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# **Social Reality and Mythic Worlds**

Reflections on Folk Belief and the Supernatural in  
James Macpherson's *Ossian* and Elias Lönnrot's *Kalevala*

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## Abstract

This thesis investigates the representation of social reality that can be reflected by folk belief and the supernatural within mythic worlds created in epic poetry. Although the society, itself, can be regarded as the creator of its own myth, it may still be subjected to the impact of the synthesized mythic world, and this study seeks to address the roles of the society in the shaping of such mythic worlds.

The research is inspired by an innovative approach, using James Macpherson's *Ossian* (1760-63) and Elias Lönnrot's *Kalevala* (1835-49) as epic models that benefit from mythical traditions. Through the examination and the comparison of these two epic collections, both of which seem to have a close association with social reformation and restructuring, the study explores the universality of human nature. It also reveals the extent mythic worlds may exhibit the 'realities' of their source-societies and how mythical tradition may become a reflection of a society's transforming past modes of thinking. Moreover, the study devotes special attention to the influence of mythic heritage on national awakening and the construction of national identities.

The research treats Macpherson as the re-inventor of Gaelic oral tradition with his *Ossian*, where he portrays a Romanticized image of a gallant past according to the norms of the eighteenth century. Therefore, the mythic world of the epic can be seen as a combination of an ancient heroic past and the aesthetic refinement of a polished age. In this framework, as the product of a society going through a transition period from traditional to modern, *Ossian* seems to reflect the society's changing world-view, both celebrating, and mourning for a culture on the verge of extinction.

Focusing on the *Kalevala*, the study analyzes its portrayal of Finnish folk belief. The *Kalevala*, like *Ossian*, is an attempt to recover ancient tradition, which seems to revolve around supernatural and divine elements, with hopes to establish a common social reality. It is an expression of Finnish language, belief and culture, whose production was prompted by the looming Finnish nationalism. Therefore, the evolving mode of thought represented in the mythic world of Kalevalaic poems, is expected and favoured by the society, enabling the epic to encourage a social reformation.

## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due acknowledgement has been made in the text. It has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified.

Ersev Ersoy

2 April 2012



# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements		ix
List of Abbreviations		xi
List of Illustrations		xii
Chapter 1	General Introduction	1
	Research Questions, Thesis Aims and Structure	1
	Key Concepts	5
Chapter 2	Relations Between the Cultural-Political Contexts of <i>Ossian</i> and the <i>Kalevala</i>	15
	Introduction	15
	James Macpherson and the Scottish Highlands	17
	Macpherson's Ambitions and his Ideals in Europe	22
	Elias Lönnrot's Life	27
	Macpherson's Influence on Lönnrot	30
	Analogies between <i>The Poems of Ossian</i> and the <i>Kalevala</i>	36
	Tradition and Nature	36
	Bardic Tradition and Rune Singing	38
	'Joy of grief'	45
	'Liminal Spaces': Border Zones	47
	Ancestors and Origins	54
	Conclusions	61



Chapter 3	Scottish Folk Belief and the Ossianic Supernatural World	65
	Introduction	65
	<i>Critical Dissertations</i> by Dr John Macpherson of Sleat	66
	The Last Bard	69
	Spirits	76
	Spirits of the Hill	80
	Spirit of the Storm	82
	Spirit of the Wind	82
	Spirit of the Mountain	83
	The Fairy Tradition	84
	<i>Ossian</i> and Native Gaelic Tradition	85
	<i>The Hunter</i> (1756) and <i>The Highlander</i> (1758)	91
	Circles and Need-fire	101
	Second Sight	105
	Conclusions	109
Chapter 4	The Returning Dead in <i>Ossian</i>	117
	Introduction	117
	Ghostly Apparitions	118
	Ghosts Appearing on a Meteor	120
	Ghosts Foretelling a Battle	122
	Ghosts in Mourning	124
	Silent Ghosts	125
	Ossianic Ghosts and the Past	129
	Ghosts of Ossian Compared with those in Homer, Virgil and Milton	140

	Conclusions	152
Chapter 5	The Spirit of Loda	155
	Introduction	155
	Macpherson's References to Loda	155
	<i>Fingal: Book III</i>	156
	<i>Fingal: Book V</i>	157
	<i>The Death of Cuchullin</i>	158
	<i>Carric-thura</i>	162
	<i>Temora: Book V</i>	165
	<i>Temora: Book VI</i>	166
	<i>Cathlin of Clutha</i>	166
	<i>Sul-malla of Lumon</i>	168
	<i>Cath-loda: Duan First</i>	169
	<i>Cath-loda: Duan Second</i>	171
	<i>Cath-loda: Duan Third</i>	172
	<i>Oina-morul</i>	173
	Concluding Thoughts — Ossianic References to Loda	173
	Ossianic Expeditions to Scandinavia	180
	Lochlin	182
	Inis-thona	184
	Inistore	185
	Berrathon	187
	I-thorno	188
	Fuärfed	189

	Concluding Thoughts — Ossianic Expeditions to the Circle of Loda	190
	Macpherson’s Sources on Scandinavian Gods	199
	Macpherson’s <i>Introduction</i> (1771, 1772, 1773)	199
	Conclusions	215
Chapter 6	The Supernatural World of the <i>Kalevala</i>	219
	Introduction	219
	Heroes and Heroic Exploits in the <i>Kalevala</i>	220
	Väinämöinen’s Journey: Tuonela, Wisdom and Transition	221
	Lemminkäinen’s Re-birth: Finnish Gods and Nature	241
	Adventures of Ilmarinen: The Magic of the Sampo and Nature’s Joy	254
	The <i>Kalevala</i> as a Shamanic Performance	264
	Conclusions	271
Chapter 7	Conclusion	279
	Bibliography	287
	Appendix A	301
	Appendix B	307

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## List of Abbreviations

- Critical Dissertation* Blair's "A Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian, the Son of Fingal." In *PO* [1763]: 343-401.
- Critical Dissertations* John Macpherson's *Critical Dissertations on the origin, antiquities, language, government, manners, and religion of the ancient Caledonians, their posterity the Picts, and the British and Irish Scots* (1768).
- Essays* Anne Grant's *Essays on the Superstitions of the Highlands* (1811).
- Introduction* Macpherson's *An Introduction to the History of Great Britain and Ireland* (1771, 1772, 1773).
- Pieces* Percy's *Five Pieces of Runic Poetry translated from the Islandic Language* (1763).
- PO* Macpherson, James. *The Poems of Ossian and Related Works*. Ed. Howard Gaskill, 1996.
- Reliques* Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry: consisting chiefly of old heroic ballads and songs, and other pieces of our earlier poets, (chiefly lyrical kind). Together with some few of a later date*. 3 Vols. (1765).
- Report* Mackenzie's *Report of the Committee of the Highland Society of Scotland, appointed to inquire into the Nature and Authenticity of the Poems of Ossian, with a Copious Appendix, containing some of the principal Documents on which the Report is founded* (1805).

## List of Illustrations

Figure 1: Different layers of 'reality' in <i>Ossian</i> and the <i>Kalevala</i>	-	-	12
Figure 2: Genealogical table showing the Ossianic characters	-	-	125
Figure 3: Map of Scandinavian homelands and other areas in the British Isles settled by Scandinavians	-	-	176
Figure 4: Map of the North-West Highlands and Islands showing places visited by Macpherson	-	-	188
Figure 5: Pococke's depiction of the Ring of Brodgar (1760)	-	-	190
Figure 6: The oldest photograph showing a rune singing performance (1872)	-	-	263
Figure 7: Schefferus's depiction of a sage in trance (1673)	-	-	265
Figure 8: An example of a shaman's drum	-	-	265
Figure 9: A plan of the Circle of Loda in the Parish of Stenhouse by Joseph Banks (1772)	-	-	298
Figure 10: Ring of Brodgar	-	-	299
Figure 11: Stone Circles in the Highlands	-	-	299
Figure 12: Aviemore Stone Circle	-	-	300

## Chapter 1: General Introduction

### Research Questions, Thesis Aims and Structure

This thesis will address the impact of myths and mythic worlds created in epic poetry on their related societies. In particular, the focus will be on the mythic worlds synthesized during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century while the primary focus of the study will be on Macpherson's *Poems of Ossian* (1760-63) and Lönnrot's *Kalevala* (1835-49). The roles of the society and its influences on the creation of such mythic worlds will be investigated besides the manner the society is involved in the shaping of epics such as *Ossian* and the *Kalevala*. It will be the aim of the study to interpret how and to what extent these mythic worlds reflect the 'realities' and the past modes of thought of their source-societies. In the case of *Ossian* the reflections from the Gaelic-Scottish world will be dealt with while the *Kalevala* will shed light on the impressions from Finland.

In addressing these matters, I will attempt to add a new dimension to the study of myths by using *Ossian* and the *Kalevala* as epic models that display mythical traditions. The comparison of these two epics will serve two main purposes: first and foremost, to demonstrate the commonalities in the approach and intentions of their authors—whether due to similar life experiences, a shared belief in the Romantic doctrine, the universalities of human nature, or all three—and secondly, to highlight the potential dialogue between Lönnrot and the works of Macpherson. Myths can be seen as the means to establish a link to perennial prominent events in the past and thus, act as a strong foundation for the establishment of a social whole. As myths are involved in both the existential and cultural aspects of a society their role in social movements aiming to form a national unity has



proven to be a significant one. Therefore, this research will venture to demonstrate the vital status of mythical traditions in the moulding of history and the construction of national identities.

Macpherson is generally perceived as one of the pioneers of the Romantic Movement and his *Ossian* can be seen as a product of proto-Romanticism since it blends together emphasis on nature, folk poetry, primitivism and genius; much like how the German Sturm und Drang ushers Romanticism. *Ossian's* proto-Romanticism also lies in the remarkable change in the imagination it has triggered—sublime northern and western landscapes of the British isles were viewed as crucial to poetic vision while the interest in prose poetry started to increase (Crawford 2001, 44). The idea that Gaelic literature, though primitive and foreign to most Lowlanders, possessed intellectual and poetic merit was initiated with Jerome Stones's first ever English translation of a Gaelic ballad (*Albin and the Daughter of Mey*) in 1756. At the time, Stones was also supporting the need for a "quasi-epic native poetry that was both primitive and capable of appealing to modern sensibilities; that was foreign and familiar" (Crawford 2001, 41) and it seems that it was this change in literary taste which prepared the grounds of a cultural shift and inspired the creation of Macpherson's *Ossian*.

Following Stones, Macpherson attempted to collect and remake Gaelic in a sort of translatoresque, editing, anthologizing and creating at the same time; similar to the modernists, Pound and Eliot (Crawford 2001, 67). In this context, as suggested by Simpson, Macpherson may be seen as a proto-postmodernist and his achievement with *Ossian* places him in the great Scottish tradition of innovation, demonstrating the esemplastic power of the imagination (Simpson 2009, 117-18). His poetry is self-reflexive, makes use of estrangement

devices, contains built-in commentary and focuses on the creative act itself.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, *Ossian* can be considered as a postmodernist work because it emerged at a time when a civilization was under threat: that is, like modernists whose civilization was threatened by modern commercial, linguistic, and educational forces, Macpherson's poetry is a literary result of Culloden and the Jacobite Rebellions which were a threat to the Gaelic culture. In this perspective, as Crawford also explains, Macpherson's work is an attempt similar to that of the modern poet: "to carry forward something of that civilization into new, changed conditions, so that it may continue to underpin culture. They are fragments that gesture towards a larger epic structure, one that lies beyond the English language" (Crawford 2001, 67).

Even though almost every aspect of Ossianic truth and myth has been questioned *Ossian's* image as epic poetry has remained unquestioned and widely accepted. There has been extensive research concerning the reception of *Ossian* in Europe but its particular influence on Finland and possibly Finnish nationalism has not been investigated in depth. In this thesis, I intend to address this issue by thoroughly analyzing the representation of mythical tradition in *Ossian* which seems to have provided an epic model for the *Kalevala*; a model whose appeal was inspiring and perhaps, whose faults had to be avoided. Additionally, a detailed study of the epic nature of the *Kalevala* will be carried out in order to illustrate the special role mythical tradition has played in creating a common background for the Finnish population. In this way, the necessary circumstances for a successful national awakening will become apparent.

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<sup>1</sup> "Macpherson's technique is characterised by binaries and patterned alternation. The narrative alternates between account of action (sometimes vividly rendered as to be relived or virtually present) and anecdote (generally exemplary and pathetic). The moods are alternately celebration and lamentation: achievement is heralded, loss is mourned (Simpson 2009, 118).

Following this introductory section, chapter 2 of the thesis will outline the reception of Macpherson's *Ossian* in Europe. Particular attention will be given to its impact in Finland and on the later composition of the *Kalevala*. To further this end, the significance of the *Kalevala* for Finnish nationalism will also be pointed out. Crucially, analogies between the themes and the character of *Ossian* and the *Kalevala* will be highlighted. Chapter 3 will explore the popular beliefs and conventions of Celtic culture in an attempt to demonstrate the connections between Macpherson's Ossianic writings and Gaelic Scottish folk belief before chapter 4 analyzes how *Ossian's* 'otherworld' is illustrated through a detailed examination of ghostly appearances and what they symbolize. Chapter 5, then, turns the focus to Scandinavia. In this chapter, the depiction of religious belief and ritual in *Ossian* which appears only in the context of Scandinavia will be examined. A chronological account of Macpherson's references to Loda, a Scandinavian god in Scottish Gaelic tradition, will be given in hopes of observing the patterns and meaning of the representation of Scandinavia in Ossianic texts. Chapter 6 investigates the epic structure of the *Kalevala* in an attempt to shed light on the representation of Finnish folk belief, shamanism and ritual in the poems. Chapter 7 will conclude by consolidating the discussions on *Ossian* and the *Kalevala* which will demonstrate how mythical tradition can be reflective of a society's transforming mode of thinking.

## Key Concepts

A rediscovery of the supernatural will be, above all, a regaining of openness in our perception of reality. It will not only be, as theologians influenced by existentialism have greatly overemphasized, an overcoming of tragedy. Perhaps more importantly it will be an overcoming of triviality. In openness to the signals of transcendence the true proportions of our existence are rediscovered. This is the comic relief of redemption; it makes it possible for us to laugh and to play with a new fullness.

Peter Berger, *A Rumour of Angels*.<sup>2</sup>

Belief in the supernatural denotes the acknowledgment of the possibility of 'another reality'—one that transcends the reality revealed by everyday experiences. It is this fundamental assumption of reality that according to Berger is "allegedly defunct or in the process of becoming defunct in the modern world" (Berger 1970, 14). The transition between the alleged demise and the suggested rediscovery of the supernatural coincides with the Romantic period in the European literature as exemplified by James Macpherson's *Ossian* (1760-63) and Elias Lönnrot's *Kalevala* (1835). The 'rediscovery' of Macpherson and Lönnrot was under the influence of the Romantic ideology, which was, at least in part, a revolt against the rationalization of nature and natural phenomena. With his epic poem *Ossian*, attributed to a bard of the same name, purportedly composing in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC Macpherson tried to restore respect for the neglected Gaelic antiquities, while Lönnrot's later published *Kalevala* was to become the means to establish national awareness in Finland.

The Romantic Movement advocates the importance of strong emotions, especially those that can be gained by experiencing the sublimity of aesthetic qualities of untamed nature. Emotional intensity, such as nostalgia (for childhood or the past), melancholy, horror and sentimentality were favoured over the restrained balance of neoclassicism (Baldick 1990, 193/ "Romanticism"). As Von Hendy states, it was during the eighteenth century that the

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<sup>2</sup> Berger 1970, 119.

Europeans began to attend to the marginalized stories of their indigenous traditions and to appreciate the aesthetic presuppositions in earlier phases of high culture (Von Hendy 2002, 17). Folk material and in particular, ancient oral customs and traditions were elevated, and with the rise of the Romantic nationalism old epics were revived in an attempt to invent the ancient root of a nation in order to find a sense of belonging. Mallet's *Monumens de la Mythologie et de la Poésie des Celtes et Particulièrement des Anciens Scandinaves* (1756), which reintroduces the Norse mythology preserved in the *Eddas*, can be seen as the landmark of this movement (Von Hendy 2002, 17). This was later followed by epic collections such as *Ossian* (1760-63), *Beowulf* (1815), the *Kalevala* (1835-49), the *Chanson de Roland* (1837), the *Nibelungenlied* (1870-80) and the Welsh *Mabinogion* (1838-49). Thus, the conceptualizing of 'myth' takes place in the eighteenth century by manifesting itself in the "initiation of the folklore movement and of the slow discovery of the nature of 'oral literature'" (Von Hendy 2002, 17).

