amusement' (p. i).<sup>52</sup> Unlike the OC, where Macpherson (and Blair) insisted on authenticity, sources and originality, here Macpherson is far more reluctant to aggrandise his undertaking: 'notwithstanding the small hopes he entertains of reconciling the public judgment to the period which he has endeavoured to illustrate, he has taken some pains to present, in its most agreeable form, a subject not very capable of ornament' (pp. i–ii). 'Small hopes', 'endeavoured' and 'some pains' all point towards an awareness of this, while the fact that he is presenting his subject 'in its most agreeable form' at once allows him scope for embellishment (and thus to avoid the purists that criticised the embellishments of the OC) and for blending his sources carefully to create a more 'ornamented' work. Like Hume, Macpherson emphasises the *delectare* that all good writing ought to possess.

In another passage of the Preface to the *Introduction*, and one that like the sections quoted above remained in all three versions of it, Macpherson assures his readers that this work is by no means to be seen as another instalment of the OC saga, but instead, though it deals with the same period, should be taken as a non-fiction history, thoroughly researched and meticulously prepared:

[he] has studied to be very clear in disquisition, concise in observation, just in inference. An enemy to fiction himself, he imposes none upon the world. He advances nothing as fact without authorities; and his conjectures arise not so much from his own ingenuity, as from the proofs which the ancients have laid down before him (p. ii).

Macpherson, the 'enemy to fiction', who would 'impose none upon the world', distances himself from those critics who saw the OC as fabrications of an overactive imagination. 'Fiction' here is by no means a matter of form or genre,

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<sup>52</sup> This is also the reason given in the two later editions.

opposed to more serious non-fiction, but instead a matter of authenticity, sources and truth.

Macpherson also explicitly separates himself, and his way of writing history, from the conjectural approach favoured by Smith and Stewart, who, we remember, ‘supply the place of fact by conjecture’ (p. 293). His work is quite the opposite: instead of relying on amateur historians, Macpherson endeavours to ‘extricate truth from the polemical rubbish of former antiquaries’ (pp. II, ii). Instead, Macpherson notes the influence of classical historians; in the *Introduction* he footnotes a number of authorities such as Herodotus, Dionysius, Tacitus, Pliny and Plutarch. This is important: unlike his contemporaries Macpherson does not rely on modern historians, apart from his namesake (and distant cousin) John Macpherson of Sleat, whose notes for the *Dissertations on [...] the Caledonians* (1768) Macpherson freely admits to using for his *Introduction*.<sup>53</sup>

Macpherson’s next historical project after the *Introduction* was the continuation of Hume’s *History*. By 1769 Hume had decided — and informed his London publisher, William Strahan — that he did not wish to extend the *History* beyond 1688.<sup>54</sup> Strahan was determined to continue, and four years later had two candidates in mind: Macpherson and John Dalrymple.<sup>55</sup> Hume responded, ‘wish[ing] my continuators good Success’, and praising Macpherson’s ‘Style and Spirit’ (though lamenting his hot-headedness and lack of judgment).<sup>56</sup> Macpherson was chosen, and delivered *The History of Great Britain, from the*

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<sup>53</sup> Apart from him, though he has ‘availed himself of the industry of some modern writers’ — that is, their sources — but ‘neither borrows their sentiments nor relies upon their judgment’ (Macpherson, ‘Preface’ to the *Introduction* (1771), p. iii).

<sup>54</sup> Cf. DeGatigno, *James Macpherson*, p. 137.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. William Strahan to Hume, 25 January 1773, *Letters of Hume*, II, p. 269 n2.

<sup>56</sup> Hume to Strahan, 30 January 1773, *Letters of Hume*, II, p. 269. Of Dalrymple he says that he ‘has Spirit, but no Style, and still less Judgement than the other’ (ibid.). After the work was published Hume was less keen on Macpherson’s skill: ‘Macpherson’s History, one of the most wretched *Productions* that ever came from your Press’ (Hume to Strahan, 13 November 1775, *Letters of Hume*, II, p. 304).

*Restoration, to the Accession of the House of Hannover* in 1775. The title itself is a sign of his Unionism, still going strong almost twenty years after the publication of *The Highlander*; as pointed out above, Hume's *History* was, in title at least, the history of *England*. Eager to continue the strain of authenticity that the *Introduction* had set up, Macpherson published most of the documents he used as the basis for his *History* earlier in the same year as the *Original Papers*.<sup>57</sup>

The *Original Papers* contain an advertisement and an introduction, both aimed at accounting for the sources of the work. The Stuart section of the *Papers*, Macpherson explains, is taken from the diary and correspondence of Sir David Nairne, courtier at the courts of James II and III, which had come into the hands of Thomas Carte, the English historian.<sup>58</sup> The Hanoverian section is taken from 'the correspondence and secret negotiations of the house of Hannover, their agents and their friends in Britain, throughout the reign of Queen Anne', with the 'Extracts from the *Life of James II* taken from both Carte and from papers at the Scots College in Paris, which Macpherson had visited in 1774.<sup>59</sup> He also exhibited the 'Originals' at Strahan's shop in the Strand.<sup>60</sup> These meticulously recorded sources make Macpherson's work stand out: though hardly recognised as such by literary critics and Macpherson scholars, Horn noted in the 1960s that 'Macpherson's main importance as a collector of new material was in the papers which he obtained', and that he and Dalrymple 'between them added more new information to the store of historical knowledge than the rest of their

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<sup>57</sup> That publication is, of course, the *Original Papers*. Saunders assumes that Macpherson published the *Original Papers* 'to forestall criticism' of the *History* (*Life and Letters*, p. 228).

<sup>58</sup> The Nairne papers form part of Carte's archives in the Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford (GB 1061 MSS Carte 1–290), and were deposited in the 1750s.

<sup>59</sup> James Macpherson, 'Advertisement' to the *Original Papers; Containing the Secret History of Great Britain, from the Restoration, to the Accession of the House of Hannover. To which are Prefixed Extracts from the Life of James II. As Written by Himself*, 2 vols (London: W. Strahan, T. Cadell, 1775), vol. 1 (no page numbers).

<sup>60</sup> Macpherson, 'Advertisement' to the *Original Papers*.

contemporaries put together'.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, Macpherson's careful attention to sources emphasises him as an authentic historian, and the nature of the sources — a diary and an autobiography — underlines his biographical approach.

Macpherson furnished the *Original Papers* with a ten-page introduction to explain how he acquired the material contained therein. His motive in gathering (and publishing) the papers is objectivity:

to ascertain [...] the genuine circumstances of former transactions; to redeem history from the misrepresentations of the designing, the errors of the ignorant, and the weakness of the prejudiced; to give to characters their genuine colour; to shew mankind, without either fear of favour, as they were.<sup>62</sup>

Though working for the government under Lord North at the time, Macpherson — like Hume — sought to rise above party politics, finding fault with both sides and declaring his disapproval of 'rest[ing] the justice of their respective claims on the authority of former ages' (p. 3). Indeed, he protests that 'nothing [...] is more ridiculous, than to suppose that freedom can be received as a legacy; or that abject progenitors have any right to entail slavery on their posterity' (p. 3). This means, of course, that his work suited both factions, and that, in an administration such as North's, which, though often labelled 'Tory', was comprised of a number of ex- and almost-Whigs, he was sure not to offend. But it also places him away from conjectural historians who did not emphasise objectivity.

The rest of the introduction continues to establish Macpherson as a reputable historian. Although Carte's transcription of James II's journal was 'large and accurate', Nairne's papers were 'jumbled together in such a mass of

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<sup>61</sup> Horn, 'Some Scottish Historians', pp. 12–13, 15. Unlike other historians, Macpherson 'wrote a narrative of events based on much more complete sources than had hitherto been available' (ibid., p. 11). Horn also grants this to Dalrymple's work. Indeed, Horn assures us, 'their works are still frequently used and referred to by present-day historians, largely because their works were so well done that no one has found it necessary to republish most of the documents they contributed to the store of knowledge' (ibid., p. 15.).

<sup>62</sup> James Macpherson, 'Introduction' to the *Original Papers*, p. 3. All references to Macpherson's 'Introduction' to the *Original Papers* are taken from this edition and will be given in parentheses in the text.



confusion, that a great deal of time and industry, and, it may even be said, a very considerable knowledge of the period to which they relate, were absolutely necessary, to give them the importance they deserve' (pp. 5–6).<sup>63</sup> Because of his diligence and historical expertise, he was not content with merely reprinting Carte's extracts, but instead went to Paris 'to satisfy himself, as well as to authenticate his materials to the public' (p. 6). Authenticity, we see, is still a burning concern of his. He is careful to point out that his sources are varied: 'though the correspondences of the house of STUART are highly important, the Editor is very far from deriving his whole information from that side. He has received original papers from several persons abroad. At home he owes obligations of the same kind to a few' (p. 7).<sup>64</sup> He admits freely that he was not able to inspect any other private collections, though, he assures the reader, he has nonetheless 'been enabled to give to the public, in this collection, as many particulars, concerning men in office, as the public would wish to know' (p. 8). Finally, he leaves the reader with an assurance of his impartiality: 'he has religiously adhered, throughout, to TRUTH; and that it could not be expected he should risk his own reputation, by concealing any facts that came to his knowledge, though they might tend to sully the fame of THEIR ancestors' (p. 12). The introduction to the *Original Papers* thus situates Macpherson away from Enlightenment historians in the tradition of authenticity and examples propagated by Bolingbroke.

The *Original Papers* were also intended to whet the public's appetite for the *History of Britain*. Macpherson is sure that 'the papers contained in the following collection will [...] convince the public, that he has very much to say, that is both

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<sup>63</sup> Later in the Introduction he emphasises his knowledge: 'the Editor, expecting little that was new, especially to HIM, on the period he has chosen' (pp. 8–9), and assures us that his 'reading, on the period of his history, has been pretty extensive' (p. 10).

<sup>64</sup> He names a number of British people whose papers he accessed: Thomas Astle, archivist and book collector, Matthew Duane, lawyer and art patron, and John Price, Keeper of the Bodleian.

striking and new' (p. 12). He emphasises this again in the preface to the *History of Britain*: 'the new light thrown upon public transactions [...] will, he hopes, atone for his defects as a writer, and recommend his work to the public'.<sup>65</sup> As with the *Original Papers*, authenticity was ever-present in Macpherson's mind, and in the opening paragraph of the preface he both assures the reader of the veracity of the *History* (p. iii). Whether this stems from an OC-related need to justify his sources, or from a desire to increase interest in the *Original Papers* is unclear, but Macpherson very consciously presents himself as an authentic historian.<sup>66</sup>

In the preface to the *History of Britain* Macpherson discusses his methodology:

Where the facts are important and but little known, the authorities have been carefully quoted. Where their truth is universally admitted, the author has been less anxious about the precision of his citations. [...] He has consulted, on every point, a greater number of printed works, than he would chuse to cite at the bottom of any page. He has taken no fact, in all its circumstances, from any one writer. His narrative is the general result of an intense inquiry into what has been advanced on all sides. [...] The dates have been carefully investigated; and, where they are not interwoven with the work, are placed at the bottom of the page. In matters already known and admitted, a comprehensive brevity has been studied. [...] He has marked the outlines of military operations with a precision that brings forward the whole figure distinctly to view (pp. iv–v).

In brief, 'where the transactions are most important, and least known, the greatest labour and time have been bestowed' (p. v). This *modus operandi*, surprisingly detailed and concise, serves yet again to lend Macpherson authorial credibility — something, perhaps, his readers were hesitant about after the OC debate — and, by implication, sets his *History* apart from other historical works which may not

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<sup>65</sup> James Macpherson, 'Preface' to *The History of Great Britain, From the Restoration to the Accession of the House of Hanover* 2 vols (London: W. Strahan, T. Cadell, 1775), I, p. iii. All references to Macpherson's 'Preface' to the *History of Britain* are taken from this edition and will be given in parentheses in the text.