At this point, it becomes clearer to see how the *Kalevala* and *Ossian* are both the products of the view suggesting that the myths and fairy tales of a society lacking documentary tradition, could be preserved for centuries orally, which if uncontaminated by outside literary sources, would express a society's primordial nature—that is, that society's 'reality'. This reality is associated with the world of 'natural' consciousness and can be extended to otherworldly experiences. For instance, in the third century when Ossian is supposed to have composed his epics, the society is presented as experiencing or truly believing in the supernatural, while James Macpherson, in the late eighteenth century, finds himself in a situation where he is at pains to provide a 'natural' explanation to these supposed past experiences while also trying not to disparage his heroes and the transcendence of his poetry. Similarly, Elias Lönnrot and the Finnish population embrace

what they believed or hoped to be a recovered lost epic telling of the lives of their ancestors which revolves around their supernatural experiences and environment. The *Kalevala* was illustrative of a life with which the Finns were familiar, but one that was mostly abandoned in the first half of the nineteenth century when attitudes towards the supernatural had already begun to alter. Berger explains that:

[...] primitive and ancient men also accepted the idea of another, supernatural world of divine beings and forces as a background to the ordinary world and assumed that 'the other world' impinged on this one in a variety of ways. This suggests that at least part of the reason why we today have embraced what we consider the 'rationality' (or 'naturalism') of modern science and philosophy is because we wish to maintain that 'natural' consciousness is the only possible or desirable one. (Berger 1970, 15)

Therefore, looking at Berger's theory in the context of the *Kalevala* and *Ossian*, it becomes evident that even though the supernatural may have been a meaningful 'reality' for their ancient societies, it is no longer present—or is hardly there—in the everyday lives of the modern Finns and Scots, at least, not in the way it is presented by their ancient poetry (Gaelic oral tradition and ancient Finnish runes). As Berger states, modern societies seem to manage their lives without the supernatural as a meaningful reality quite well, for in today's world transcendence has become a "rumour" (Berger 1970, 119)—with time the divine fullness began to recede and "the breaches of this-worldly reality which these mighty figures [gods and angels] embodied have increasingly vanished from our consciousness as serious possibilities. They linger on as fairy tales, nostalgias, perhaps as vague symbols of some sort" (Berger 1970, 118-19).

It is in the appropriation of these symbols that we find the key inspiration behind both *Ossian* and the *Kalevala*: looking towards the past with hopes to 'rediscover' what was being neglected in contemporary modernist thought—that is, tradition, which seems to be

centred on the supernatural and the divine—in order to help construct a common social reality or awareness. Theirs was also a rediscovery or a recreation of mythic worlds which could not be detached from their society's knowledge and creation of history, as “myths express and deal with a people's *reality postulates* about the world; and mythic truths pertain more to a *moral universe* than to a ‘natural’ one (in the sense of the physical unitary world of scientists)” (Overing 1997, 12). It becomes clear that the mythic worlds of *Ossian* and the *Kalevala* were aimed at the creation of a common symbolic universe which is a cohesive collective of the past, present and the future, in order to establish a memory that is shared by all the individuals in the collectivity.

*The Poems of Ossian* proves to be a crucial text marking the beginnings of the eighteenth-century Romantic Movement to which Macpherson contributes significantly by his construction of a Romanticized image of a heroic past from the Gaelic ballad tradition. Under the influence of this ideology, Lönnrot considered “folklore to be one of the deepest expressions of mythology” (Pentikäinen 1989, 5) which would shed light on the essence of the Finnish language and culture. Of course, the end result which is highly dependent on the method of the collector as well as the needs and expectations of their consecutive societies, has proven to be different for each nation. While the *Kalevala* eventually led to a national realization in Finland, *Ossian* never had quite the same effect in Gaelic Scotland.

Berger and Luckmann explain that members of a community have inevitable tendencies to strengthen social patterns and to make sure these patterns are ‘real’ or ‘objective’. This can be achieved by a process called ‘legitimation’ which is defined as “a ‘second-order’ objectivation of meaning” (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 92). In other words, legitimation is the process of creation of ideas which can account for the existing state of affairs as well as the different beliefs within them—it is the process of explaining and

justifying of the institutional tradition (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 93). It seems feasible to place mythic worlds in the category of what Berger and Luckmann call a 'symbolic universe' which constitutes the fourth and the most comprehensive level of the legitimation process:<sup>3</sup>

The symbolic universe is conceived of as the matrix of *all* socially objectivated and subjectively real meanings; the entire historic society and the entire biography of the individual are seen as events taking place *within* this universe. [...] the marginal situations of the life of the individual (marginal, that is, in not being included in the reality of everyday existence in society) are also encompassed by the symbolic universe. Such situations are experienced in dreams and fantasies as provinces of meaning detached from everyday life, and endowed with a peculiar reality of their own. [...] The symbolic universe is, of course, constructed by means of social objectivations. Yet, its meaning-bestowing capacity far exceeds the domain of social life, so that the individual may "locate" himself within it even in his most solitary experiences. (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 96)

Just as in dreams and fantasies a whole world is created in myths—a world that is a symbolic universe of social product with a history. Therefore, it is necessary to understand a society's history in order to comprehend the meaning of their mythic productions. This seems to be the reason myth and history cannot be separated as the understanding of one reinforces the meaning of the other. Once the symbolic universe is posited—in our case, a mythic world—various episodes of everyday life experiences can be integrated into the symbolic universe which begins to legitimate the everyday roles, priorities and procedures; thus, creating a common 'reality' for every individual who is a part of that particular symbolic universe, forming the basis of a social construction. In Berger and Luckmann's words: "the symbolic universe provides a comprehensive integration of *all* discrete

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<sup>3</sup> The first level is incipient legitimation, achieved by transmitting linguistic objectifications of human experience. The second level contains various explanatory highly pragmatic schemes that relate to concrete actions; and the third level contains explicit theories that legitimize an institutional sector in terms of a differentiated body of knowledge (Berger and Luckmann 1996, 94).



institutional processes. The entire society now makes sense. Particular institutions and roles are legitimated by locating them in a comprehensively meaningful world" (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 103).

Nations are, as Benedict Anderson describes, "imagined communities" — "imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson 1991, 6). That is to say, the desire, motivation and will are fundamental for the construction of nationhood. Within this framework, the major difference between the two societies comes to the surface: the Finns dreamt of or 'imagined' an independent state and the *Kalevala* was merely a means of introducing new myths, emphasizing a common history, traditions and language, to the already emerging Finnish nationalism. Macpherson's *Ossian* however was not born into or out of a similar environment. His Highlanders admitted 'defeat'; they did not share the imagination of a 'nation'. Therefore, despite Macpherson's ambitious efforts of redemption, Gaelic Scotland could not achieve liberation from antiquity.

It is possible to define 'epic' as a lengthy narrative poem detailing and celebrating the great deeds of one or more legendary heroes, who usually perform superhuman exploits in battle or in voyages often saving or founding a nation, in a ceremonious style—these heroes might be protected by or even descended from gods (Baldick 1990, 70/ "epic"). Epic poetry (also known as 'heroic poetry') was considered as the highest form of literature in the Renaissance (Baldick 1990, 70/ "epic"), and with the advent of the eighteenth century, certain qualities were sought in an epic: firstly, every true epic had to be based on reason and nature. Secondly, it ought to be an imitation of general or selective human action and thirdly, it was expected to share the same pattern with the classical models. Rubel points out the four basic features of epic poetry for the critics of the Romantic period: it was "partly real and partly feigned, which narrated some great and heroic action," it had a "purpose of moral

edification," it was presented in "a sublime style" and had "a central figure—a hero—around whom the whole action would pivot" (Rubel 1978, 71). Yet, "a more or less specific conception of the epic as a genre and some kind of critical attitude towards it manifested themselves in a great many discussions of literature" (Foerster 1955, 683).

An epic may take its readers to a fantastic world, challenge their imagination, and perhaps, give them the opportunity to think beyond the boundaries of everyday life while making it possible for the poet/writer to employ sublime and striking descriptions. To achieve this, he makes use of the supernatural or the divine to create the machinery of the epic, which is considered to be of great importance by many critics, including Hugh Blair, who had the chance to discuss the issue with Macpherson and almost certainly led him to give his translations epic pretensions. Blair argues that if probability is absent from a work, its effect and deep impression decreases, while the weight and dignity are lost too (Blair, *PO* [1763] 365).<sup>4</sup> For this reason, these must be dominant in an epic; it can, therefore, be understood that the presence of sublime descriptions, which are mostly fed by supernatural and divine elements, is what shapes an epic from mythic worlds.<sup>5</sup> However, it is important to find a good balance between the supernatural and the 'natural' which can be maintained by making use of such machinery that is inspired by the popular belief of the society.

What is considered to be meaningful can, of course, vary. This is the main reason these supernatural elements, their representations and profound meanings may differ from

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<sup>4</sup> The version of Blair's *Dissertation* in the 1765 edition, which is a revision of the initial publication (though most of it remains unchanged), is the basis for *PO*.

<sup>5</sup> According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, when referring to people, their feelings and actions, the word sublime suggests "standing high above others by reason of nobility or grandeur of nature or character; of high intellectual, moral, or spiritual level. Passing into a term of high commendation: Supreme, perfect;" while when speaking of language, style or a writer, it means "expressing lofty ideas in a grand and elevated manner" ("Sublime"). Therefore, it can be suggested that, when present in nature, art or literature, sublimity can astonish the reader, introducing uncommon or new ideas to the mind, also contributing to the poetical merit.

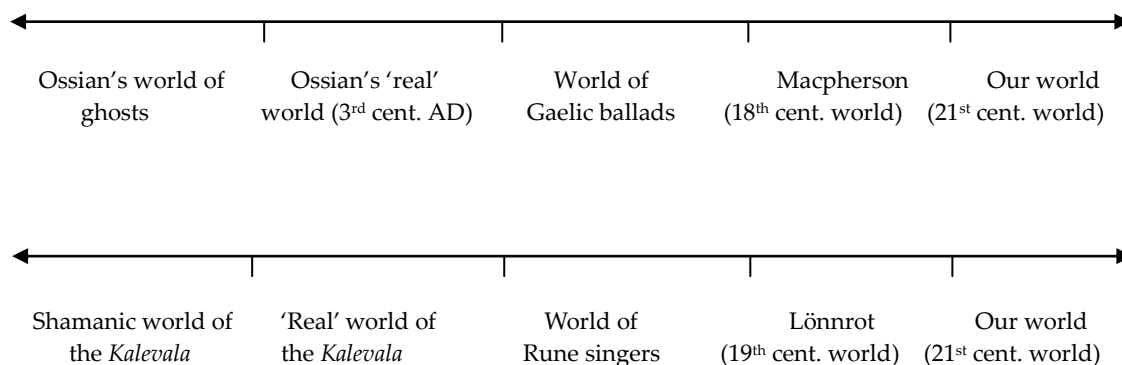
one epic to another and across societies. Lönnrot seems to have been inspired by shamanism, the singers of shamanic poetry, incantations and magic in ancient Finnish runes. Through employing these, the *Kalevala* contributes to the mythicizing process of Finnish rune singing and singers which eventually led to the transformation of a regional tradition into a national heritage. To Macpherson-Ossian,<sup>6</sup> on the other hand, ghosts and spirits of the tales and ballads of the ancient Gaelic tradition are available: Macpherson has Ossian include the 'ghosts of the past' in his poems in order to increase the solemnity of his heroes which, in turn, highlights the sublime in his poetry. In Blair's words, "the sublime is an awful and serious emotion; and is heightened by all the images of Trouble, and Terror, and Darkness" (Blair, *PO* [1763] 394). Sublimity refers to "the moment when the ability to apprehend, to know, and to express a thought or sensation is defeated. Yet through this very defeat, the mind gets a feeling for which lies beyond thought and language" (Shaw 2006, 3). Nevertheless, "Macpherson's efforts can thus be seen as part of the process of turning a living culture into a safe museum of bits and pieces retrieved from the wreckage of a community" (Stafford and Gaskill 1998, xiii).

The otherworld symbolism present in both *Ossian* and the *Kalevala* acts as "a generalized, abstract way of expressing the most varied of conceptual or social differences" (Tarkka 1994, 262). These are surely symbolic of the differences between Macpherson's age (the eighteenth century) and the age in which Ossian is imagined as having existed (the third century BC). Similarly, in the case of the *Kalevala* they are representative of the differences between the nineteenth century Finland and the age the poems are set in (the period beginning from the origin of the world to the arrival of Christianity in Finland). However, the symbolism is not limited to that, as it also denotes the differences within the worlds of

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<sup>6</sup> The term 'Macpherson-Ossian' refers to 'Ossian as conceived by Macpherson's imagination'.

the two texts—that is to say; there exist several interwoven layers of ‘reality’ in the symbolic universe created. The understanding of these layers would lead to a better comprehension of the poems as well as this research:



**Fig. 1.** Different layers of ‘reality’ in *Ossian* and the *Kalevala*.

Figure 1 above illustrates these layers found in each epic: Ossian in the third century BC is pictured as believing in the supernatural world of the heroic age where he meets the ghosts of the past. In the world of Gaelic ballads these Ossianic stories are recited and thus preserved reaching Macpherson, who in the eighteenth century collects and adapts them in order to make a coherent epic. On the other hand, the heroes of the *Kalevala* leave their world using shamanic powers entering another realm. In this case, the tradition of rune singing carries these stories to the nineteenth century when Lönnrot puts them together to create a Finnish epic.



## Chapter 2: Relations Between the Cultural-Political Contexts of *Ossian* and the *Kalevala*

### Introduction

The cultural impact of Macpherson's *Poems of Ossian* (1760-63) was extremely wide-ranging and reached virtually all parts of Europe. The poems were translated into, imitated and read in many languages at different times and the interest in the poems continued to grow until well into the nineteenth century. By 1800, for example, editions of the *Poems* had been published in German, Italian, French, Swedish, Dutch, Italian, Danish, Hungarian, Russian and Polish—at least in parts or as single poems, if not as a whole.<sup>7</sup> Even though it would be wrong to assume that *Ossian* was translated into all the European languages as soon as it appeared, it is safe to say that his poetry quickly became popular—being eagerly read in the languages in which it was available.<sup>8</sup> It was twenty, thirty years or more until it was translated into some of the languages. “So, the Spanish and the Russians tended at first to read their *Ossian* in French, the Greeks in Italian, the Dutch, Czechs, Hungarians in German” and so on (Gaskill 2004, 15).

Specific attention should be given to the initial reception of *Ossian* in Sweden, when looking at the matter in the context of Finland, Finnish nationalism and the *Kalevala*, as in 1760s, Finland did not exist as a political entity—it was known as *Österbotten* (the eastern province of Sweden), and was a fully-integrated province of Sweden. Its inhabitants were all

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<sup>7</sup> A timeline of *Ossian*'s European reception can be found in Gaskill's *Reception of Ossian in Europe* (2004): xxi-lxviii.

<sup>8</sup> In some languages it was never made completely available, though there might have been many translations of individual pieces.

Swedish, the language of the establishment, the social elite and the aspirational was Swedish. Finnish nationalism began to rise only after this area had been ceded to Russia as the Grand Duchy of Finland. Reception in Sweden, was prompted by the writings of Carl Christoffer Gjörwell, the editor of *Den Swänska Mercurius* (The Swedish Mercury) and the *Poems* managed to attract the attention of Swedish intellectuals; also ensuring a place in the mindset of future Finnish nationalists. Therefore, the significance of the (western) Swedish literati in transmitting the ideas of Ossianism to the nascent Finnish nationalists should not be overlooked.

Graves emphasizes the importance of Turku (Swedish, Åbo)<sup>9</sup> and the students of the later established Åbo Academy for the early reception of *Ossian* (Graves 2004, 206). Elias Lönnrot, the collector of the *Kalevala* poetry, was also a matriculated student at this academy (in 1822) along with Johan Ludwig Runeberg, who translated part of the Ossianic poem *Darthula* from Herder's German in the early 1830s (Graves 2004, 207).<sup>10</sup> Graves points out that the scholars and students of the Åbo Academy of 1810s "retained Ossianic interests along with an increasing enthusiasm for the Finnish language and culture which was to lead, among many other things, to Elias Lönnrot's collection of ancient Finnish songs out of which he composed the *Kalevala* (1835-49)" (Graves 2004, 206-07). Therefore, it should be kept in mind that a combination of internal and external factors prepared Finland for the publication of the *Kalevala*. Michael Branch identifies the principal external factor of the Finnish preparation process as "the romantic interest in local cultures, particularly in their oral poetry, which had reached Finland through works such as Thomas Percy's *Reliques of*

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<sup>9</sup> Turku (Åbo) was a part of Sweden until 1808-09 when Finland was lost to Russia after the Finnish war (February 1808-September 1809).

<sup>10</sup> Herder included 'Darthula's Grabesgesang' in his *Volkslieder* (1778/79), though in fact his translation is not directly from Macpherson's English, but is a reworking of Denis' German. However, Runeberg would not have known this at the time.

*Ancient Poetry* (1765) and James Macpherson's Ossianic poetry of the 1760s, and the writings of Rousseau" (Branch 1994, 199). Finland possessed a large corpus of oral poetry telling of mythical and legendary characters and with the rising awareness of local history these external developments were received by an informed Finnish audience.

This chapter will deal with the reception of Macpherson's *Ossian* in Europe and its particular influence in Finland. It will be necessary to look at the *Kalevala* as a literary text in an attempt to thoroughly understand the reasons behind its significance for Finnish nationalism. Analogies in spirit, themes and characters between *Ossian* and the *Kalevala* will also be pointed out in the concluding section. Such an investigation is relevant as it would provide an introduction to the understanding of these two texts and their reflection of social reality. Moreover, it would also reveal whether or not *Ossian* can be seen as a romantic trigger for the publication of the *Kalevala*.

## **James Macpherson and the Scottish Highlands**

Macpherson's colourful life, which took him from the heart of the Scottish Highlands to a townhouse in Westminster, seems to display a constant struggle to restore harmony between the contradictory ideals of the North and the South; and the traditional and modern. Even when he was living in London in 1780s, after his 'Ossianic success', he still retained a strong sentimental attachment to his homeland, spending the last years of his life in the Highlands. His poetry was, certainly, a product of similar taste, and with his *Ossian*, he managed to combine his personal memories with the eighteenth-century demands for originality, individuality and spontaneous composition (Stafford 1996, *PO* xiv). Therefore, some knowledge of the Scottish Highlands in the eighteenth century, Macpherson's native culture



and his early experiences of Highland life are necessary in order to fully understand *The Poems of Ossian*.

Born in October 1736 in a farm near Kingussie, Macpherson grew up in a Gaelic-speaking area of rural Badenoch where he was exposed to the aftermath of the 1715 Rising (First Jacobite Rebellion). The events of 1715 were one of the rebellions, occurring between 1688 and 1746, against the ruling British government. Ruthven Barracks, which were erected by the British army in the 1720s to bring order to the Highlands and to prevent any further riot, were only half a mile away from Macpherson's village. Therefore, it seems likely that spending his early years under the constant pressure of the army and especially, living through the 1745 Rising must have had a formative impact on Macpherson's worldview and later, found an expression in his literary works. After having to witness the violence of battle and the defeat of his community against the government forces, Macpherson experienced the measures taken by the British in order to suppress the distinctive Highland culture, such as banning tartan plait and bagpipes. Nevertheless, besides absorbing the political conflicts of the eighteenth-century Highlands, he was also embedded in native traditional culture, listening to the legends and tales passed down orally from generation to generation. Stafford explains that "tales relating to Fionn, Oscar and Oisín were current throughout Inverness-shire, and it is easy to imagine James Macpherson as a child sitting at the hearth of his neighbour, the well-known story-teller, Finlay Macpherson of Lyneberack" (Stafford 1996, *PO* ix). According to Campbell's *Popular Tales of the Highlands* (1890):

During the recitation of these tales, the emotions of the reciters are occasionally very strongly excited, and so also are those of the listeners, almost shedding tears at one time, and giving way to loud laughter at another. A good many of them firmly believe in all the extravagance of these stories. They speak of the Ossianic heroes with as much feeling, sympathy, and belief in their existence and reality [...] Fingal, or rather Fionn, is never called the king of any country or territory, but the king of the Finn, a

body of men who were raised, according to the traditions current in the Long Island and other parts of the Highlands, in Ireland and in the Highlands, to defend both countries against foreign invaders, more especially against the Scandinavians. (Campbell 1890, v)

It is obvious that Macpherson was brought up in the landscape of the Highlands, with the memory of the Fiana and was taught to admire the ancient warriors, who seem to have become symbols of the Highland spirit.

Towards the end of 1752, he arrived in Aberdeen for his university education, finding himself among a lively circle of intellectuals such as Thomas Blackwell, Thomas Reid, Alexander Gerard and George Campbell. Upon completing his studies—History, Geography, Maths, Natural Philosophy, Logic and Metaphysics (Stafford 1991, 27)—at Marischal College (part of Aberdeen University) he left for Edinburgh. Pittock suggests that Macpherson’s experience as a student in Aberdeen has often been considered as of equal importance to his childhood years in the Scottish Gàidhealteachd (Pittock 1998, 47). It seems that his university education and the experience of city life enabled him to express—if not, to form—his thoughts and to find the right channels to publish his works. Yet, it is highly likely that his works, praising the Highlands and his native culture, owe much to Macpherson having left his hometown. In Stafford’s words:

The advantages of the physical ‘education of Nature’ became apparent only through his experience of urban life and, ironically, Macpherson’s personal revolt against the advancing civilisation of the Lowlands owed more to his education at Aberdeen University than to his ‘natural’ education in Badenoch. (Stafford 1991, 24)

Shortly after the success of his first Ossianic publication, *Fragments* (June 1760), Macpherson was encouraged by Blair to go on a journey through the Highlands and the Western Islands in search of longer pieces, especially the lost epic of Fingal (Stafford 1991, 115). He began his

journey by travelling through Skye and the Outer Hebrides, since the islands were remote and thus, less likely to have been contaminated by outside influences. The second trip was to Mull and the coast of Argyll, which proved to be fruitless before he visited the shores of Loch Ness, where he acquired *The Book of the Dean of Lismore*<sup>11</sup> (Stafford 1991, 117-18).

The biggest contribution to *The Poems of Ossian* came from his Highland tours which not only gave him the chance to collect more from oral tradition but also provided him with the opportunity to meet recognized authorities on Celtic antiquities such as Dr John Macpherson whose *Dissertations* (1768) reinforce James' vision of Celtic Scotland. Throughout his trips, Macpherson received help and encouragement from friends and acquaintances, including Ewan Macpherson (who accompanied him for a month and helped him with his transcriptions) and Colin MacFarquhar (Stafford 1991, 120-21).<sup>12</sup>

When Macpherson began to collect traditional Gaelic poetry in 1756, a few client bards still survived (e.g. MacMhuirich for Clanronald). In *The Beauties of Gaelic Poetry and Lives of the Highland Bards*, John Mackenzie reports an incident involving James Macpherson's acquiring a book of Gaelic ballads, told by Roderick Mac Neil of MacMhuirich:

In the house of Patrick Nicolson, at Torlum, near Castle-Burgh, in the shire of Inverness, on the ninth day of August, compeared in the fifty ninth year of his age, Lachlan, son of Neil, son of Lachlan, son of Neil, son of Donald, son of Lachlan, son of Neil Mòr, son of Lachlan, son of Donald, of the surname of Mac Vuirich, before Roderick M. Neil laird of Barra, and declared, That, according to the best of his knowledge, he is the eighteenth in descent from Muireach, whose posterity had officiated as bards to the family of Clanronald; and that they had from that time, as the salary of their office the farm; [...]

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<sup>11</sup> *The Book of the Dean of Lismore* (1862) is the oldest collection of Gaelic ballads that has been reserved in Scotland. The original manuscript was collected by Sir James M'Gregor, the Dean of Lismore, in the beginning of the sixteenth century.

<sup>12</sup> Figure 8, in chapter 5, shows the places visited by Macpherson.

He remembers well that works of Ossian, written on parchment, were in the custody of his father, as received from his predecessors; that some of the parchments were up in the form of books, and that others were loose and separate, which contained works of other bards besides those of Ossian. He remembers that his father had a book which was called the Red Book, made of paper, which he had from his predecessors, and which, as his father informed him contained a good deal of the history of the Highland Clans, together with part of the works of Ossian. That none of these books are to be found at this day, because when they (his family) were deprived of their lands, they lost their alacrity and zeal. That he is not certain what became of the parchments, but thinks that some of them were carried away by Alexander, son of the Rev. Alexander Macdonald, and others by Ronald his son; and he saw two or three of them cut down by tailors for measures. That he remembers well that Clanronald made his father give up the red book to James Macpherson from Badenoch; that it was near as thick as a Bible, but that it was longer and broader though not so thick in the cover. That the parchments and the red book were written in the hand in which the Gaelic used to be written of old both in Scotland and Ireland before people began to use the English hand in writing Gaelic; and that his father knew well how to read the old hand. (Mackenzie 1841, 64-65)

This letter (originally written in Gaelic) was addressed to Henry Mackenzie at the time he was working on the Highland Society's *Report on Ossian*. The report in question was the result of an investigation held by the Highland Society of Scotland on the 'nature and authenticity of the *Poems of Ossian*'. Henry Mackenzie was a founder member of the society in 1784 and the chair of committee of the society looking into this issue which produced the final report in 1805. Mackenzie "presents his function (rather as Macpherson had his in the early *Fragments*) as that of indentured scribe" (Manning 1998, 139). Whether or not Macpherson received this 'Red Book' cannot be known for sure, but if he did it would have given him an enormous source of material and inspiration that he needed in order to raise the voice of ancient bards again.

Once his collection trips were finalized, Macpherson was anxious to meet the expectations of the Edinburgh literati and thus, began editing his material, which, in his

opinion, required some alteration as his 'translations' were aimed at English speakers— Gaelic names were anglicized (i.e. Oisín vs. Ossian) while tales and stories were romanticized. According to Stafford, whilst Macpherson was following Blackwell's ideal of drawing on personal experience in his early poetry, "much of the freshness was marred by the attempt to produce 'refined' descriptions, according to the demands of contemporary taste" (Stafford 1988, 54). Macpherson was left in conflict during his education in Aberdeen as not everyone shared Blackwell's idea of recording personal experiences as literary material; in fact Gerard, a tutor of Macpherson and the author of *An Essay on Taste* (1756) which won the first prize in a competition set by the Edinburgh Society in 1756, emphasizes the significance of taste in literature:

Refinement of taste makes a man susceptible of delicate feelings on every occasion; and these increase the acuteness of the moral sense. [...] On this account, a man of nice taste will have a stronger abhorrence of vice, and a keener relish for virtue. (Gerard 1759, 205)

These early influences on Macpherson were to be displayed in his own compositions, as well as his later Ossianic 'translations', where he attempts to find a way to preserve the imaginative power of his native tradition while also pandering to the taste of a 'polished age'. Therefore, it seems that with the influence of Blair and his university education, his eventual publication is more likely to have been a product of Edinburgh than that of the Highlands.

### **Macpherson's Ambitions and his Ideals in Europe**

Derick Thomson, comparing the *Kalevala* and *Ossian*, observes that earlier collections of Ossianic poetry do not successfully present an epic togetherness:

In different circumstances the native Gaelic ballads might have had quite different potential for literary elaboration, especially in their original language. As it happened, they did not achieve that particular culmination either in Scottish Gaelic or in Irish. When the Dean of Lismore, in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, collected heroic ballads it was only as one category of syllabic verse. He seems to have taken such items as they came to hand, and there is little close grouping of such ballads in his MS: we find items from p.3 to p.294, with at most three items closely grouped, out of a total of over two dozen heroic items. *Duanaire Finn*, the first specific collection of heroic ballads in Ireland, comes a century later, and it too is an ingathering of such matter, not an ordered or reshaped sequence. Nor was the sophisticated twelfth-century prose and verse compilation of Ossianic stories, *Acallam na Senórach*, cast in an epic mould. (Thomson 1990, 126-27)

As seen in the example of *The Book of Dean of Lismore*, ‘unedited’ ballad pieces would not meet the needs of Macpherson and his followers’ expectations. While the conditions of early nineteenth-century Finland demonstrate a similarity to the Scottish Gàidhealtachd of the 1750s, the *Kalevala* remains the best example of a synthetic ‘collected whole’ together with Macpherson’s *Fingal* (1761) and *Temora* (1763).<sup>13</sup> Encouraged by supporters such as Hugh Blair, for whom epic was the highest literary form, Macpherson had attempted to fill this gap—that is, the lack of an organized Gaelic ballad collection—by bringing together discrete sources and imposing on them an alien epic structure; mostly developing them with his own writings.<sup>14</sup>

At this point, it is of significance to bring Macpherson’s ambitions and his motives for publishing his *Ossian* to attention. As Gaskill writes in his ‘Introduction’ to *Ossian Revisited*:

One of Macpherson’s motives was undoubtedly the preservation of the literary patrimony of the Gael. But beyond this, he wished

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<sup>13</sup> It is worth noting that apart from the fact that there are ‘minor’ Ossianic poems, the longer epics themselves are fragmented by numerous episodic interludes.

<sup>14</sup> Though, Donald Meek observes a tendency for discrete ballads in the original sources to come together to form bigger “conglomerate ballads” (Meek 1986-87, 159).

to restore some belated glory to a shattered people, by having its culture recognized by an outside world for whom 'Highlander' was synonymous with savage (and if that word gradually ceased to be a pejorative term, Macpherson himself had something to do with it). He was also an ambitious poet in his own right who desired fame and wealth. He would have assumed, no doubt rightly, that the material he collected would not, in its raw and undiluted form, be sufficient 'to please a polished age' [*The Antiquity, &c. Of the Poems of Ossian*, PO 50 [M]]. He may also have managed to convince himself, and not wholly without justification, that what had come into his possession comprised the corrupt remnants of a literary tradition of far greater dignity and antiquity, perhaps stretching back to the legendary Ossian himself; and that he was therefore justified in attempting to reconstitute it as it might once have been, restoring 'a work of merit to its original purity'.<sup>15</sup> (Gaskill 1991, 5)

It becomes possible to see that Macpherson had large ambitions and not entirely ignoble intentions in publishing the poems (1760-63); and it is only fair to admit that he accomplished some of his goals to a certain extent: he created an epic whole out of the fragments he gathered and he certainly became a famous poet of his time (though with a different image which did not seem to trouble him).<sup>16</sup> More importantly, even though the attitude towards the Highlander did not change overnight he did have a hand in preparing the necessary grounds for this transition by being a pioneer of the Romantic Movement in Britain.

Macpherson's *Ossian* fascinated the British Romantics—including Blake whose early work, *Gwin, King of Norway* (1769-77), displays influence of Macpherson, Coleridge whose Ossianic imitations appeared in 1796, and Wordsworth, several of whose poems, *Glen*

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<sup>15</sup> Mackenzie 1805, 44.

<sup>16</sup> Only weeks after Macpherson's first Ossianic publication, doubts were raised regarding the authenticity of his Gaelic material and the debate whether he was an editor, a translator or a forger only became heated as time passed. It has been argued by contemporary critics that a large portion of the Ossianic controversy was political and ethnic in origin, as opposed to simply being literary. No matter what one's point of view on the matter is, the fact remains that any discussion of Macpherson's work has almost always included the question of fraudulence.

*Almain* (1803), and *Effusion in the Pleasure-Ground on the Banks of the Bran* (1814), display traces of Ossianic influence even though unacknowledged. By 1818, even an English critic, William Hazlitt, places *Ossian* among the world's best poetry: "I shall conclude this general account with some remarks on four of the principal works of poetry in the world, at different periods of history Homer, the Bible, Dante, and let me add, Ossian" (Hazlitt 1902, 15 [1818]). In the 1860s, regarding the authenticity of the poems as irrelevant, Matthew Arnold talks about the effect of Macpherson's work on European literature, also emphasizing the sense of passion and melancholy felt in the poems:

A famous book, Macpherson's *Ossian*, carried in the last century this vein like a flood of lava through Europe. I am not going to criticize Macpherson's *Ossian* here. Make the part of what is forged, modern, tawdry, spurious, in the book, as large as you please [...] there will still be left [...] a residue with the very soul of Celtic genius in it, and which has the proud distinction of having brought this soul of the Celtic genius into contact with the genius of the nations of modern Europe, and enriched all our poetry by it. [...] All Europe felt the power of that melancholy. (Arnold 1867, 152-54)

Even at the end of the nineteenth century, one hundred years after the publication of *Ossian*, Yeats was drawing from Macpherson's poetry—*The Rose of Battle* (1892) was originally named "They went forth to the Battle, but they always fell" (Yeats 1957, 113). It seems that Yeats realized that 'defeat' could be seen as a valuable asset since he relates defeat to spirituality and success to materialism and vulgarity (Watson 1998, 219).

The remote and mysterious Celtic world of Macpherson, whose heroes displayed nobility, generosity and heroism, was admired on the European literary scene as it both appealed to taste for the Gothic and the seekers of the Sublime. Macpherson's heroes were not repressed by religion or government, there were no class differences but they were still a part of the natural world. According to Stafford:



Despite their newness, *The Poems of Ossian* also seemed to offer a comforting sense of permanence: it was ancient poetry like the Bible or Homer and therefore seemed safe. Although Macpherson's work anticipated many of the concerns of the Romantic Movement, the words of a third-century poet could hardly seem revolutionary. The melancholy preoccupations of the Celtic bard himself attracted the sympathy of an eighteenth-century audience, but he still retained the stature of an Ancient. The combination of the subjective poet and the sage prophet was perfect for the Romantic Period, where the image of the poet as an isolated genius emerged again and again. As sole survivor of a greater world, Ossian commanded the perennial fascination with the exiled hero and the loss of paradise. (Stafford 1988, 178)

*Ossian's* appeal in Europe was not limited to its literary and poetic merit—it was also an inspiration for preserving national folk cultures and bringing 'forgotten' literary monuments to light—with hopes to demonstrate that their 'barbarian' forefathers had a culture to be proud of, whether German, Russian, Swedish or Finnish.<sup>17</sup> With these ideals gaining popularity and societies becoming more and more interested in their ancestral values in eighteenth-century Europe, the torch lit by Macpherson's *Ossian* began to be passed on to different countries.