<sup>66</sup> He has availed himself of the records and journals of the houses of parliament', of 'the best military writers', of 'the authors who wrote in the times', following 'unerring guides, original papers', and having 'consulted, with the utmost attention, the best writers of foreign nations', all to 'give a comprehensive view of the state of other countries, in order to throw a more complete light on our own' (Macpherson, 'Preface' to the *History of Britain*, pp. iii–iv).

have followed his strict etiquette. Indeed, Macpherson did not simply advocate the accumulation of facts and examples, but, as Horn has observed, he ‘was genuinely interested in the past’ and ‘combined [his new material] with the old and present[ed] a synthesis for the edification of the reading public’.<sup>67</sup> Macpherson’s emphasis on precision, dates and objectivity complicates any understanding of him as a forger, conjecturalist or philosophical historian.

Two brief case studies will help us understand Macpherson’s approach to history writing better. The subject of the first is the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660. This is where Hume’s and Macpherson’s *Histories* overlap, and where we can see their theories at work in direct opposition. Let us consider, first, the actual Restoration itself — Charles’s physical return to Britain. It is found in volume VI, chapter LXII of Hume’s *History* and forms the opening chapter of the first volume of Macpherson’s. Though the sentiment is similar — Charles returned after a period of upheaval, welcomed by friend and foe alike — the execution and emphasis differ considerably. Hume’s depiction of Charles’s entry into London is short: ‘the two houses attended; while the King was proclaimed with great solemnity, in Palace-Yard, at White-hall, and at Temple-Bar’.<sup>68</sup> Macpherson, on the other hand, launches into a much fuller account:

Charles the Second was proclaimed, at London, on the eighth of May, in the year one thousand six hundred and sixty. He entered that city, on the twenty-ninth of the month, amid the acclamations of an infinite concourse of spectators. The two houses of parliament attended the King, at Whitehall; and, by their speakers, congratulated him, in terms full of submission and loyalty. The populace, with their usual extravagance, expressed their satisfaction in riot and intemperance.<sup>69</sup>

Macpherson’s version is far more narrative: it tells the story, adding particulars and descriptions. His example is extensive, while Hume is merely concerned with

<sup>67</sup> Horn, ‘Some Scottish Historians’, pp. 14, 15.

<sup>68</sup> Hume, *History of England*, vi, p. 139.

<sup>69</sup> Macpherson, *History of Britain*, i, pp. 1–2. All references to Macpherson’s *History of Britain* are taken from this edition and will be given in parentheses in the text.

objective facts: facts that are measurable, quantifiable and lend themselves to interpretation. ‘The commons’, he explains,

voted 500 pounds to buy a jewel for Granville, who had brought them the king’s gracious messages: A present of 50,000 pounds was conferred to the king, 10,000 pounds on the duke of York, 5000 pounds on the duke of Gloucester. [...] The rapidity, with which all these events were conducted, was marvellous, and discovered the passionate zeal and entire unanimity of the nation.<sup>70</sup>

His admiration for the rapidity of the proceedings, as well as his delineation of the exact cost, clashes with Macpherson’s vivid insistence on unity and patriotism in the face of earlier ‘anarchy and confusion’ that, under the new king, ‘yielded to the hopes of a regular steadiness in government’ (p. 2). Indeed, ‘the pomp of royalty pleased the bulk of mankind; its novelty all’ (p. 2). For Macpherson, Charles brought cohesion to his countries long before the Union of 1707 did. In his account of the Restoration Macpherson embraces Bolingbroke’s insistence on examples to illustrate, and perhaps encourage his readers to emulate, the past. Although Macpherson was employed to continue Hume’s philosophical history, in style and attitude he resembled Bolingbroke’s and Clarendon’s biographical works.

This is why Macpherson treats his readers to a character sketch of the king. Hume does not. What interests Macpherson here and elsewhere are the deeds and characters of individuals — not the progress of society. With Macpherson, history is centred in his characters — in his poetry as well as in his histories. Of Charles he says that

the disposition and character of Charles, as far as they were THEN known, were well suited to the times. Attached to no system of religion, he seemed favourable to all. In appearance destitute of political ambition, his sudden elevation was more an object of admiration, than of jealousy. Accommodating in his possessions and easy in his manner, he pleased even those whom he could not gratify. Men, from principle, enemies to monarchy, were prejudiced in favour of the person of the Prince. Those in whom fear might excite aversion, lost their hatred, in his apparent forgetfulness of past injuries. [...] Insinuating, dissembling, but frequently

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<sup>70</sup> Hume, *History*, p. 139.

judicious, he came upon mankind, through the channel of their ruling passions (p. 3).

Charles is at the centre of this part of Macpherson's *History*. He is both the starting point and the focus; without a knowledge of his character there can be no true history for a biographical historian such as Macpherson. Similarly, Macpherson ends his *History* with a (decidedly more critical) character sketch of Queen Anne, which follows after the description of her death.<sup>71</sup>

For our second case study, pertinent both to this chapter and, more generally, to this thesis as a whole, we shall turn to Britishness in the wake of the Union of 1707. Though labelled elsewhere as sympathetic to the Jacobite cause, as we have seen with *The Highlander* Macpherson was quite the opposite: an opportunistic Scot wedded firmly to Union and the idea of Britain. He censures the Scots for their reluctance to accept the new British government as inclusive and more than just English: 'the Scots, instead of enjoying the benefit of a general government, continued under the tyranny of a faction of their own countrymen' (p. 335). Indeed, we learn that 'the generality of the Scottish nation, either swayed by their pride, or yielding to their prejudices, were loud in their complaints, and wanted nothing but a leader to appeal from their parliament to the decision of the sword' (p. 344). This echoes Johnson's infamous remarks from the *Journey* pertinently:

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<sup>71</sup> 'She was always generous, sometimes liberal, but never profuse. Like the rest of her family, she was good-natured, to a degree of weakness. Indolent in her disposition, timid by nature, devoted to the company of her favourites, easily led. She possessed all the virtues of her father, except political courage. She was subject to all his weaknesses, except enthusiasm in religion. She was jealous of her authority, and sullenly irreconcilable toward those who treated either herself or her prerogative with disrespect. But, like him also, she was much better qualified to discharge the duties of a private life, than to act the part of a sovereign. As a friend, a mother, a wife, she deserved every praise. Her conduct, as a daughter, could scarcely be excused by a virtue much superior to all these. Upon the whole, though her reign was crowded with great events, she cannot, with any justice, be called a great Princess. Subject to terror, beyond the constitutional timidity of her sex, she was altogether incapable of decisive councils; and nothing, but her irresistible popularity could have supported her authority, amidst the ferment of those distracted times' (ibid., pp. 587–88).

the Scots have something to plead for their easy reception of an improbable fiction: they are seduced by their fondness for their supposed ancestors. A Scotchman must be a very sturdy moralist, who does not love *Scotland* better than truth: he will always love it better than inquiry; and if falsehood flatters his vanity, will not be very diligent to detect it.<sup>72</sup>

National pride is here perceived as negative: something that clouds judgments and perpetuates stereotypes. This, Macpherson argues, is a form of insanity: ‘the minister of England, in the mean time [...] had made no preparations against the sudden incursion of a people whom he knew to be inflamed to a degree of madness’ (p. 344). Once again we see Macpherson as a thoroughly British writer, without traces of residual Jacobitism. As a historian Macpherson is objective: he does not get carried away with philosophical speculation, but remains focused on individuals.

#### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: HISTORY, BRITISHNESS, TRADITION

As we have seen, throughout his writings — poetical and otherwise — Macpherson perpetuated a kind of Britishness that celebrated Scottishness while simultaneously praising the Union with England. For him, the hermit’s advice in Canto V of *The Highlander* held true throughout the 1760s and ’70s, from the first appearance of the *Fragments* and the rest of the OC to his Celtic and modern histories: ‘See SCOT and SAXON coalesc’d in one,/Support the glory of the common crown’ (V. 177–78). As Kersey has pointed out, Macpherson has traditionally been labelled as a Tory and Jacobite, with almost every critic stressing the importance of his supposed childhood encounter with the retreating Jacobite army in 1746.<sup>73</sup> Yet it is very difficult to make this case from his works, which endorse Scottishness and stress liberty but do not subscribe to sentimental

<sup>72</sup> Samuel Johnson, *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*. In *Journey to the Hebrides*, ed. by Ian McGowan (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1996), p. 105.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Melvin Kersey, ‘The Pre-Ossianic Politics of James Macpherson’, in *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 27 (2004), 51–75.

Highlandism or Jacobite tartanry. Indeed, critics tend to ignore the difference between the ‘conjectural and the textual Macpherson’ (Kersey again): like Enlightenment historians they present their speculations as facts instead of examining his works.<sup>74</sup> This is undoubtedly the reason why scholarship on the authenticity debate and the reception of the OC, both at home and abroad, by far outweighs criticism on Macpherson’s works themselves. This thesis has put the works of Macpherson and his contemporaries first (apart from the biographical section that forms part of chapter 2) and hopes thus to make a useful and original contribution to Macpherson criticism.

Where Macpherson’s politics have proved difficult for scholars to ascertain, or even to analyse except in the context of the OC, his poetic ideology has proved even more elusive.<sup>75</sup> What unites his works is his interest in history; they are all set in the past and only rarely comment on the present. They also celebrate Scotland’s ancient past, but not in order to undermine the Union with England and encourage devolution, but instead to celebrate the Scottish contribution to the Union. Indeed, both *The Highlander* and the OC can be seen as an attempt to fashion, or rediscover, or preserve, the national epic that *Britain* lacks instead of an assertion of a supposed (and feared) Scottish superiority over English culture. Because of the nature of the British state, with its separate origins and founding myths but united present and future, its national literature is surely diverse and not merely anglocentric. Works produced after the Union, therefore, unless overtly sectarian, are all part of the new British identity, with Macpherson’s Scottish works contributing to the British corpus with astonishing success both at home and abroad. In the case of his non-OC works Macpherson remains

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>75</sup> A noteworthy exception to the run of ‘Macpherson = Jacobite’ criticism is Dafydd Moore’s ‘James Macpherson and “Celtic Whiggism”’, in *Eighteenth-Century Life* 30:1 (2005), 1–24.

decidedly Scottish in content, but not in form. Both *The Highlander* and his later histories are modelled on southern works, but given a Scottish twist through their sources and themes. As discussed in chapter 4, *The Highlander* is based on a mixture of Scottish chronicles and ballads, but its form is unambiguously neo-classical and English. Although generally ignored by ‘contextual’ critics, the poem reflects his circumstances well: for most of his life Macpherson straddles the two worlds of London and the Edinburgh, of cities and the Highlands, of South and North Britain. In this way he, like his works, was far more thoroughly British than those contemporaries of his that remained firmly in one sphere.

As in his histories, where, as we have just seen, Macpherson is more of a biographical historian than a conjectural, philosophical one, in his earlier poetry Macpherson is less of a pre-Romantic writer than he is usually credited with in the context of the OC. His works, both poetical and historical, share an earlier, neo-classical form that contradicts the sentimentality of the OC. It is this disparity between the OC and his other works that emphasises Macpherson’s nature of opposites, as outlined in chapter 1. Although this idea is usually explored in relation to the OC, it can be extended to cover the dichotomy between the OC and Macpherson’s other writings. *The Highlander* epitomises the confusion and complexity of mid-eighteenth-century Britain, during the Seven Years’ War and between the Jacobite failure in 1746 and the success of the OC from the early 1760s. At once celebrating Scottishness (and Scotland) and at the same time positively British, the poem reflects the supposed conflicting sides of Macpherson’s character: Scottish and British, Highland and Lowland, Celtic and Anglo-Saxon, past and present. All of these, of course, feature prominently in the OC and in the discussions surrounding, and the criticism pertaining to, the poems. Similarly, his later histories emphasise the problem of periodisation that leaves Macpherson



always outwith his own time; while other writers were concerned with Enlightened progress and (pre-)Romantic sensibility, Macpherson was just as rooted in the past as his works.