In Finland (*Swedish Österbotten*, at the time), Johan Henrik Kellgren, who was a dominant literary figure of his time, became acquainted with *Ossian* through the selected French translations of Turgot in the journal, *Variétés littéraires*, in 1768-69. He was a student of the famous Åbo Academy of Finland and later a member of the Åbo literary society, *Aurora*. Kellgren's earliest poems and his first Ossianic translation—*Alpin ett ersiskt skaldestycke* ('Alpin, an Erse poem' taken from the *Songs of Selma*) appeared in 1775 (Graves 2004, 201). It is worth noting that the literary society founded by the Åbo Romantics in 1815 in order to promote Finnish awakening, was called the 'Selma Society' before being renamed

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<sup>17</sup> *Den Götiska Forbundet* (The Gothic League) in Sweden, which was a social club for literary studies created by a number of Swedish poets and writers in 1811, is likely to have had an impact on Finland. The members of the club believed the elevation of Swedish society could be achieved by the study of Scandinavian antiquity ("Swedish Literature").

as the 'Aura Society', which might stand as proof of Ossianic inspiration. Kellgren is the important name when it comes to the Ossianic interpretation on the Finnish literary scene, as he is the first to observe the relation of *Ossian* to native Finnish tradition by pointing out that Finnish runes<sup>18</sup> were preserved in a similar manner to *Ossian*. Graves suspects that behind this observation could be Henrik Gabriel Porthan (1739-1804), one of Kellgren's teachers at the academy, who was also a significant figure in the study of Finnish culture, history and the growth of Finnish identity (Graves 2004, 201). This seems to be a feasible assumption considering Porthan as the author of *De poesi Fennica* (On Finnish Poetry), 1766-78, initiated the collection and study of Finnish folk poetry (Honko 2002, 18).

### **Elias Lönnrot's Life**

Before focusing on the *Kalevala*, it is necessary to have some knowledge of Lönnrot's background and life as this would not only provide insights into the poet's inspirations and aims but also familiarize us with his vision of Finland. Lönnrot was born on April 9, 1802 in the southern Finnish parish, Sammatti. He was the son of a tailor, living in a farmer's cottage most probably in financial difficulties. However, his desire for education ensured him a scholarship to start his studies at Turku Academy in 1822. Here, he studied the classical languages (Latin, Greek and Hebrew) besides Russian. Mathematics, history, rhetoric, Greek literature, physics, Eastern literature, history of literature and philosophy were among the other subjects that were taught (Pentikäinen 1989, 68). In 1827, he became a doctoral candidate and finally, received his doctorate in medicine in 1832. Considering his thesis title for his master's degree was *Väinämöisestä, muinaissuimalaisten jumalasta* (On Väinämöinen, a

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<sup>18</sup> In Finnish tradition 'runes' refer to oral folk poetry.

god of the ancient Finns) and his doctorate thesis was titled *Suomalaisten tainomaisesta lääketaidosta* (On magic in Finnish medicine), his interest in Finnish folklore and antiquities was rather early (Kaukonen 1979, 23).

His folklore collecting journeys began in 1828, when he became a tutor in the province of Häme. Four years later, he was assigned as an assistant to the district physician in Oulu, and in 1833 he himself became the district physician in Kajaani (Pentikäinen 1989, 68-69). Lönnrot had many interests and literary activities besides his medical job—he also found time to edit the Finnish-language journal, *The Bee*, in Kajaani and during the 1840s, he founded *Suomi-aikakauskirja* (The Finnish Review). In the 1850s, he published *Oulun Wiiko-Sanomien* (The Oulu Weekly) (Pentikäinen 1989, 71). However, it seems that his Kalevalaic research became more like a way of life as might be suggested by his early interest in folklore and the natural development of his collection trips. During his years as a student, Lönnrot was greatly influenced by the Romantic doctrine, and his *Kalevala* gave him the valuable chance to combine his scientific approach with his research material, his belief in Christian faith and his fascination towards Finnish antiquities.

Of his eleven collection trips to different parts of Finland and Russian Karelia in search of Finnish folk tradition, the first two were in 1822 and 1831. There were less contact with the Swedish speaking world and less influence of Swedish culture and language in Kajaani (eastern Finland), where he worked as a doctor; and thus, the community was more likely to have preserved their ancient poetry. It seems that being so closely involved with the community, and observing their ‘untouched’ customs and traditions in a remote town of Kajaani, increased Lönnrot’s antiquarian curiosity—after all, Karelia and Savo, in the north east, were considered the real “Finland of Poems” (Honko 2002, 17).

Lönnrot collected ancient Finnish runes, which served as the means to keep and repeat the memories of ancient Finns and to hand them down to future generations. Determining the age of the runes is a complicated process as their content and the expression of their content in poetic form can be separate from one another (Pentikäinen 1989, 83). In the case of the Kalevala runes, for instance, the trochaic metre, alliteration and parallelism—features of the Kalevala metre—seem to indicate their age (Pentikäinen 1989, 86). Rune-singing in this metre is estimated to be 2500 to 3000 years old (Kuusi 1980, 21-23) and it is highly likely that Lönnrot kept the hypothetical age of the runes, as well as their plot, during his adaptation. Kuusi divides the themes of Kalevala runes into seven categories, listed in the order of antiquity: myth poetry describing cosmogonic events of creation at the beginning of time; magic and shaman poetry, where characters have magical powers and take shamanistic journeys; adventure poetry, often about wooing journeys; fantasy poems, in which a wondrous animal or a small child is threatened; Christian legends; ballads, narrative poetry and lyrical epic; and, historical war poetry (Kuusi, Bosley & Branch 1977, 46-47). Although all the poems that belong to these categories might appear in the Kalevala metre, “only the first four form the basis for the *Kalevala* and are usually referred to as Kalevala epics” (Siikala 1994, 18).<sup>19</sup> Thus, the *Kalevala* begins with the origin of the world and ends with ‘Väinämöinen’s Judgement’. Lönnrot edited the collected runes and his first publication, *The Kantele*, consisting of twenty-four poems, was published in 1829. This greatly contributed to the planning of the creation of his true folk epic, the *Kalevala*, in line with what Honko calls the ultimate goal of the Romantic movement even though the *Kantele* itself contains only a few epic lays (Honko 2002, 18).

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<sup>19</sup> “Christian legends, ballads and lyrical epics bear clear marks of medieval poetry; ‘historical war poetry’ tells about kings and rulers of the New Era and differs clearly from the ancient mythical world of *Kalevala* themes” (Siikala 1994, 18).

It was with these Romantic ideals in mind that Lönnrot began collecting and editing his pieces for the *Kalevala*, realizing that what he gathered would illustrate the origins of the Finnish nation—a necessary notion for a society at the starting point of nation formation. His classical background gained from the Åbo Academy, was certainly beneficial, both when he began to collect folk songs and when he fitted and adapted the runes. Lönnrot fused the fragments into cycles by putting together 12000 verses in his first edition of 1835, expanded to almost 23000 verses in the 1849 edition—the *New Kalevala*, which is the widely-known and read version (also the basis for this thesis). Doane emphasizes that Lönnrot is a scribe who reperforms and edits the traditional oral works in the act of writing “in such a way that the text may change but remain authentic, just as a completely oral poet’s text changes from performance to performance without losing its authenticity” (Daone 1991, 80-81).

### **Macpherson’s Influence on Lönnrot**

As he did not begin his studies at the Åbo Academy until 1822, Lönnrot was not taught by Porthan (died in 1804), who, as mentioned earlier, was the greatest of Lönnrot’s predecessors and the founder of folk poetry research in Finland (Honko 2002, 18). Nevertheless, Lönnrot continued in Porthan’s path publishing his *Kalevala* in 1835. In fact, he acknowledges the influence of Porthan and several others in his *Preface to the Old Kalevala*:

Heretofore Finnish mythology has of course already been to some extent investigated by, among others Lencqvist, Ganander, and Porthan, but without doubt there are still grave errors, and mistakes in many places. (*Kalevala/Preface to the Old Kalevala*, 371 [1835])

What Henrik Gabriel Porthan brought to attention was in fact reflective of the resemblance of Finland and Scotland not only in literary but also in political matters. Perhaps not

surprisingly, like Finland, Scotland had been subsumed by a larger, more powerful nation whose ancient language and folk tradition it did not share. Whether intentionally achieved or not, Macpherson's *Ossian* seemed to foreground the otherness of Scotland's Gaelic heritage compared to that of its Anglophone and anglophile political culture. Macpherson's impact appears to be most marked where a nation possesses a rich oral culture alongside a sense of historical and political oppression. It is in such cases that oral literature is collected in an attempt to reconstitute an epic whole of these 'fragments of poetry'; as opposed to merely creating anthologies like Percy's *Reliques* (1765).

Considering the circles he was moving in, therefore, it seems likely that Lönnrot's familiarity with *Ossian* was an early one and it is safe to say that this had an effect on his Romantic consciousness, which would later form a fundamental basis for the *Kalevala* and the rise of Finnish national awareness. In fact, Lönnrot's familiarity with the Classics was probably much greater than Macpherson's while his involvement with both classical and indigenous verse tradition was much longer, from the early 1810s until he published the *New Kalevala* in 1849. Thomson observes that this difference between the poets "helps in part to explain the great contrast in method between the work of the two men: Lönnrot's detailed and pervasive use of the original sources which he fitted into his scheme and arrangement, as against Macpherson's episodic and impressionistic culling from the ballads" (Thomson 1990, 127-28). Pentikäinen points out that Macpherson's *Ossian* along with Homer's works and the Germanic *Nibelungenlied* provided Lönnrot with an international model for the *Kalevala*'s mythologizing process (Pentikäinen 1989, 101). As opposed to Macpherson's 'translating' his Gaelic material, Lönnrot kept the runes in Finnish. Had he translated them into Swedish his work would have been more like what Macpherson was doing. A reason

for this seems to be that unlike Macpherson, Lönnrot had not accepted that his people and their culture were finished.

Lönnrot's motive for publishing the *Kalevala* was to raise the collective cultural memory of the Finns that had been repressed for centuries due to political reasons. For him, the *Kalevala* as an epic denoted Finnish mythology, ethnography, language and literature:

If Finnish mythology might derive any help from these poems [...] then one of my hopes will have been realized; but there are still other matters. I would hope to get some elucidation from these of our forebears' life of old and some benefit for the Finnish language and poetic art. (*Kalevala/Preface to the Old Kalevala*, 370 [1835])

With the spirit of the Romantic Movement taking hold of Europe, folklore research and epic construction gained popularity while folk poetry and national epic were regarded as complementary. Together with the Romantic idea of the poet, Lönnrot attempted to be the voice of his nation's spirit and 'reality'. Other epics of the world proved to be an inspiration for him too:

I have tried to put these songs into some sort of order, a task of which I should give some account. Since to my knowledge no one has previously tried to order them or so much as mentioned doing so, I will first report on how I came upon this idea. Already a while reading songs previously collected, particularly those collected by Ganander, I at least wondered whether one might not possibly find songs about Väinämöinen, Ilmarinen, and Lemminkäinen and other memorable forebears of ours until from these had been got longer accounts, too, just as we see that the Greeks [in the Homeric poems] and the Icelanders [in the *Poetic* or *Elder Edda*] and others got songs of their forebears. This idea was just getting a firm place in my mind when in 1826 with the help of Reinhold von Becker, associate professor of history at Turku (Swedish Åbo), I got to writing a B.A. thesis on Väinämöinen, and while preparing it I saw that there was no lack of tales about him. I also wondered why Ganander had not already done this, but I soon came to understand that he did not have the songs necessary for the task. He published the best passages in the songs he collected in his *Mythologia Fennica* (Turku, 1798), but he had scarcely any of these in very ample form. An early death had

taken off Zachris Topelius. Sr.; otherwise he would in the course of time have been able to devote himself to this work. (*Kalevala/Preface to the Old Kalevala*, 366 [1835])

Looking at Lönnrot's Finland, one can see a community that was annexed by Russia in 1809 after being a province of Sweden since the twelfth century; however, the Finnish community began to see itself as a nation in its own right. The importance of awareness of origins for national consciousness in Finland is emphasized by Adolf Ivar Arwidsson's famous admonishment to his countrymen: "We are no longer Swedes; we can never become Russians; therefore let us be Finns" (Leerssen 2006, 169). Under these circumstances, the *Kalevala* provided the Finns with what they needed—an epic that would reinforce their national identity by giving them a shared history. In order to achieve this, like Macpherson, Lönnrot focused on his nation's past; in fact with very similar reasons to Macpherson: to prove that their ancestors were not barbarians, that they were one of the oldest nations and that they had their own language which was just as old (Honko 1987, 280). Perhaps the reason why *Kalevala* was not produced before Lönnrot (we see him wondering this too in the extract above), was simply because the earlier collections were carried out more in the interest of tradition for its own sake and Finland was not ready for the big transition yet. The same might be true of *Ossian* as well—Gaelic-speaking Scotland was not ready for a 'national consciousness fight' before Macpherson's time: "the Scots were at that time, [...] more in need of sufficient food and better clothing than of glory" (Bysveen 1982, 52). In fact it seems feasible to say that they never did become ready—any fight there might have been in the Scottish Gael would have expressed itself in the Jacobite revolts (1715 and 1745) both of which, particularly the '45, seem to have resulted in Gaelic Scotland being subjected to something close to a cultural genocide.



Nevertheless, even though these instabilities postponed the formation or the declaration of a nation it seems that they are a fundamental basis of the need for an epic since no nation with a stable government would be a suitable subject for an epic poem, "the structure of which cannot dispense with the wonderful and the marvellous" (Bysveen 1982, 37). The division between the Gaelic-speaking Highlands and the English/Scots-speaking Lowlands of Scotland constitute a major difference from the Finnish situation, though Lowland Scots could affect a Highland identity to emphasize their distinctness from the English. The parallel is observed between the Gaelic culture and language being marginalized by Scots/English and the Finnish language/culture being marginalized by the Swedish. Ironically, the transfer of Finland from Sweden to Russia was helpful to a resurgence of Finnish because the Russian authorities could use Finnish to undermine any residual loyalty to Sweden.

According to Pentikäinen "at its creation, an epic is often interpreted as the sacred history of a people. It is the source of their identity and strength and serves to transform both the creation of new myths and the passage of history" (Pentikäinen 1989, 101). This was certainly the case for the *Kalevala*. The emerging Finnish nationalism found its voice in the *Kalevala*, which provided the Finns with evidence of their rich folklore and supplying their society with a common past, language and tradition. Before long, the fame of the *Kalevala* was spread through Europe, not least thanks to Jacob Grimm's lecture at the Prussian Academy, 'Über das finnische Epos' (About the Finnish Epic), in 1845; and *Kalevala*-inspired folk collections began to appear throughout the Baltic region, including the Estonian, *Kalevipoeg* (1857-61). As a whole, the *Kalevala* presents itself as a reflection of the religion, beliefs, customs and superstitions of ancient Finns as well as providing an explanation of the origin of the world and the Finns themselves. The heroic stories, adventures, charms and

magic in the verses are its ornaments which take the reader into the very core of ancient Finnish tradition and to the soul of the epic, where we find an 'Otherworld', a 'Northland', three national heroes, gods, a beautiful maiden and a destructive mother. Then they take us forward to Finnish national consciousness in the present.

One can clearly see the similar order of developments in the productions of the *Kalevala* and *Ossian*: On the one hand, we have Macpherson, who grew up in the Scottish Highlands and on the other, Lönnrot who spent his childhood in a rural Finnish-speaking village; so it is safe to say that the pair grew up listening to traditional verses, ballads and oral prose tales. Both Macpherson and Lönnrot had a classical educational background and had some sort of familiarity with classical epics (such as Homer and the *Eddas*), which we know to have influenced their publications. They were both from countries suffering from years of political oppression and cultural marginalization; they both had access to neglected rich ancient oral tradition, and more importantly, they both wished to take an active role in raising their culture from the dead.

It is interesting that Lönnrot does not acknowledge Macpherson as one of his inspirations, but there is no doubt that he was familiar with the model of his *Ossian*—it was difficult not to be influenced by the Ossianic vogue at the time in any case. In the 'Introduction' to his translation of the *Kalevala*, Keith Bosley observes that *Ossian* marks the beginning of the 'Romantic epic' style, emphasizing that Henrik Gabriel Porthan and his students (at the Åbo Academy) saw a kindred spirit in Macpherson (Bosley 1989, xv). So, it is clear that *Ossian's* spirit reached all the way to Finland and to the doors of the Åbo Academy where Lönnrot would also have become familiar with it too. The reason he prefers not to mention Macpherson among his influences might be because he was worried about being mixed up with the Ossianic controversy which would overshadow the effect and value of his

*Kalevala*—as in the case of Macpherson’s *Ossian*. Honko, for instance, points to the issue of authenticity by saying that Lönnrot has “destroyed the authenticity of his original recordings in chopping them up into lines and segments to suit his own ends. He tried to replace it by a new authenticity ultimately relying on his own view of the *Kalevala* way of life” (Honko 1987, 286). Therefore, it is possible to see Lönnrot’s work as an epic whole which portrays the existing features of the Finnish culture in fragments.