## CHAPTER 7 — EPILOGUE: MACPHERSON'S LEGACY

‘It’s impossible to overstate how influential Macpherson’s poetry was. [...] Nowadays we might say that Macpherson “sexed up” Gaelic materials’<sup>1</sup>  
(Robert Crawford)

Macpherson has lived on in a scholarly jumble of authenticity, forgery and Highlandism, marginalised in literary criticism yet uniformly present in works on eighteenth-century Scotland across the disciplines and, at least as a note, in an increasing number of works on the long eighteenth century. Yet he is also present in Scotland itself: as chapter 5 has shown, the image of Scotland, and particularly of the Highlands, is Ossianic. This epilogue brings together some of the ways in which Macpherson has had a lasting impact, outwith the serious sphere of academia: Scottish tourism, modern novels and popular culture. The OC were the first in a long line of Scottish literary works that gave the landscape literary meaning.<sup>2</sup> When picturesque tourism became a popular pastime, a different kind of tourist began to explore the world: the literary traveller, who visits places because of their associations with specific texts or authors. Although tourism had been popular in other parts of Britain and on the continent from the late seventeenth century, Scotland became a tourist destination only from the middle of the eighteenth century — from the publication of the OC. While literary tourism, with the notable exception of Shakespeare’s Stratford-upon-Avon, was mainly a nineteenth-century addition in the rest of Britain, in Scotland tourism was literary from the beginning. The tourists not only read other, earlier tours to prepare themselves for their journey, but also fiction both from and about the

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<sup>1</sup> *The Great Ossian Hoax*, BBC 4 (3 July 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Paul Baines, ‘Ossianic Geographies: Fingalian Figures on the Scottish Tour, 1760–1830’, in *Scottlands* 4.1 (1997), 44–61 (p. 44). Baines’s article discusses Ossianic tourism, but in a different way from this epilogue: he is more concerned with actual places and the responses they evoked, rather than the travellers’ motivations. He also focuses on Fingal.

regions they were hoping to explore, and purposefully visited sites associated with these.

In 1801, John Stoddart observed that

the man of learning consults his books, to find what the ancients have said upon such or such a country, and how much the moderns have added or fallen short of their information. The man of science inquires how far discovery and system have gone with regard to its products, its manufactures, &c. The picturesque traveller reviews the scenes of nature and the rules of art, with which he is already acquainted, and in imagination adapts to this standard the scenery, which he expects to behold.<sup>3</sup>

However, at the same time as picturesque tourism became a popular pastime, a different kind of tourist began to explore the world: the literary traveller, who visits places because of their associations with specific texts or authors. Within a short space of time, Scotland received a stream of visitors similar to that of Wales or the Lake District.

In England literary tourism tended to focus on authors, but in Scotland it began as an exploration of space. The popularity of the OC and the debate about their authenticity ensured that the first vogue of literary tourists went in search of the poems, rather than James Macpherson. Because the OC are not set in any one, traceable spot, the whole of the Highlands gradually became Ossianised, with tourists discovering Ossianic scenes everywhere they went. In contrast, Burns's rural Scots poetry, concentrated in his native Ayrshire and Dumfriesshire and containing a number of identifiable locations, gave the tourists the chance to explore both man and works within a contained physical space. Yet much like the Ossianic Highlands Burns's Ayrshire and Dumfriesshire became part of the tourists' itinerary because of its associations with the poet and his poetry, and both literary phenomena shaped Scottish identity in a way that is unparalleled before

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<sup>3</sup> John Stoddart, *Remarks on Local Scenery and Manners in Scotland During the Years 1799 and 1800*, 2 vols (London: W. Miller, 1801), I, p. 2.

Scotland became Scott-land, and the *Lady of the Lake* turned the Trossachs from a picturesque destination into a literary one.

There are a number of reasons for the sudden interest in Scotland as a tourist destination. The growing nationalism of the eighteenth century, the unavailability of the continent in the last decade of the eighteenth and the early nineteenth century, and a more affluent middle class were all factors that played a part in the growth of tourism within Britain.<sup>4</sup> The picturesque vogue that had previously enticed tourists to visit the continent and now enjoined them to visit North Britain offered the middle classes the chance to ‘enjoy[...] their native land as a series of rustic scenes at little financial or social cost’.<sup>5</sup> At the same time it enabled them to approximate the upper classes by appropriating one of their traditional leisure activities. The average eighteenth-century tourist, no longer a well-to-do squire but more likely a member of the rising middle classes, displayed an avid interest in the relationship between art and nature, was keen to discuss the Sublime and the Beautiful, and had a curious fascination with the distant past. Fuelled by stories about ancient warriors and clan loyalty, potential travellers looked upon Highland culture with a longing for cathartic melancholy, as well as the possibility to recover their own lost past, almost on their doorstep and, after the improvements in roads and security in the wake of the last Jacobite rising, civilised enough to be enjoyable.

As Nicola Watson explains, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries ‘reading [...] becomes progressively and differentially linked to place’, when ‘the practice of visiting places associated with particular books in order to savour text, place and their interrelations grow into a commercially significant

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Alastair J. Durie, *Scotland for the Holidays: A History of Tourism in Scotland, 1780–1939* (East Linton: Tuckwell, 2003), p. 5ff.

<sup>5</sup> Tim Fulford, *Landscape, Liberty and Authority: Poetry, Criticism and Politics from Thomson to Wordsworth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 117.

phenomenon'.<sup>6</sup> Frequently, and increasingly more so over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this association between place and book was replaced by one between place and author, with birthplaces, houses and and tombs attracting tourists as the fictional landscape created by these authors' works had done previously. Indeed, while the Highlands were always associated with the OC, and rarely with Macpherson, Burns's Ayrshire and Dumfriesshire was a mixture of author-oriented, and book-oriented exploration from the beginning. And in Scott's case the divide was even more startling: Loch Katrine became a tourist attraction in the wake of *The Lady of the Lake*, almost independently of Scott, while Scott's home in the Borders became a tourist attraction in their own right.

Before the eighteenth century few travellers ventured into Scotland. Yet although the number of travelogues — and tourists — increased dramatically towards the end of the eighteenth century, there were plenty of earlier travellers' reports. One thing they have in common is the notable absence, before the 1760s, of references to literary sites or authors' haunts. And before the seventeenth century travellers did not venture into the Highlands. Those that did go north saw the Highlands as neither romantic nor mythical. John Taylor, the water poet, was one of the first travellers to visit the Highlands and described local customs, such as the dress. Thomas Tucker also gave information about the Highlands, although he was more concerned with the geographical and economical situation and less with customs and traditions. Thomas Kirke alone included a noteworthy pre-Ossianic rebukal on the antiquity of Scotland.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Nicola J. Watson, *The Literary Tourist: Readers and Places in Romantic & Victorian Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> For these travellers see Peter H. Brown, *Early Travellers in Scotland* (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1891).

In the first half of the eighteenth-century, before the appearance of the OC, travellers carried on much in the same vein. Of course, due to the political situation of the period travel in the Highlands was not always possible, or desirable. One of those visitors who travelled as far as Inverness, however, was Edmund Burt, who, though English, lived in Scotland for some time. His *Letters from a Gentleman in the North of Scotland to His Friend in London* are representative of early-eighteenth-century English notions of Scotland. However, neither Burt nor his contemporaries were much concerned with literature, and tourism, as opposed to visiting or travelling, was not a common pastime in Scotland in the first half of the eighteenth century. By 1772, however, after the appearance and popularity of the OC had attracted tourists to Scotland, the *Weekly Magazine* could write that ‘it is now become fashionable to make a tour into Scotland for some weeks or months’.<sup>8</sup>

Martin Rackwitz observes that ‘since the earliest tales of travellers to Scotland, the country had been regarded as a land of myth and miracles’.<sup>9</sup> He explains that although ‘Scotland was regarded as remote and backward, [...] by the end of the eighteenth century this image had given way to ‘Ossian’ enthusiasm’, with ‘dozens of travellers tour[ing] Scotland every summer season, and particularly the Highlands, to feel the magic of the mountains and to experience the relics of a bygone culture’.<sup>10</sup> The publication of the OC had ‘turned the Highlands, in less than two decades, into one of Europe’s most popular travel destinations’, and changed tourists from picturesque amateurs into literary explorers, who prepared for their travels not simply by reading travel

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<sup>8</sup> Durie, *Scotland for the Holidays*, pp. 21, 22.

<sup>9</sup> Martin Rackwitz, *Travels to Terra Incognita: the Scottish Highlands and Hebrides in Early Modern Travellers’ Accounts c. 1600 to 1800* (Münster: Waxmann, 2007), p. 17.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

journals and guide books, but by reading and re-reading texts written and set in the places they were about to explore.

The OC became synonymous with the Highlands, if not with Scotland, for many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century tourists and writers. Durie notes the importance of the OC for the rise of Scottish tourism: ‘there was the cult of the Picturesque [...] and secondly the associated enthusiasm for Ossian’.<sup>11</sup> Others put it even more directly: ‘Ossian was the focus of the first wave of “literary tourism”’.<sup>12</sup> The OC were, Durie argues, ‘a myth — in every sense of the word — that exercised a level of appeal rivalled perhaps only by that of Prester John for the Victorians or the Arthurian legend at Glastonbury’, but certainly not rivalled in Scotland at the period.<sup>13</sup> He discusses the obsession of many early travellers with Ossian and the authenticity of the Collections: ‘the search for Ossian preoccupied many an early visitor to Scotland from the 1760s onwards’, although the examples he cites all post-date Johnson’s and Boswell’s tour of 1773.<sup>14</sup> The search for Ossian was not the search for Macpherson. Unlike Burns and Scott later in the period Macpherson never interested the tourists. Instead, they were eager to learn more about the OC and travelled in search of authenticity.

Although the authenticity debate started Ossianic tourism, it soon gave way to a more common kind of literary tourism: to ‘see the landscapes which had inspired Ossian and to tread in his footsteps’.<sup>15</sup> For those tourists, Gold and Gold explain, ‘there was another landscape to be found beneath the veneer of modern Scotland; a world untouched by forces of modernity, where simplicity, peace and

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<sup>11</sup> Durie, *Scotland for the Holidays*, p. 38.

<sup>12</sup> John R. Gold and Margaret M. Gold, *Imagining Scotland: Tradition, Representation and Promotion in Scottish Tourism since 1750* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995), p. 54.

<sup>13</sup> Durie, *Scotland for the Holidays*, p. 39.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Gold and Gold, *Imagining Scotland.*, p. 55.

the culture of antiquity still reigned'.<sup>16</sup> Importantly, unlike other, more localised texts and authors, the OC notoriously lacked more specific information, thus opening up the whole of the Highlands to the search for the OC: 'it permitted almost any accessible point in the Highlands and Islands to attract literary tourists by claiming some link to this mythic Celtic past'.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, as Burns enthusiastically wrote to his brother Gilbert in 1786, '[wa]rm as I was from Ossian's country where I had seen his grave, what cared I for fisher-towns and fertile corses?'.<sup>18</sup> The connection between the OC and the Highlands is obvious: Burns comfortably uses 'Ossian's country' as a synonym for the Highlands.