Although Macpherson’s main influence on Lönnrot’s work appears to have been mostly his role as a catalyst triggering literary historicism and being one of the pioneers who contributed to the Finnish Romantic revival with his *Ossian*, it is unlikely to be limited to that. Therefore, the similarity of these two epic collections lies in their essence, the process of creation and the ambitions of their collector-poets. In view of this, it would not be possible to conduct a close inter-textual analysis of *Ossian* and the *Kalevala*. Yet, similarities between the themes, the characters and the spirit of the two epics can be seen. Notions that correspond are considerably noteworthy for they each contribute to the main framework of both of the epics. Thus, this possible closeness between the two epics can hold light to the universality of human nature, and the similar road taken by societies when attempting to form or to recover their common social reality.

## **Analogies between *The Poems of Ossian* and the *Kalevala***

### **Tradition and Nature**

First and foremost, while the *Kalevala* comes across as a reflection of Finnish customs and beliefs Macpherson’s *Ossian* is representative of the Scottish-Gaelic traditions and

conventions. Kuusi emphasizes that since the ancient Finns did not have any means of documenting their linguistic communication the *Kalevala* tradition served as an “unwritten literature” (Kuusi 1994, 41):

Kalevala language aimed at precise, word-for-word communication [...] the Kalevala tradition, the Kalevala fund of memorised lore, served our forefathers in the same way as the Bible, the hymn book, the law book, the medical book, the guides to etiquette and the art of living serve people of the modern era. It was knowledge, skill and belief in crystallised, formulaic form. (Kuusi 1994, 41)

Even though the *Kalevala* includes only a section of all the epic runes found in Finland, it provides great insight into how the Finns perceived their world:

It [the *Kalevala*] describes the Finnish view of the genesis of the world, including its elements and its eschatology. The *Kalevala* is also a book about life and death, offering patterns for life experiences and interpretations. It contains episodes of cult dramas, such as bear rituals and weddings. The essence of the epic lies in its shamanistic world view. Its many heroes are mediators between this world and the levels of altered consciousness in the upper or nether realms of the universe. (Pentikäinen 1989, xvi)

Similarly, the ancient heritage of the Highlanders was passed from one generation to the next and down to Macpherson’s day orally through their Gaelic ballad tradition (also, the oral prose tales he would have grown up with); “and even then it was abundantly proved that a rude poetry, recounting the doings of a great chief or hero, named Fion or Fingal,<sup>20</sup> had been handed down among the Highlanders from time immemorial. Common sayings, popular proverbs, and local names in the Highlands and Isles everywhere attested this belief” (Saunders 1894, 97-98). Gaelic ballads would probably have reached the eighteenth or the nineteenth century even without Macpherson’s intervention; however, it is highly likely

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<sup>20</sup> The ‘Fingal’ form was probably not common before Macpherson’s time.

that his work “enhanced their appeal and reinforced their centrality in the Gaelic literary matrix” (Meek 2004, 49).

Being a very important part of the ancient Gaelic and Finnish life, nature and natural phenomena are central to both *Ossian* and the *Kalevala*. Macpherson-Ossian as a poet of nature lays in front of our eyes the landscape of the northern regions with mists, mountains, winds, storms and clouds; elements which he makes extensive use of in his similes, increasing the poetical merit of the poems. Blair likes to think of these similes, as “sparkling ornaments” (Blair, *PO* [1763] 383)—nature is a combination of celestial imagery and local colour. The *Kalevala*, on the other hand, not only gives an account of Finnish nature but also presents the ancient Finns at a stage of nature worship. Therefore, it is possible to observe that the nature is experienced in a different manner in Finnish and Scottish-Gaelic culture and this is reflected in their epics.<sup>21</sup>

### **Bardic Tradition and Rune Singing: Ossian’s Harp and Väinämöinen’s Kantele**

In ancient Gaelic culture, as presented by Macpherson, bards were highly respected and their influence on society was enormous: “the respect for their order was so great and universal, that armies engaged in action have been known to desist from battle when the bards threw themselves between the lines” (Macpherson 1771, 210). If, as Macpherson argues, this tradition was universal, then it would be possible to find its parallels in other cultures such as the Scandinavian skaldic poetry or the Finnish rune-singing,<sup>22</sup> which would help define the characteristics of ancient poetry; thus, providing a clearer idea of what the bard stood for.

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<sup>21</sup> Further discussion on Ossianic nature can be found below in the section on ‘Liminal Spaces: Border Zones’ and in chapter 3 while nature and nature worship in the *Kalevala* are examined in chapter 6.

<sup>22</sup> Scandinavian skalds (‘Gothic’ ‘scalders’) differ from Finnish rune-singers.

The bardic orders of Scotland and Ireland can be assumed to have existed in prehistoric times and we know that the tradition was carried on till the middle of the seventeenth century in Ireland, while it lasted half a century longer in Scotland (Bergin 1970, 3). Bergin establishes that the bardic poetry shows changes from one period to another and this can be distinguished by its form. He clarifies that his work deals with the compositions of the Early Modern Irish (from the thirteenth-century Bardic Schools to the seventeenth century) when being a bard did not necessarily mean only being an inspired poet (Bergin 1970, 3). Bergin defines the bard as such:

He [the bard] was, in fact, a professor of literature and a man of letters, highly trained in the use of a polished literary medium, belonging to a hereditary caste in an aristocratic society, holding an official position therein by virtue of his training, his learning, his knowledge of the history and traditions of his country and his clan. He discharged, as O'Donovan pointed out many years ago, the functions of the modern journalist. He was not a song writer. He was often a public official, chronicler, a political essayist, a keen and satirical observer of his fellow-countrymen. At an earlier period he had been regarded as a dealer in magic, a weaver of spells and incantations, who could blast his enemies by venom of his verse, and there are traces down to the most recent times of a lingering belief, which was not, of course, confined to Ireland, in the efficacy of a well-turned malediction. He might be a poet, too, if in addition to his training he was gifted with the indefinable power, the true magic, of poetry. But whether he was a poet in this higher sense or not, he always composed in verse. (Bergin 1970, 4)

This vision of the bard, as a moralist and a man of virtue, was carried into the eighteenth century by Macpherson's blind bard, Ossian. In the *Poems*, Carril is Cuchullin's bard while Ossian and Ullin are Fingal's. Every bard had great talent but as Macpherson informs us Ossian is the best among them and has a special role:

As he acted in a more extensive sphere, his ideas are more noble and universal; neither has he so many of those peculiarities, which are only understood in a certain period or country. The other bards have their beauties, but not in that species of

composition in which Ossian excels. Their rhimes, only calculated to kindle a martial spirit among the vulgar, afford very little pleasure to genuine taste. This observation only regards their poems of the heroic kind; in every other species of poetry they are more successful. They express the tender melancholy of desponding love, with irresistible simplicity and nature. So well adapted are the sounds of the words to the sentiments, that, even without any knowledge of the language, they pierce and dissolve the heart. (*A Dissertation, PO* [1763] 214)

Cuchullin's bard Carril's emphasis on Ossian's being the greatest of the bards in *Fingal: Book*

*V* is illustrative of this:

Ossian king of swords, replied the bard, thou best raisest the song. Long hast thou been known to Carril, thou ruler of battles. (*Fingal: Book V, PO* 96)

What sets Ossian apart from others is his "exquisite sensibility of heart," "tender melancholy," "great genius" and being "equally susceptible of strong and of soft emotions" (Blair, *PO* [1763] 352) while his age and frailty attract the sympathy of the reader. Blair argues that "Ossian's own character, the old man, the hero, and the bard, all in one, presents to us through the whole work a most respectable and venerable figure, which we always contemplate with pleasure" (Blair, *PO* [1763] 363). His poetry is directed to everyone, not only to create brave and generous heroes but also kind citizens, compassionate lovers, caring friends, responsible children and devoted parents.

It is possible to see Finnish rune-singing as the Finnish equivalent of the Celtic bardic tradition. The rune singers, in principle, undertake the duties of the bard to a certain extent. However, since their responsibilities are created and shaped by the belief and customs of the ancient Finns they certainly show major differences from Gaelic bards.

Porthan describes rune-singing as follows:

Our rustic patrons of the muses observe a unique way of performing poetry inherited from their forefathers. Two persons,

it will be observed, sing in solemn manner, surrounded by a circle of listeners who stand alongside with ears pricked. The singer or leader, or some other person distinguished by virtue of age or position, either alone or assuming the leading role—this role will be occupied by the poet himself whenever the poem has to be improvised—appoints an assistant known as an accompanist or companion. The singing is then shared between them so that as the former reaches the end of the third bar, i.e. the last foot of the line, the accompanist joins in. For it is easy to guess from the idea and the metre what the remaining foot will be. Thus, both perform the final foot together. [...] The singers sit either side by side or facing each other and so close that their right hands and knees are touching, naturally one his right and the other his left knee, on which they rest their hands. As they sing they gently sway their bodies as if one wished to touch the other's head with his own, and their expressions are thoughtful and serious. Very seldom do they sing standing. (Porthan 1983, 79-80 [trans. "The singer ideal" Siikala 2002, 29])

The *Kalevala* "canonized the concept of a golden age of Finnish rune singing" (Pentikäinen 1989, 101) which was believed to have existed generations before Lönnrot's collecting trips, prompted by the Romantic idea that an ancient epic was once alive and was wholly passed on to the eighteenth century by the best singers. The *Kalevala* is a shamanistic epic which reflects the shamanistic world view of ancient Finns. Eliade explains that the complex concept of shamanism can be defined as the technique of ecstasy (Eliade 1964, 4), while shamans are believed to be the mediators between this world and the world of the spirits. According to the ancient tradition, a chanting competition would be held in order for the shaman to prove his or her power. During this shamanistic chanting competition two shamans would sit across each other in ecstasy and their souls, which are mobile, would fight in animal form. Holmberg reports:

When two shamans quarrelled, e.g., at some fair when both were drunk, they would attempt to show one other which of them owned the more powerful spirit. They sat down opposite one another and began their arts. It was believed that their spirits fought with one another in the guise of reindeer-bulls. The one possessing the strongest "reindeer-bull" emerged from the



contest as the winner. “Shaman-birds” were also used in these contests. (Holmberg 1927, 284-85)<sup>23</sup>

In keeping with this tradition, the *Kalevala* revolves around competition and shamanistic deeds, rather than battles: the heroes have magical skills instead of warrior features. *Poem 3*, for instance, describes the meeting of old wanderer Väinämöinen and the youthful Joukahainen, who is said to reside in Pohjola:

Far away the news is heard, the tidings spread quickly  
of Väinämöinen’s singing, of the man’s skill.  
The tidings spread quickly to the south, the news reached the  
north country.  
Joukahainen was young, a scrawny Lappish lad. (*Kalevala/Poem*  
3, 14: 9-12)

Their sledges meet on a narrow road and one has to move for the other to pass—since neither is willing to yield a verbal quarrel begins. Joukahainen tests Väinämöinen’s knowledge and claims he was present at the creation of the world. Getting angry because of his lying, Väinämöinen chants him into a swamp up to his waist, thus proving to be a truly powerful shaman:

Old Väinämöinen then got angry, then got angry and felt  
shamed.  
He began to sing, got to reciting;  
The magic songs are not children’s songs, not children’s songs,  
women’s jokes;  
[...]  
He bewitched Joukahainen. He sang sprouts onto his shaft-  
bow,  
a willow bush onto his hames, shallows onto the end of his  
traces.  
He bewitched the lovely basket sleigh; he sang it into a pond as  
fallen trees.  
[...]  
He bewitched Joukahainen himself, sang him into a fen up to  
the loins,

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<sup>23</sup> He gives Leem’s *Beskrivelse over Finmarkens Lapper* (1767) and Reuterskiöld’s *Fataburen* (1897) as references.

Into a grassy meadow up to the groin, into a heath up to the  
armpits. (*Kalevala/Poem 3, 18: 277- 340*)

In fact, bardic singing competitions were a custom of Celtic antiquity which ensured the preservation of ancient poetry and Macpherson claims that *The Songs of Selma* is illustrative of this tradition:

This poem [*The Songs of Selma*] fixes the antiquity of a custom, which is well known to have prevailed afterwards, in the north of Scotland, and in Ireland. The bards, at an annual feast, provided by the king or chief, repeated their poems, and such of them as were thought, by him, worthy of being preserved, were carefully taught to their children, in order to have them transmitted to posterity. It was one of those occasions that afforded the subject of the present poem to Ossian. It is called in the original, *The Songs of Selma*, which title it was thought proper to adopt in the translation. (*The Songs of Selma, PO 463 n. 1 [M]*)

However, even if a similar setting for reciting poetry was created both by bards and rune-singers their subject matter diverged considerably. The songs of the latter, as the products of a shamanist culture, are reflective of shamanist religious belief having incantations, magic and supernatural powers at its core which would allow the shaman to assume animal forms or travel to the realm of the dead or to celestial grounds. Therefore, as characters of a shamanist epic, the heroes of the *Kalevala* are shamanistic sages as opposed to the warriors of Ossianic poetry.

Nevertheless, similarities between the ancient bard, Ossian, and the shaman, Väinämöinen, can be seen: besides being old and wise, they are both presented as inspired poets who are endowed with great musical talent. While Ossian has a harp and fascinates his audience with his poetic gift and is respected for his wisdom, Väinämöinen is the only one who can play the magical instrument, 'Kantele' in an enchanting way. The hero makes the Kantele, which is quite similar to a harp, from the jawbone of the giant pike of the North Sea after killing it:

Steadfast old Väinämöinen said these words:  
 “Nevertheless, from these indeed might come a fishbone harp  
 were there a competent person, a maker of a bone instrument.”  
 When no one else at all came, when there was no competent  
 person,  
 no maker of a bone instrument, steadfast old Väinämöinen  
 turned himself into a constructor, made himself a maker.  
 He made a pikebone instrument, produced an instrument of  
 eternal joy. (*Kalevala/Poem 40, 274: 203-09*)

He enchants every living thing in nature with his musical magic:

Steadfast old Väinämöinen, eternal singer,  
 Arranges his fingers, lightly rubs his thumbs together.  
 He seats himself on a music stone, places himself on a song  
 boulder,  
 on a silver hill, on a golden knoll.  
 He took the instrument in his fingers, on his knees turned the  
 instrument with a tapering frame, the harp under his hand.  
 [...]
 Now joyous music resulted in joyous music, rapture after  
 rapture burst forth,  
 the music seemed like music, the song was like a proper song.  
 (*Kalevala/Poem 41, 276: 1-14*).

It can be concluded that Ossian’s bardic songs as presented by Macpherson in the *Poems* and Väinämöinen’s singing in the *Kalevala* differ in major and significant aspects such as their contents, the performances of their singers and their use for the society. However, it is interesting to see that the profile and the image created by Macpherson, for his ancient bard, and Lönnrot, for his shaman, share traces of the eighteenth-century vision of bards, sages and prophets: aged, wise and gifted cultural heroes. Just as the Romantic view of Gaelic ballads which suggested they represented the native tradition of Gaelic Scotland, Romanticism in Finland advocated that “the runes described an aspect of antiquity and that there existed in them ‘a people’s voice’” (Pentikäinen 1998, 18). Ossian and Väinämöinen were the mouthpieces through whom this voice was heard.

### ‘Joy of Grief’: Inevitable Change, Transition and Transience

Son of Alpin, strike the string. Is there ought of joy in the harp?  
 Pour it then, on the soul of Ossian: it is folded in mist. I hear thee,  
 O bard, in my night. But cease the lightly-trembling sound. The  
 joy of grief belongs to Ossian, amidst his dark-brown years.  
 (*Temora: Book VII, PO 283*)

The theme of transition is dominant throughout the *Kalevala* whether it is from human to animal form, from birch-wood to a boat, from pike-bone to the Kantele or from iron to the Sampo, all of which symbolize and point to the final fundamental change at the end of the epic: transition from paganism to Christianity and from a community to a nation. Therefore, it is an extremely significant motif and one of the most significant messages of the *Kalevala* alongside the theme of origins.<sup>24</sup>

The sense of defeatism in *Ossian*, on the other hand, is reinforced by the realization of inevitable change brought by passage of time and the natural order of the universe. Here, however, unlike the *Kalevala*, the transition from one generation to another has caused all of Ossian’s heroes to abandon him, and as the sole survivor of his race he has to accept the changes alone. Therefore, the audience gets a chance to have a glimpse at the aftermath of the transition that has taken place in Ossian’s world. The defeat of a race of heroes by time causes the ancient bard to acknowledge that nothing lasts forever; he is presented as being in a vague mixture of happiness and sadness “which results from recalling and reliving [...] the pleasures and pains of an irretrievable past” — the Ossianic “joy of grief” (Gaskill 1995, 105-06). It has been suggested that the mournful tone of *Ossian* which is alien to the *Kalevala* is presumably due to “the echo of a struggle against an overwhelming aggressor, tempered and refined by the influence of Druids and bards” (Saunders 1894, 321); on balance,

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<sup>24</sup> More discussion on ‘transition in the *Kalevala*’ can be found in the chapter 6.

however, it seems more likely to be due to an eighteenth-century predilection for the pleasures of melancholy:

Ye, on whose souls the blue hosts of our fathers rise! strike the harp in my hall; and let Fingal hear the song. Pleasant is the joy of grief! it is like the shower of spring, when it softens the branch of the oak, and the young leaf lifts its green head. (*Carric-thura, PO* 158)

This Ossianic ‘joy of grief’ is perhaps the most striking portrayal of *Ossian’s* dualism. That is to say, the sorrow of a lost heroic age almost gives pleasure as it is distanced and attenuated. Perhaps, the most eloquent exposition of the ‘joy of grief’ has been made by Edmund Burke, whose ideas are thought to have influenced Blair (Burke 1958, lxxxvi). In *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), though he does not actually use the phrase, ‘joy of grief’, Burke defines the three ways in which the mind is affected by the “cessation of pleasure”:

If it [pleasure] simply ceases, after having continued a proper time, the effect is *indifference*; if it be abruptly broken off, there ensues an uneasy sense called *disappointment*; if the object be so totally lost that there is no chance of enjoying it again, a passion arises in the mind, which is called *grief*. Now there is none of these, not even grief, which is the most violent, that I think has any resemblance to positive pain. The person who grieves, suffers his passion to grow upon him; he indulges it, he loves it: but this never happens in the case of actual pain, which no man ever willingly endured for any considerable time. That grief should be willingly endured, though far from a simply pleasing sensation, is not so difficult to be understood. It is the nature of grief to keep its object perpetually in its eye, to present it in its most pleasurable views, to repeat all the circumstances that attend it, even to the last minuteness; to go back to every particular enjoyment, to dwell upon each, and to find a thousand new perfections in all, that were not sufficiently understood before; in grief, the *pleasure* is still uppermost; and the affliction we suffer has no resemblance to absolute pain, which is always odious, and which we endeavour to shake off as soon as possible.” (Burke 1958, 37)

It seems likely that Macpherson was influenced by Burke, either directly or through Blair. The Ossianic world created by Macpherson is a world of mixed feelings where there is a “terrible beauty” (*Temora: Book IV, PO 497 n. 17 [M]*) and “heroic hopelessness, loneliness, despair and alienation, tempered only by the decidedly mixed pleasure of nostalgia” (Gaskill 1994, 672). Born from this view, Ossianic poetry presents that it is the lack of something that makes one realize its beauty: for instance, to emphasize the warmth of the sound of the harp, which is likened to the sun, darkness covering the fields in its absence is drawn attention to:

Bring, daughter of Toscar, bring the harp; the light of the song rises in Ossian’s soul. It is like the field, when darkness covers the hills around, and the shadow grows slowly on the plain of the sun. (*The War of Caros, PO 110*)

The use of clashing opposites to make a stronger statement of what is important or what needs to be emphasized finds its counterpart in the *Kalevala* too: it is the experiencing of the supernatural that makes the heroes appreciate nature and its beauty even more and it is the threat or danger of death that causes them to hold on to life tighter. An example of this is seen in the episodes of Lemminkäinen and the Demon’s elk and Väinämöinen’s escape from the Land of the Dead (discussed fully in Chapter 6).

### **‘Liminal Spaces’: Border Zones**

The idea of oppositions can be analyzed on a different level, where we may realize that both Macpherson and Lönnrot play with the imagery of ‘borders’—that is to say, the thematic borders between natural and supernatural or past and present. Leerssen suggests that liminality—a setting or a concept that is remote from ordinary human experience—is preferred as a literary device as it heightens emotions and poetic inspiration (Leerssen 1998,

3).<sup>25</sup> In this framework, we can observe that the landscape of the *Kalevala* is also dualistic, as it is “built on the tension between the home and the alien, village and forest, the family homestead and the mythical Pohjola” (Tarkka 1994, 251); experiencing the one provokes the search for its complementary counterpart. Therefore, the epic seems to point to the borders between self and other, subject and object, culture and nature as well as different religions. Leerssen explains that Siberian shamans (with whom Finnish shamans have much in common) follow a ritual in order to achieve liminality, which involves intoxication or an otherwise induced trance state that requires abandoning control over one’s identity:

[...] frequently such superhuman or supernatural, orphic inspiration is acquired in *settings* that are topographically ambiguous: between land and sea, or between earth and open air, or between land and water: luminal settings could be a shore, a riverbank, the mouth of a river or an estuary, a harbour, a cave, a mountain top. Moreover, such topographical liminality can be heightened or overdetermined by other temporal states of ontological ambiguity or in-between-ness: between dark and light, for instance, at dawn, dusk or in moonlight; at dead tide, between ebb and flood; on a solstice day or in between seasons; at midnight. (Leerssen 1998, 3-4)

It immediately becomes apparent that both *Ossian* and the *Kalevala* employ liminal settings in an attempt to shape literary imagination. Ossian, between life and death; constantly in touch with the realm of the dead, is the only survivor of his heroic kin whose memory he lives by. His supreme isolation is emphasized by the ubiquitous presence of the ghosts of the past (Stafford 1994, 115) and the most celebrated passages tell us how he is in communication with this distant outer zone:

In the hall I lay in night. Mine eyes were half-closed in sleep. Soft music came to mine ear: it was like the rising breeze, that whirls, at first, the thistle’s beard; then flies, dark-shadowy, over the grass. It was the maid of Fuärfed wild: she raised the nightly

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<sup>25</sup> ‘Liminal’ is a term derived from the Latin *limin* which means ‘threshold’ (Narváez 1991, 337).

song; for she knew that my soul was a stream, that flowed at pleasant sounds. (*Cath-loda: Duan II, PO 324*)

He is not a part of the society anymore, but rather a “remote ambassador to the ontological outer fringes, relaying messages from other spheres to his audience” (Leerssen 1998, 7) interpreting the music of the harp as messages from beyond the grave. The poems do not portray Ossian or his heroes as believing in a supreme deity, but only in the ghosts or the spirits—that are the memories—of their ancestors. It seems that the admiration towards the past and nature in its purest form (though what is evoked is also harsh, monochromatic and bleak) go hand in hand for Macpherson, since he describes ancient Caledonians retreating into the mountains, living in ideal rural societies, self-sufficient and not allowing themselves to be contaminated with anything modern and commercial in order to remain unconquered and uncorrupted:

What brought about a total change in the genius of the Scots nation, was their wars, and other transactions with the Saxons. Several counties in the south of Scotland were alternately possessed by the two nations. They were ceded, in the ninth age, to the Scots, and, it is probable, that most of the Saxon inhabitants remained in possession of their lands. During the several conquests and revolutions in England, many fled, for refuge, into Scotland, to avoid the oppression of foreigners, or the tyranny of domestic usurpers; in so much, that the Saxon race formed perhaps near one half of the Scottish kingdom. The Saxon manners and language daily gained ground, on the tongue and customs of the antient Caledonians, till, at last, the latter were entirely relegated to inhabitants of the mountains, who were still unmixed with strangers. (*A Dissertation, PO [1763] 212*)

While nature worship, according to which everything in nature such as trees, animals, barley, iron, sun and moon seem to have religious or ritualistic purpose, is an important part of Lönnrot’s Finland, it has been observed that Macpherson’s Highland landscape is an “uncontrolled and godless place” where “the characters are at the mercy of nature, with no faith to sustain them”—his poetry “demonstrates the horror of a world without God”



(Stafford 1988, 107). Therefore, even though one is at liberty to say that nature is of paramount importance in both texts, its portrayal, how it is perceived by the heroes and what it stands for in the epics differ: in the *Kalevala*, for example, the importance of nature is further displayed by personifications—one can find instances when nature or natural phenomena (such as frost, animals or trees) are personified. These may also become tools which help heroes achieve their goal. For instance, when Väinämöinen has Sampsa, the Spirit of Arable, look for suitable wood it is guided by the trees:

Speaking the aspen says, chatters with its tongue:  
 “What, man, do you want of me? Whatever do you desire?”  
 The lad Sampsa, Spirit of Arable, he, indeed, uttered these  
 words:  
 “That indeed I want of you, that I am looking for and desire:  
 a boat for Väinämöinen, ship’s timber for the singer.”  
 The aspen spoke rather oddly, the hundred-branched tree was  
 able to say:  
 A leaky boat will come of me and a sinking sort of vessel.  
 I am hollow in the lower part of my trunk; three times this  
 summer  
 a grub ate my heart, a maggot ravished my root.”  
 (*Kalevala/Poem 16, 96: 41-51*)

Or be used as an obstacle that they need to overcome:

Louhi, mistress of North Farm, gat-toothed dame of North  
 Farm,  
 made wings together with their feathers, flitted off.  
 She flew around near the dwellings, thence she flung herself  
 farther off  
 across the sea of North Farm to craftsman Ilmarinen’s smithy.  
 (*Kalevala/Poem 49, 328: 330-33*)

Nevertheless, it can also be controlled by the heroes with the aid of their charms and magic—as in *Poem 49* where Väinämöinen and Ilmarinen force the mistress of the Northland, who is in the shape of a hawk, to bring back the sun and the moon:

Craftsman Ilmarinen says in reply:  
 “I am forging a neck ring for that dame of North Farm

with which she will be made fast to the lower slope of a great mountain.”  
 Louhi, mistress of North Farm, gat-toothed dame of North Farm,  
 now sensed disaster coming, a day of trouble coming upon her.  
 At once she started to fly, got away to North Farm.  
 She set the moon free from the stone, let the sun loose from the rock. (*Kalevala/Poem 49, 329: 349-55*)

What is striking is that in the *Kalevala* nature is depicted as being actively present in everyday life of the characters—whether as friend or foe. In *Ossian*, on the contrary, despite constantly surrounding the heroes, nature and natural objects emphasize the absence of human company. Ironically, such an anthropomorphic treatment of nature allows Macpherson to fill the Ossianic landscape with emotion and restless power—nature (winds, waves, moonlight) gains sentimental value:

Rise, Carril of other times, and carry my words to Swaran; tell him that came from the roaring of waters, that Cuchullin gives his feast. Here let him listen to the sound of my groves amidst the clouds of night. For cold and bleak the blustering winds rush over the foam of his seas. Here let him praise the trembling harp, and hear the songs of heroes. (*Fingal: Book I, PO 60-01*)

It is this particular Ossianic setting which contributes to the liminal character of the poems greatly for liminality often requires mystic inspiration which is most likely to be acquired in topographically ambiguous spaces: riverbanks, mountain tops, caves, often at dusk or under the moonlight. As Leerssen observes, deploying liminal settings has been particularly prominent in the expression of Celtic colour which has remained “Ossianic, shadowy, an ontological borderland where mundane reality takes a back seat and wistful meditation, emotion or imagination gains the upper hand” (Leerssen 1998, 9). This mode has found its place throughout the nineteenth century as in Arnold’s *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867), while it can also be strongly detected in the *Kalevala* whose epic world is “split by a thematic

border between this world and the other. Many of the poems tell about looking over or crossing the border, of joining the two worlds by symbolic means" (Tarkka 1994, 251).

The landscape heroes pass through during their adventures to acquire knowledge, heal a wound, woo the maiden or to hunt, is a major element of the supranormal features of these journeys also highlighting the liminal topography: between earth and air, land and sea or between north and south. Moreover, "even the water itself can be interpreted as a symbol of transition, liminality, of a marginal state (Stattin 1984, 106-07) while the transition refers to the act of being in an in-between state at the end of which the subject is taken into his or her new identity or reaches his or her new destination or gains new knowledge:

Then craftsman Ilmarinen uttered a word, spoke thus:  
 "O you old Väinämöinen, eternal sage!  
 What have you to say about your travels now that you have  
 come to the dwellings here at home?"  
 Old Väinämöinen spoke: "I have many things to say.  
 There is a maiden at North Farm, a virgin in the cold  
 settlement,  
 who does not yield to suitors, does not fancy nice men.  
 Half the north land praises her, for she is very comely.  
 [...]  
 If you can forge a Sampo, decorate a lid of many colors,  
 then you will get the maiden as your payment, the lovely girl of  
 your work." (*Kalevala/Poem 10*, 56: 60-74)

In this context, one can notice that the significance of 'borders' is further emphasized by the changes in setting. Thus, the vital role of travel and mobility in both texts is highlighted. Their journeys—whether they are shamanic journeys as in the *Kalevala* or Ossianic voyages—enable heroes to cross boundaries to distant lands or to experience cultures that are depicted as different from their own. For instance, Ossianic expeditions take heroes to Scandinavian locations, where they become familiar with Scandinavian customs:

But morning rose in the east; the blue waters rolled in light.  
 Fingal bade his sails to rise, and the winds come rustling from  
 their hills. Inis-tore rose to sight, and Carric-thura's mossy towers.

But the sign of distress was on their top: the green flame edged with smoke. The king of Morven struck his breast: he assumed, at once, his spear. His darkened brow bends forward to the coast: he looks back to the lagging winds. His hair is disordered on his back. The silence of the king is terrible. (*Carric-thura*, PO 160)

Similarly, the heroes of the Kelava District travel to the Northland in search of new adventures and knowledge:

Then craftsman Ilmarinen dresses himself, gets himself ready,  
clothes himself, decks himself out. Then he said to his slave:  
“Now harness the splendid colt in front of the decorated sleigh  
for me to set out driving, for me to go to North Farm.”  
(*Kalevala/Poem 18*, 118: 372-75)

Heroes travel to the unknown, not only physically but also emotionally. Confusion and panic become an inner battle as they leave what is familiar behind and enter the unknown. In the *Kalevala*, this may be symbolized by the boat getting stuck in sea as the heroes approach the Northland (the unfamiliar setting):

Old Väinämöinen steers easily.  
He steered between the boulders over those heavy swells;  
the wooden vessel did not stop, the sage's boat did not get  
stuck.  
As soon as he got there to those broad waters  
the vessel stopped running on, the boat stopped flying along.  
The vessel stops on something solid, the boat lay to there  
without moving. (*Kalevala/Poem 40*, 272: 96-101)

In *Ossian*, a storm, mist, roaring winds or even silence—since the hero cannot hear the familiar sounds of his homeland—may signify this inner struggle; as in *Cath-loda: Duan I*:

A tale of the times of old! Why, thou wanderer unseen, that  
bendest the thistle of Lora, why, thou breeze of the valley, hast  
thou left mine ear? I hear no distant roar of streams, no sound of  
the harp, from the rocks! Come, thou huntress of Lutha, send  
back his soul to the bard.

I look forward to Lochlin of lakes, to the dark, ridgy bay  
of U-thórno, where Fingal descended from ocean, from the roar of  
winds. Few are the heroes of Morven, in a land unknown! Starno

sent a dweller of Loda, to bid Fingal to the feast; but the king remembered the past, and all his rage arose. (*Cath-loda: Duan I PO*, 307)

However, in both texts, we see that the expressions of ‘darkness’ and ‘gloom’ seem to symbolize the unknown or uncertainty:

<b>The Kalevala</b>	<b>Ossian</b>
Just do not go there at all to the cold settlement, to gloomy North Farm. Ruin will surely come, [...] ( <i>Kalevala/Poem 27, 70: 196-97</i> )	Nor alone were the dwellers of rocks; a son of Loda was there; a voice, in his own dark land, to call the ghosts from high. ( <i>Cathlin of Clutha PO 296</i> )

It is worth noting that especially in episodes of mobility Macpherson and Lönnrot make extensive use of the poetic inspiration of liminality—the poems hover between the domestic community and metaphysical, existential uncertainty. In this way, the concept of identity is emphasized: in *Ossian*, going on excursions to other countries and being subjected to a different setting or culture (Scandinavian) highlights the Scottish-Gaelic identity, whereas going on shamanic journeys to the Northland or the Land of the Dead eventually causes the heroes to get together for a common goal, realizing their common identity.

### **Ancestors and Origins**

Lastly, the fascination with past over present, or holding on to the ancestors in hopes of having a sense of belonging and revival, which was a fundamental feature of Romanticism, seems to have inspired the production of both *Ossian* and the *Kalevala*. “In literary terms this can be seen as an expression of the modern poet’s struggle with a heritage of dazzling achievement, but it may also reflect the attitude of a poet who had seen his own community devastated by its attempt to challenge the ruling powers” (Stafford 1998, 182).