The most famous authenticity tourist was Samuel Johnson, who visited the Highlands and Islands in 1773. Johnson was not only the earliest famous tourist in Scotland, but also the first literary tourist. A large portion of his *Journey* (1776) is devoted to Ossian, bardism and ancient stories. He carefully informs his readers that

that the *Earse* never was a written language; that there is not in the world an Earse manuscript a hundred years old [...] In an unwritten speech, nothing that is not very short is transmitted from one generation to another [...] I believe there cannot be recovered, in the whole *Earse* language, five hundred lines of which there is any evidence to prove them a hundred years old. Yet I hear that the father of Ossian boasts of two chests more of ancient poetry, which he suppresses, because they are too good for the *English* [...] I suppose my opinion of the poems of Ossian is already discovered. I believe they never existed in any other form than which we have seen. The editor, or author, never could shew the original; nor can it be shewn by any other [...] He has doubtless inserted names that circulate in popular stories, and may have translated some wandering ballads, if any can be found; and the names and some of the images being recollected, make an inaccurate auditor imagine, by the help of Caledonian bigotry, that he has formerly heard the whole.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Franklyn B. Snyder, *The Life of Robert Burns* (New York: Macmillan, 1932), p. 249.

<sup>19</sup> Samuel Johnson, *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*, in *Journey to the Hebrides*, ed. by Ian McGowan (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1996), pp. 101–105.



Boswell relates other instances of Ossian discussion in his *Journal*. At Aberdeen, for example, ‘we spoke of Fingal’, with Johnson once again suggesting the ‘originals’ of the poems be put on show’.<sup>20</sup> Later he reports Johnson saying ‘I look upon M’Pherson’s *Fingal* to be as gross an imposition as ever the world was troubled with. Had it been really an ancient work, a true specimen how men thought at that time, it would have been a curiosity of the first rate. As a modern production, it is nothing’.<sup>21</sup>

Throughout his tour Johnson searches for Ossian. But, unlike later writers, he does not Ossianise the landscape; he merely uses his tour as a way to prove his opinion on the OC. Indeed, his *Journey* serves as the cornerstone of the authenticity debate: here Johnson puts his thoughts and opinions on the OC and Macpherson into print. He assaults Macpherson’s character from the safe distance of London, and Ossian from Skye; his diatribe is prompted by the island, not the Highlands. Johnson looks for the OC all over the Highlands and Islands, and unwittingly turns them all into Ossianic territory.

No other traveller was as occupied with the authenticity of the OC as Johnson. While many were sceptical, most could not help but associate particularly sublime spots in the Highlands and Islands with the Collections and their heroes. Stoddart notes ‘Dun Fion’ as ‘the first trace, that we found, of Ossianic times: it is said to signify, the hill of Fingal, and to have been one of that monarch’s hunting seats’, despite finding himself unable to ‘subscribe to the historical system of Mr. Macpherson’.<sup>22</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, usually sparse with literary allusions, notes the ‘Glen of Fingal’ — Fionn Ghleann — shortly before he parts ways with

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<sup>20</sup> James Boswell, *The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson*, in *Journey to the Hebrides*, ed. by Ian McGowan (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1996), p. 222.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 340–41.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 223, 224.

the Wordsworths, where he is ‘lost in reverie’.<sup>23</sup> Even Robert Southey, who is critical of Macpherson and Ossian throughout his *Journal* (1819), has to admit that ‘the effect [of the sunset over the landscape] was such that I could almost have wished I were a believer in Ossian’.<sup>24</sup> The OC exerted an undeniable presence throughout travelogues of the period, and travellers went looking for authenticity far and near.

Dorothy Wordsworth’s *Recollections* (1803) are filled with references to Ossian — and unlike Johnson’s search for authenticity, Dorothy is in search of, and finds, Ossianic Scotland. The first mention of Ossian occurs in the first week of September: ‘there was a range of hills opposite, which we were here first told were the hills of Morven, so much sung of by Ossian’.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, Morven is particularly Ossianic:

the sea, or sea-loch, of which we only saw as it were a glimpse crossing the vale at the foot of it, the high mountains on the opposite shore, the unenclosed hills on each side of the vale, with black cattle feeding on them, the simplicity of the scattered huts, the half-sheltered, half-exposed situation of the village, the imperfect culture of the fields, the distance from any city or large town, and the very names of Morvin and Appin, particularly at such a time, when old Ossian’s old friends, sunbeams and mists, as like ghosts as any in the mid-afternoon could be, were keeping company with them.<sup>26</sup>

At Dunkeld Dorothy and William tour the Duke of Atholl’s pleasure grounds, which include the Hermitage, or Ossian’s Hall. By 1803 Ossian had become a tourist attraction — but a fictitious one: Dunkeld had no actual connection to Ossian. Dorothy notes that to see the waterfall they ‘were first [...] conducted into a small apartment, where the gardener desired us to look at a painting of the figure of Ossian, which [...] disappeared, parting in the middle, flying asunder as

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Breaking Away. Coleridge in Scotland*, ed. by Carol K. Walker (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 155.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 227.

<sup>25</sup> Dorothy Wordsworth, *Recollections of a Tour Made in Scotland*, ed. by Carol K. Walker (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 141.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

if by the touch of magic'.<sup>27</sup> Ossian's final appearance is more inadvertent: when the Wordsworths are in the Narrow Glen, or Glen Almain, they are unaware of the legends that hold this as Ossian's burial place. However, 'on hearing of a tradition relating to it', William is inspired to write his poem 'Glen Almain, or, the Narrow Glen' about Ossian.<sup>28</sup>

The *Recollections* also contain references to the OC. The little Highland boy described by Dorothy, with his 'half-articulate Gaelic hooting', is nestled in Ossianism: 'mists were on hillsides, darkness shutting in upon the huge avenue of mountains, torrents roaring'.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, Dorothy observes, the scene 'contain[ed] in itself the whole history of the Highlander's life — his melancholy, his simplicity, his poverty, his superstition, and above all, that visionariness which results from a communion with the unworldliness of nature'.<sup>30</sup> All of these are, of course, Ossianic features. The visionary quality of Ossianic landscapes is repeated later in the *Recollections*: 'a high mountain, green in the sunshine, and overcast with clouds, — an object as inviting to the fancy as the evening sky in the west, and though of a terrestrial green, almost as visionary'.<sup>31</sup>

Because the tourists were unsure about the authorship of the OC Macpherson's native Badenoch did not receive a great deal of tourist attention. Coleridge was an exception to this: he records passing Balavil, the 'huge house' built by Macpherson in the 1780s, which, despite being visible from the main road between Inverness and Perth, was rarely noticed by tourists.<sup>32</sup> This allows for the Ossianisation of the whole Highlands, as well as the Ossianisation of Scottish

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>32</sup> Coleridge, *Breaking Away*, p. 173.

identity. In the later eighteenth century, the focus of literary tourism shifted: while Ossianic tourists were almost solely occupied with Ossianic grandeur and authenticity, but not with Macpherson himself, later tourists began to explore authors' haunts as well as places associated with their works.

In 1882 Scotland was still marvellously Ossianic: Jules Verne, who fictionalised his Highland tour as *Le Rayon Vert* (1882), populates the novel with references to Ossian, and phrases such as 'the land of Fingal' locate Verne as a successor of the earlier tourists.<sup>33</sup> The Hebrides are seen as 'the seat of supernatural beings! [...] Ossian, Fingal, and the entire host of poetic phantoms who escaped from the books of the Sagas' (p. 126). The OC have taken over the west coast of Scotland and are intimately linked with the landscape: 'How beautiful are these figures, whose apparition can be invoked by our memory, in the midst of the mist of the Arctic seas, through the snows of hyperborean regions! Here is an Olympus that is far more divine than the Greek Olympus!' (p. 126). Indeed, the sea that surrounds Scotland 'has nothing earthly about it, and if it was necessary to assign it a place worthy of its guests [that is, Ossian and Fingal], it would in our Hebridean seas!' (p. 126). Later on the stars conjure up 'many memories of Ossian's poems', underlined by lengthy quotations from 'The Songs of Selma' (p. 134.) Iona is associated with a stanza from 'The Battle of Lora' (p. 143) and Fingal's cave naturally with the OC, for 'What name could be better suited to it? [...] Fingal was Ossian's father, and Ossian's genius united poetry and music in a single art' (p. 184). However, Verne also mocks his characters' Ossianism:

'I would like to call up the spirit of Ossian here!' resumed the enthusiastic young girl. 'Why should the invisible bard not reappear at my voice after fifteen centuries of slumber? I like to think that the ill-fated

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<sup>33</sup> Jules Verne, *The Green Ray*, trans. Karen Loukes (Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2009), p. 8. All references to the text are taken from this edition and will be given in parentheses in the text.

one, blind like Homer and a poet like him, singing of the great deeds of his time, has more than once taken refuge in this palace, which still bears the name of his father! There doubtless, the echoes of Fingal have often repeated his epic and lyrical inspirations in the purest Gaelic accent and idioms. Do you not think, Mr Sinclair, that the aged Ossian might have sat himself in the very place where we are, and that the sounds of his harp must have mingled with the hoarse accents of Selma's voice?"

[...]

And in a clear voice, she called out the name of the ancient bard several times through the vibrations of the wind.

But, however much Miss Campbell wished for it, and although she called three times, only the echo replied. Ossian's spirit failed to appear in the paternal place.

Yet later on even the green ray of the title — the reason for the novel's tour of Scotland — is urged to appear with verses from 'Carthon' (p. 210).

Despite the lack of critical attention to Macpherson and the OC until about twenty years ago, Ossian has permeated culture. References to it can be found not just in novels of the period (where they abound, for example, in Scott's *The Antiquary*, Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* or Mme de Staël's *Corinne*), but also in more modern works. Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1854) and *Cape Cod* (1865) each contain a reference to Ossian. In Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs* (1870) Ossian is mentioned twice in the context of Severin's education. John Galsworthy places Ossian in a line of literary greats made up, otherwise, of Homer, Cervantes and Shakespeare, in *The Island Pharisees* (1904). In Graham Greene's *Our Man in Havana* (1958) Wormold 'thought there is something wrong with Mr Mac Dougall's Scottishness. It smelt of fraud like Ossian' (part 5, chapter 5, section 3). Apart from literature, Ossian features in art (Calum Colvin held an exhibition devoted to the *Fragments* at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery in 2002; Alexander Stoddert has been producing Ossian sculptures in the style of the eighteenth century for the last few years), music (the folk band Ossian, first formed in the 1970s, has re-grouped in 1997; there is also a Hungarian heavy-metal band of the same name), and the real ale movement (Inveralmond's *Ossian* 4.1% is the

‘Champion Golden Ale of Scotland 2010’ as awarded by CAMRA). You can also live in Ossian, New York (pop. 751), Ossian, Iowa (pop. 853) or Ossian, Indiana (pop. 2943).

Although Ossian is still associated with Scottishness, he has lost the connection to the landscape that characterised the eighteenth-century response to the OC. The exception is Ossian’s Hall at Dunkeld, the hermitage visited by Dorothy Wordsworth. It has recently been restored and re-decorated with mural mirrors depicting on one side’s Alexander Runciman’s sketch ‘Fingal Encounters Carbon’ (c. 1773) and on the other a collage of Ossianic scenes by Calum Colvin (including a very small picture of Macpherson). The door features a picture of Ossian, which — at the pull of a lever — once again ‘fly[s] asunder as if by the touch of magic’. Scotland has indeed become Ossianised: a more historically informed attitude to Highland life is notably absent. *The Highlander* offers one such perspective: it is grounded in tradition instead of touristified myth.

TRACES OF OSSIAN, THE OC AND JAMES MACPHERSON IN CONTEMPORARY SCOTLAND



'Fingal Encounters Carbon' at Ossian's Hall at the Hermitage, Dunkeld (© Kristin Ott, 2011)



Calum Colvin's installation at Ossian's Hall at the Hermitage, Dunkeld (© Kristin Ott, 2011)



Ossian's portrait at Ossian's Hall at the Hermitage, Dunkeld (© Kristin Ott, 2011)



James Macpherson at Ossian's Hall at the Hermitage, Dunkeld (© Kristin Ott, 2011)





Macpherson's Indian seal, at Balavil (© Kristin Ott, 2010)



Macpherson's stone obelisk at Balavil (© Kristin Ott, 2010)

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