Macpherson's attempt to evoke a lost age owes much to his creation of the romanticized image of the bard. He was of course aware of Thomas Gray's powerful evocation in *The Bard* (1757) whose melodramatic poem recites the confrontation of the last ancient poet of Wales with the invading English army. While throughout Gray's poem, "there is implicit contrast between the primitive energy embodied in the ancient bard and the passive voice of the modern narrator" (Stafford 1994, 97), the power of the bard is reflected in his remoteness from the modern world:

On a rock, whose haughty brow  
Frowns o'er old Conway's foaming flood,  
Robed in the sable garb of woe,  
With haggard eyes the poet stood;  
(Loose his beard and hoary hair  
Streamed, like a meteor, to the troubled air)  
And with a master's hand and prophet's fire,  
Struck the deep sorrows of his lyre. (*The Bard*, 15-22)

It was not only Gray's poem that suggested the image of the passionate ancient bard even though it is likely that he influenced Macpherson's work to a certain extent—Ossian is presented as mournful and nostalgic rather than passionate. Several aesthetic discussions and theories on ancient poetry appeared in 1750s and 1760s such as Mallet's *Introduction à l'Histoire de Dannemarc (Northern Antiquities)* which introduced the poetry of medieval Scandinavia to the rest of Europe in 1755<sup>26</sup> and Burke's *Enquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful* in 1757 which investigated the 'genius' of Antiquity. The style of Gray's Pindaric ode also seemed to provide the freedom of expression for the passionate bard of the Romantic Movement along with the metres of the Bible. Being familiar with these works Macpherson sought to portray the emotions of the Celtic bard, as for the eighteenth-century

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<sup>26</sup> Mallet's subsequent volume, *Monumens de la mythologie et de la poésie des Celtes, et particulièrement des anciens Scandinaves* was published in 1756 and also provided important documents for eighteenth-century primitivist thought.

poets and writers ancient poetry was reflective of passion and strong feelings (of primitive ancient). Mallet's remarks on contemporary poetry provide insights into the attraction towards the primitive and the figurative language of ancient literature:

The stile of these ancient poems is very enigmatical and figurative, very remote from the common language, and for that reason, grand, but tumid; sublime, but obscure. If it be the character of poetry to have nothing in common with prose, if the language of the Gods ought to be quite different from that of men, if every thing should be expressed by imagery, figures, hyperboles, and allegories, the Scandinavians may rank in the highest class of poets : Nor is this unaccountable. The soaring flights of fancy may possibly more peculiarly belong to a rude and uncultivated, than to a civilized people. The great objects of nature strike more forcibly on rude imaginations. Their passions are not impaired by the constraint of laws and education. The paucity of their ideas, and the barrenness of their language oblige them to borrow from all nature, images fit to cloath their conceptions in. How should abstract terms and reflex ideas, which so much enervate our poetry, be found in theirs? They could seldom have been met with in their most familiar conversations. The moment the soul, reflecting on its own operations recurs inwards, and detaches itself from exterior objects, the imagination loses its energy, the passions their activity, the mind becomes severe, and requires ideas rather than sensations; language then becomes precise and cautious, and poetry being no longer the child of pure passion, is able to affect but feebly. If it be asked, what is become of that magic power which the ancients attributed to this art? It may be well said to exist no more. The poetry of the modern languages is nothing more than reasoning in rhyme, addressed to the understanding, but very little to the heart. No longer essentially connected with religion, politics or morality, it is at present, if I may so say, a mere private art, an amusement that attains its end when it has gained the approbation of a few select judges. (Mallet 1809 [1755], 328-30 [Percy])<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Quoi qu'il en soit, le tour d'esprit de tous ces Poètes, soit qu'ils fussent Islandois ou non, semble avoir été presque le même. Les peuples graves & portés à la méditation ont une façon de rendre leurs pensées, qui paroît extrêmement recherché & rebutante à des homes plus impatiens & plus vifs. Leur esprit accountumé à se recueillir & à se fixer, veut des objets compliqués, qui lui donent un exercice fort & durable. Tous les anciens listoriens rendent témoignage de la gravité & de la taciturnité des Scythes & des Scandinaves. Originaires de l'Asie, ils en avoient apporté ce gout qui de tout tems y a régné pour les

Unlike contemporary poetry which was felt to have no soul, no function in society and thus no value, the poetry of the ancients (i.e. the bards) possessed a ‘magic power’ that made it ‘the language of the gods’. Macpherson seems to have aimed to meet such expectations by combining the poetry he heard being recited in Badenoch (his home district), whose leading characters were legendary third-century BC heroes and their adventures, along with his notions of the nature of ancient poetry. He had to recapture the ‘ancient’ sort of ‘magic power’ with his translations of ancient Gaelic verse if he wanted to create an ideal collection. Therefore, unlike Gray whose sources for the image of the ancient bard were mostly pictorial and literary, Macpherson derived his vision of Celtic Scotland more from his personal experiences. As a nationalist antiquarian, for Macpherson “the bard is the mouthpiece for a whole society, articulating its values, chronicling its history and mourning the inconsolable tragedy of its collapse” (Trumpener 1997, 6). In accordance with these notions of his time, Macpherson’s true subjects—embodying melancholy, heroism and tenderness—are isolation, old age and the inevitable loss and destruction of an age of heroes whose replacement by an entirely new people is unavoidable:

But why art thou sad, son of Fingal? Why grows the cloud of thy soul? The chiefs of other times are departed; they have gone without their fame. The sons of future years shall pass away; and another race arise. The people are like the waves of ocean: like the

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expressions hyperboliques & figures, les comparaisons sublimes ou gigantesque, les allegories & les emblèmes de tout genre; Les énigmes n’ont pas été plus en usage, ni plus respectées dans l’orient, que parmi eux, & l’on voit très souvent dans les anciennes chroniques des Rois & des Guerriers illustres, se proposer des énigmes à expliquer en statuant une peine pour celui, qui ne pourroit y reussir. [...] On juge bien après cela, que le style de leurs Poésies a dû être fort éloigné de la simplicité & du naturel. Le gout de la nation en auroit été offense; Il n’y a que les homes dont la raison a été soigneusement cultivée, qui ne confondent pas le difficile & l’extraordinaire avec le beau. Les Poètes semblent avoir senti de bonne heure, que plus ils mettroient d’entraves dans leur art, plus ils seroit respectés des peuples, & qu’il ne passeroit pour être le languages des Dieux, qu’autant qu’il cesseroit d’être celui des hommes. Si c’étoit là le but de ceux du Nord, on peut dire qu’ils y ont parfaitement réussi (Mallet 1755, 244-45).



leaves of woody Morven, they pass away in the rustling blast, and  
other leaves lift their green heads. (*Berrathon, PO* 198)

Therefore, the work is the product of “a struggle with the modern secularized view of linear time, which offered no assurance of redemption or a return to a higher state” (Stafford 1994, 106).<sup>28</sup>

Approximately seventy years later than Macpherson’s ambitious effort, the *Kalevala* underlines the significance of knowing the origins of something—whether it is of iron, the world or the Sampo and so on—which can be perceived as a metaphor for the importance of realizing the origins of the Finnish nation. According to ancient Finnish belief, knowing the origin of a phenomenon, a sickness or an object would give one control over it; and so, in accordance with this world view, it was necessary to provide the Finnish people with their own origins as only then, they could gain control of their future.

Pentikäinen explains that according to the ancient religion of the Finns, giving an account of the origin of a sickness would serve as a cure (Pentikäinen 1989, 66-67), while Comparetti declares that charms about origins (Finnish, *synty*) played a major role in the epic, and the shaman reporting them was in fact relating the origins of such phenomena as sickness (Comparetti 1892, 27). Looking from this perspective, one can see the reason why Lönnrot filled the poems with charms; and why Väinämöinen chants the origin of the iron in poem 9 after he is injured by an iron axe:

Air is its first of mothers,   water the eldest of brothers,  
iron the youngest of brothers,   fire in turn the middle one.  
Ukko, creator on high,   god of the skies,  
Separated the water from the air,   made the mainland into land  
from the water.

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<sup>28</sup> Gray’s bard is depicted as overcoming his fear of death with his belief in ancient supernatural concepts and cyclical time which is not employed by Macpherson. Though the presence of an afterlife is indicated by the thin ghostly forms of fallen warriors, they also remind Ossian of the inevitable disappearance of his race.

Wretched iron is not born, not born, not grown up.  
 [...]
 He [Ilmarinen] ponders, he reflects: "What would become of  
 that indeed  
 if I should thrust it into the fire, put it into the forge?"  
 Wretched iron took fright, took fright, got terrified  
 when it heard fire's messages, fire's grim utterances.  
 Craftsman Ilmarinen said: "Do not be upset by that!  
 Fire will not burn you once it has made your acquaintance, will  
 not abuse its kin.  
 When you come to fire's dwellings, to the bright one's  
 barricade,  
 there you will become beautiful, rise up to be magnificent  
 as men's fire swords, as the tips of women's laces."  
 By the end of that day bog-iron ore had been got loose from the  
 fen,  
 got separated from the miry place, been brought to the  
 craftsman's smithy. (*Kalevala/Poem 9, 47-9: 29-214*)

This motif (the knowledge of origins) in the *Kalevala* can be related to the episode of Väinämöinen and Vipunen as well as Väinämöinen's departure at the end of the epic: Vipunen sings Väinämöinen all his knowledge in *Poem 17*, including the origins of the world and his half-decayed body is able to drift away permanently since whoever passes on his knowledge to someone else is expected to step aside:

He sang of the forming of the moon, the establishing of the sun,  
 of the erecting of the pillars of heaven, the studding of the  
 heavens with stars. (*Kalevala/Poem 17, 111: 533-34*)

Similarly, Väinämöinen is eventually declared to be the father of Marjatta's son who takes over Väinämöinen's knowledge and causes Väinämöinen to retire, in other words, be cast out of the society—he becomes socially dead. That is to say, if one's name (or status) ensures one a place within a community, then, the lack of a name leaves one out of social context. Furthermore, Tarkka explains that "the borders of the 'this-worldly' cosmos are the borders of the area covered by the community; outside the community the individual is socially dead, and being dead outside the communal land of the dead is, in a sense, being doubly

dead” (Tarkka 1994, 270). Pentikäinen stresses that in some versions of the poem, the boy claims knowledge of Väinämöinen’s birth (Pentikäinen 1989, 217); and therefore, with the loss of his virility Väinämöinen leaves his people. This also concurs with the shamanic custom that requires a shaman’s retirement—“the shaman could not, however, keep up his practice for the whole of his life. Generally he became unfit for office in his fiftieth year and was never employed afterwards in any important task” (Holmberg 1929, 284).

It becomes apparent that the charms and incantations scattered among the runes of the *Kalevala* are equally central and significant to the epic as the runes themselves since they were an important aspect of the ancient Finns’ lifestyle: “they tell of the life of the people and relate this to its religious past, its remembrances and ideals” (Comparetti 1892, 22). Therefore, the ‘neglected’ ancient runes and incantations of the Finnish past, through the medium of the *Kalevala*, resulted in the realization of the common origins of the Finnish society which would lead to its hopes of a common future.

Nevertheless, even though the appeal of the past is common to the *Kalevala* and *Ossian*, the trajectory it has created for their respective nations is distinctive: the difference is that while Ossian’s heroes led themselves to their own downfall by falling in love with their own legend and haunting their descendants with memories of a distant past, the heroes of the *Kalevala* succeeded in taking the next step—they went ahead with the transition brought by a national realization and moved on, resulting in Finland gaining its own identity. One could legitimately say that Macpherson’s legacy came to fruition in Finland and that Lönnrot achieved what Macpherson might have wished for Gaelic Scotland. Of course, Macpherson was aware that his was a lost battle; and therefore, with his *Ossian* he simply attempted to provide his culture with a powerful parting shot before it was swallowed up and effectively distinguished.

## Conclusions

Needless to say, Macpherson's *Ossian* has managed to fascinate its audience (both at home and abroad) with its subject matter, its poetic merit and its literary form, which allowed readers to develop their own understanding of the poems with their open structure. As already established, it is highly likely that Lönnrot was among the audience influenced by *Ossian* and his apprehension of the poems finds its expression in his *Kalevala*. A close reading of the texts show that there are certain similarities between their themes, characters and motifs: to begin with, the theme of tradition and the importance of the past can be found at the core of both. While the *Kalevala* portrays the significance of knowing and remembering one's roots by employing charms and magic as tools to discover the origins of something, *Ossian's* ghosts of the past constantly haunt the pages highlighting the importance of the past. Nature and travel are also fundamental to the storylines of the epics—*Ossian* illustrates the Highland landscape with its complexities whereas the *Kalevala* can be seen as a representation of how Finns perceived their world. Beside these, in their use of liminality and the motif of 'complementary opposites', the poets seem to emphasize the dualistic nature of the world depicted. Finally, it has been observed that the bardic tradition in *Ossian* could be seen as the equivalent of Finnish rune-singing where the bard or the singer is pictured as an old, wise man with an exceptional musical talent.

Nevertheless, although it has been possible to find parallels between the themes, motifs and characters of the two texts, the most important and long-lasting impact of *Ossian* lies in "its 'flavour' rather than its substance" (Leerssen 2004, 122) and this 'flavour' is what the *Kalevala* benefits from the most. Ossianic poems did not have to be seen as having a single instructive moral, instead they became a source of mantic inspiration. The thematization of historical loss and defeat mixed with a heroic melancholy and

sentimentalism in the poems gave the audience the taste of an ancient forgotten world. Macpherson aimed to show his contemporaries what this 'forgotten world' had in its possession in an attempt to establish the value and antiquity of Gaelic culture in the eyes of a Sassenach world which despised it. Therefore, although raising the national consciousness of the Gaelic-speaking Highlander—whose self-respect needed to be rejuvenated after the years of repression under British rule—does not seem to be Macpherson's main goal, it would have been a very desirable side effect of the process. The poet thought this could be achieved with an epic set in the ancient past as contemporary Scotland could hardly be a suitable setting for an epic poem since by that time, it had finally risen from isolation and poverty; and a 'well-ordered' society was seen as not being conducive to epic:

[...] the King's regiments kept the King's peace in areas previously liable to sedition, administrators organized the country, engineers built new roads, [...] and ministers of the Kirk implanted honesty, virtue, and the fear of God, in people's minds. (Bysveen 1982, 52)

In this framework, one can observe that Macpherson's was also a fight against the changes brought by the English rule which would shatter the Gaelic culture not only on the battlefield but also by educational, commercial and linguistic pressures. He saw himself as the defender of his culture and tried to salvage it by reassembling its shattered pieces. Finnish culture was under a similar threat—being under Swedish rule for centuries prevented Finnish culture from flourishing. Being annexed by Russia in 1809, however, enabled the Finnish community to realize its right to their own nation and the *Kalevala*, like *Ossian*, became the means to fuse together the pieces of a shared past.

Both Macpherson and Lönnrot collect and use the fragments of their cultural history—that are in the form of Gaelic poetry or Finnish runesongs. In both cases, "the danger of cultural fragmentation leads to the self-conscious use of the fragment (not least the

ancient fragment) by the classically trained poet as a way of speaking out this position of break-up and attempting to address or gesture towards a cultural wholeness whose loss the poet fears" (Crawford 2001, 67). In this context, the individual poems are treated as the remnants of an ancient civilization by both Macpherson and Lönnrot; and they stand as symbols of both destruction and continuity. Thus, in both *Ossian* and the *Kalevala* assembling these remnants of a distant past is an attempt to salvage and preserve a poetic canon which might help create a cultural wholeness.



## Chapter 3: Scottish Folk Belief and the Ossianic Supernatural World

### Introduction

An investigation of the popular beliefs and conventions of Celtic culture—among which one finds belief in fairies, spirits, ghosts and second sight as well as the bardic tradition, which acts as a tool that hands them down to us—is an important step in demonstrating whether or not there is any connection between these and the *Poems of Ossian*. The ancient poet in the *Poems* is presented as sincerely believing in ghosts, just like the people who listen to his songs. The fact that the poems are full of imagery that Macpherson (as Ossian) creates from his surroundings and common beliefs of the people of his age, i.e. the eighteenth century cannot be denied. These are significant as they have the potential to exhibit the scenery of Scotland (particularly, the Highlands) also acting as means to reflect what strikes Macpherson about his surroundings, his society and their experiences. It is important to keep in mind that while, on the one hand, we have Macpherson who may or may not have shared beliefs and superstitions such as those illustrated in the poems, on the other, we have what he presents Ossian and his society as believing.

Before comment can be made on the authenticity of the poems, it is first of all necessary to discover Macpherson's view of Gaelic culture and ballad tradition. Macpherson's long-term thinking can arguably, be reflected in his *An Introduction to the History of Great Britain and Ireland* (1771) where he includes passages on Scottish customs and traditions. It is the aim of this chapter to display the connections between Macpherson's Ossianic writings and Scottish folk belief, and to observe how closely he mirrors Gaelic



ballad tradition in his poetry; in this framework, the *Critical Dissertations* (1768) of Dr John Macpherson of Sleat (the area on the southern tip of Skye), of which James Macpherson acknowledges consulting the manuscript version, will be the focus of attention, together with the reflections presented in the *Introduction* (1771). Additionally, Macpherson's earlier poetry will also be looked at as they are likely to provide significant information on his personal development and experiences prior to—and, which leads to—the publication of his Ossianic collection.

### ***Critical Dissertations* by Dr John Macpherson of Sleat. 1768.**

Blair explains in his *Critical Dissertation* that the appearances of the departed in Ossian's poetry stem from the popular beliefs and superstitions of all time:

Ossian's mythology is, to speak so, the mythology of human nature; for it is founded on what has been the popular belief, in all ages and countries, and under all forms of religion, concerning the appearances of departed spirits. (Blair, *PO* [1763] 368)

It is highly likely that Macpherson was influenced and inspired by the beliefs of Gaelic society he grew up in—whose beliefs are supposed to descend from Ossian's age, to a certain extent, by Macpherson and his followers—just as the ancient bard whose aim, as presented by Macpherson, is to reflect the age he lived in, in all its forms. He has also argued that other nations managed to maintain their own 'history' by oral tradition—such as the ancient laws of the Greeks and the Spartans, historical monuments of the Germans and the history of the Incas of Peru, which was composed from poetical traditions. Having said that, he comes to the conclusion that the oral tradition of the Scots (i.e. what one might call the 'Scottish Gàidhealtachd' today) should be preserved too:

If other nations then, that had been often overrun by enemies, and had sent abroad and received colonies, could, for many ages, preserve, by oral tradition, their laws and histories uncorrupted, it is much more probable that the ancient Scots, a people so free of intermixture with foreigners, and so strongly attached to the memory of their ancestors, had the works of their bards handed down with great purity. (*The Antiquity &c. of the Poems of Ossian*, PO [1763] 49)

Dr John Macpherson was a Church of Scotland minister, a known authority on Celtic antiquities and a defender of Ossian. As a clergyman and a master of the Gaelic tongue, John Macpherson put down to paper his investigations of Celtic history in an attempt to display old traditions and customs. John Macpherson met James Macpherson (no relation) in Skye during the latter's search for Ossianic sources (both manuscripts and oral tradition) in the Highlands in September 1760. It was John Macpherson's son (also named John Macpherson) who published the *Critical Dissertations on the origin, antiquities, language, government, manners, and religion of the ancient Caledonians, their posterity the Picts, and the British and Irish Scots* (1768) following the death of his father in 1765. The 'Preface' seems to have been written by James Macpherson (deGategno 1991, 104) where he sheds light on John Macpherson's perspective and reasons for writing his *Dissertations*:

Excluded, by the peculiar situation of the place of his residence, from the society of the learned, he indulged his singular passion for literature among a few good books. [...] Being a master of Celtic, in all its branches, he took pleasure in tracing other languages to that general source of all the ancient and modern tongues of Europe. From investigations of this kind many discoveries in the ancient history of nations arose. [...] He therefore resolved to write some general dissertations on that subject which, if they could not establish a new and more rational system, would at least expose the absurdity of the old. (Macpherson 1768, v-vi [James])

The book is John Macpherson's most important work and his manuscripts have provided James Macpherson with insights into the antiquities of the British and Irish Scots. He

acknowledges its influence on his own work in the preface of the *Introduction* (1771), also praising John Macpherson's work for its genuine view of antiquity as well as stating that his book has attracted the attention of an educated audience:

In that part of his work which relates to the disputes between the British and Irish Scots, the Author of the *Introduction* derives much of his information from the manuscript notes of the late very ingenious Dr. Macpherson, whose dissertations on the antiquities of the northern Britain are in the hands of the learned. (Macpherson 1771, iii)

'The hands of the learned' seems to refer to the educated society living in the city, presumably including James Macpherson himself "whose interest in the *Critical Dissertations* extended beyond the 'Preface' since the work was published posthumously and it was James who saw it through the press" (deGategno 1991, 108 n. 27).

It seems likely then that James Macpherson influenced the *Dissertations* as eventually published, since he writes that he had access to the initial manuscripts of the book which was published in 1768 in both London and Dublin, three years after the death of its author—he might have had an input to the eventual production. In his 'Preface', James Macpherson also expresses his resentment of O'Connor's attacks towards him and his *Ossian* suggesting they were abusive and ill-judged:

His personal abuse of Mr. Macpherson seems to have proceeded from a very irascible disposition, or was intended to draw an answer from that gentleman, which might give importance to his own work. In this, it is to be feared he will not succeed. The translator of the Galic poems is not much in the humour of doing an honour of that kind to adversaries who use low scurrility in the place of argument and dispassionate disquisition. (Macpherson 1768, xxv [James])

In both the 'Preface' to his *Introduction* (1771) and the 'Preface' to John Macpherson's *Critical Dissertations* (1768) James emphasizes the necessity of observing the antiquities of a nation,

especially those of the Scots, in order to shed light on a proud history that has been hitherto left in obscurity. It seems that James Macpherson's long-term thinking on Celtic history and antiquities was already beginning to come to the surface in 1768:

Though the Scots have as just pretensions to a high antiquity as any nation in Europe, yet their origin is peculiarly involved in darkness. [...] The almost continual wars and anomalies which subsisted between the English and the Scots for many ages naturally gave birth to violent national prejudices on both sides. The learned of England could not divest themselves of that antipathy to their Northern neighbours which had seized their whole nation. [...] If to throw a new and strong light on the antiquities of a nation, reflects any honour upon it, the Scots of the present age are much indebted to the industry and learning of Dr. Macpherson. (Macpherson 1768, vi-viii [James])

The 'forgotten' antiquities of the Scots that should receive the attention they deserve are mentioned again in his *Introduction* (1771):

In Britain, we content ourselves with looking back with contempt on the credulity of our ancestors. From a pride incident to polished times we are apt to think, and perhaps with some justice, that the transactions of the infancy of society are as unworthy of remembrance as they are imperfectly known. But this observation has been, made not more to depreciate our ancestors, than to cover a glaring defect in ourselves. The British nations, till of late years, were much more remarkable for the performance of great actions in the field, than for recording them with dignity and precision in the closet. [...] To dispel the shades which cover the antiquities of the British nations, to investigate their origin, to carry down some account of their characters, manners, and government, into the times of records and domestic writers, is the design of this introduction. (Macpherson 1771, 4-5)

### **The Last Bard**

One of the most important Celtic antiquities is certainly the bardic tradition, without which most of the Gaelic ballads, ancient Celtic beliefs, superstitions, conventions and history

would be lost to us; and the subject is widely discussed both by James Macpherson and John Macpherson. The latter observes the duties of the Celtic bard:

The poets of the Celtic nations were universally called bards by ancient writers. The bards celebrated in verse the great actions of heroes, and men of high dignity and renown. Without encroaching on the province of another order of men, they could not employ their genius on religious subjects. (John Macpherson 1768, 163)

It was the responsibility of bards, the chiefs' client bards to be specific, to attend to the camps of the kings and sing songs that would report their actions, magnifying their victories; these songs could dazzle society and leave it in awe of the chief. Once, each Highland clan had maintained a bard, whose duty was to honour and preserve the history and exploits of his kinsmen, besides marking special occasions like births, deaths and marriages with songs (Groom 2002, 119). Bards were the means to gain immortal fame. According to Macpherson:

A succession of bards was retained in every clan, to hand down the memorable actions of their forefathers. As the æra of Fingal, on account of Ossian's poems, was the most remarkable, and his chiefs the most renowned names in tradition, the bards took care to place one of them in the genealogy of every great family. That part of the poems, which concerned the hero who was regarded as ancestor, was preserved, as an authentic record of the antiquity of the family, and was delivered down, from race to race, with wonderful exactness. (*A Dissertation, PO* [1763] 213-14)

Furthermore, he acknowledges the fundamental contribution of bards to the preservation of antiquity by saying that "it is to this vanity that we owe the preservation of what remain of the works of Ossian" (*The Antiquity &c. of the Poems of Ossian, PO* [1763] 49).

Macpherson presents his bards (especially Ossian) first and foremost as moralists; they use their "power of art to mould the morals and manners of the community" (Dwyer 1991, 180). In order to achieve this, Blair observes that even if Ossian can sometimes be "too

melancholy he is “seldom or never trifling or tedious”; yet “always moral” (Blair, *PO* [1763] 398). Praising Ossian’s depicted bardic talent he goes on to say that:

Though his merit were in other respects much less than it is, this alone ought to entitle him to high regard, that his writings are remarkably favourable to virtue. They awake the tenderest sympathies, and inspire the most generous emotions. No reader can rise from him, without being warmed with the sentiments of humanity, virtue and honour. (Blair, *PO* [1763] 398)

Similar to Macpherson’s opinion of the bard John Macpherson regards the poet (or the bard as “called by ancient writers”) as a cultural prophet:

The poet and the prophet are two congenial souls. Their professions are nearly allied. The claim to supernatural inspiration is common to both: [...]. The conceptions of both rise to grand, marvellous, and pathetic; their language is strong, animated and magnificent, full of tropes and every way removed from prosaic diction. As it is the prophet’s business to utter predictions, so the poet assumes the same character occasionally, and asserts that he speaks the language of the Gods. (John Macpherson 1768, 186)

His description accords with Macpherson and Blair’s view of Ossian as the glorified bard. Groom observes that Ossian who, “has outlived the Druids and outlasted primitive religion, is an outcast from the unknowable Druidic mysteries, is forsaken by even the cruellest gods. Yet, his poetry still repeats the Druidical creed by tracing meaning in oaks and glades and Cyclopean rocks” (Groom 2002, 124). Ossian’s ‘bardic abilities’ somewhat resemble the visionary powers of a prophet. They both receive their knowledge from supernatural sources, from ‘another world’, and like a prophet figure, Ossian is presented as remote from earthly concerns. He is past the age of vanity and more importantly, his visualized image conforms to the prophetic mode in an iconographical way:

The way in which Ossian (and Celtic sages, bards and druids generally) were visualized in modern European culture makes them white- or gray-haired, bearded, and dressed in gowns. That

is an almost automatic, instinctive simile, which attributes to the Celtic bard a prophetic status by dint of sartorial analogy. (Leerssen 1998, 11)

Expressing his opinion on the *Poems of Ossian*, John Macpherson supports James Macpherson's arguments related to the lack of religion in the poems—perhaps, posthumously due to James' possible modifications to the manuscript before publication:

The translator of the poems of Ossian has in a great measure explained the reason that there are no traces of religion to be found in the works of that illustrious Bard. To the arguments raised by that ingenious gentleman I beg leave to add one more, which rises naturally from the observations I have just made on the subject. Though all the Celtic nations were in a manner full of Gods and superstition, their Bards could not employ their genius in the service of any divinity without going out of their own sphere. (John Macpherson 1768, 188-89)

According to John Macpherson's observations and findings concerning the period when bardic tradition was still alive, the bards would sing about secular subjects:

Ossian, therefore, though one of the first man of the state, could not, such were the prejudices of those times, interfere with religious subjects, without a manifest breach on the peculiar privileges of the branch of the Druids called the Vates. It is to this cause and not to the extinction of the Druids, I attribute the total silence concerning religion in the poems of Ossian. (John Macpherson 1768, 189)

Therefore, Ossianic bards too, are portrayed as performing to celebrate, to mourn or as a sign of war; and they never use religious themes or prayers in their songs. Yet, it can be argued that mourning death is a religious act. When Ryno dies in battle Ullin is asked to sing:

Ullin, strike the harp for Ryno; tell what the chief would have been. Farewel, thou first in every field. No more shall I direct thy dart. Thou that hast been so fair; I behold thee not—Farewel. (*Fingal: Book V, PO 93*)

Later, he sings in celebration for the return of Fingal from battle:

Rest, in thy shadowy cave, O sun! and let thy return be in joy. But let a thousand lights arise to the sound of the harps of Selma: let the beam spread in the hall, the king of shells is returned! The strife of Crona is past, like sounds that are no more: raise the song, O bards, the king is returned with his fame!

Such was the song of Ullin, when Fingal returned from battle: when he returned in the fair blushing of youth; with all his heavy locks. (*Carric-thura*, PO 158)

Carril, on the other hand, cheers up Cuchullin and his warriors before the fight with the army of Lochlin by telling of Fingal's heroic deeds in Tura:

Pleasant are the words of the song, said Cuchullin, and lovely are the tales of other times. They are like the calm dew of the morning on the hill of roes, when the sun is faint on its side, and the lake is settled and blue in the vale. O Carril, raise again thy voice, and let me hear the song of Tura: which was sung in my halls of joy, when Fingal king of shields was there, and glowed at the deeds of his fathers. (*Fingal: Book III*, PO 73)

Even though Macpherson assigns Ossian traces of the visionary abilities of a prophet, prophecies or predictions about the future are not major parts of Ossian's reflection as a prophet; because he is concerned more with the past. This is in accordance with the expectations of the eighteenth century since poets were inclined to dwell upon the purity and the genius of the imagination of antiquity when writing about heroes or supernatural events (Stafford 1988, 100). The tendency to focus on antiquities sprang from the idea that "the early poet had special gifts; he was often associated with prophecy and divine inspiration and fulfilled a crucial role in society" (Stafford 1988, 88). However, what can be regarded as prediction are Ossian's conviction that his race is doomed and his indulgence in anticipated acts of remembrance—i.e. "the stranger will come", "the stones will talk":

Sons of Cona! Fingal cried aloud, stop the hand of death. Mighty was he that is now so low! and much is he mourned in Sora! The stranger will come towards his hall, and wonder why it is silent.



The king is fallen, O stranger, and the joy of his house is ceased.  
Listen to the sound of his woods: perhaps his ghost is there; but  
he is far distant, on Morven, beneath the sword of a foreign foe.  
(*The Battle of Lora*, PO 122)

Soon shall my voice be heard no more, and my footsteps cease to  
be seen. The bards will tell of Fingal's name; the stones will talk of  
me. But, Ryno, thou art low indeed, thou hast not received thy  
fame. (*Fingal: Book V*, PO 93)

Interestingly, these 'predictions' of Ossian are also born from his devotion to the lost age of his ancestors bringing with themselves pessimism, despair and melancholy.

Since it was not the place of the bards to speak of divinities another category of the community was responsible for the reciting of such accounts: John Macpherson emphasizes that it was the duty of the Vates to speak of divinities:

*Oὔαττεις*, *Vates*, *Eubates*, *Euhages*, and *Eubages*, are words of exactly the same meaning, and diversified only in the orthography by the vicious pronunciation, of original authors, or the blunders of transcribers. Those to whom the name belonged were a Celtic order of priests, philosophers, and poets, thought to have been prophetically inspired. (John Macpherson 1768, 185)

Heavenly themes belonged to the Vates, another order of men, of a more dignified and sacred character. (John Macpherson 1768, 188-89)

This might be valid; however, Macpherson's Ossian crosses that boundary between the two orders showing some characteristics of a Vates as well as of a bard since it is possible to see the ancient bard mention heavenly bodies and superstitions even though he never speaks of a single Celtic god. John Macpherson mentions that "some Celtic bards treated [...] of theological subjects in their compositions" (John Macpherson 1768, 187); yet "as appears from the name Barditus which was the name given to that species of poetry" (John Macpherson 1768, 188) martial songs were composed by bards in order to inspire their

warriors with courage.<sup>29</sup> It seems as if in Macpherson's world, the bards formed a distinct social category; they have basically usurped the role of the Druids and according to him the "elevation of soul which the first inspired was more favourable to virtue than the dictates of the latter" (Macpherson 1771, 210). This has implications for the development of the Romantic notion of the poet: the bardic tradition was on the verge of dying following the dissolution of the clans after the battle of Culloden in 1746—English replaced Gaelic in schools; kilts, tartans, traditional weapons and even playing bagpipes was banned. The English tried to eradicate Gaelic culture; "so, it is possible to read Ossian as an attempt to reforge the Scottish nation after the massacre of Culloden, a crucial text in the reconstruction of national identities both inside and outside Great Britain" (Groom 2002, 125). In short, Macpherson wished to resurrect the dying bardic tradition with his *Ossian*.

Ossianic bards find meaning in nature and use it in similes which seem to evoke a "romance of sentimental sublime" (Moore 2003, 113)—oaks, rocks, waves, rain etc. Carril, the bard, describes Fingal as a storm:

They bent their red faces to earth, ashamed at the presence of Fingal. He came like a cloud of rain in the days of the sun, when slow it rolls on the hill, and the fields expect the shower. (*Fingal: Book IV, PO 86*)

In *Fragment VII*, Oscur's death is described by Ullin:

But death was distant far, and delayed to come. The sun began to decline; and the cow-herd thought of home. Then Oscur's keen steel found the heart of Ullin. He fell like a mountain-oak covered over with glistering frost: He shone like a rock on the plain. (*Fragment VII, PO 14*)

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<sup>29</sup> This may be regarded as a spurious etymology; yet it seems to have influenced eighteenth-century texts such as Klopstock's 'Bardiete'.

## Spirits

It has been observed that Macpherson draws a picture of a godless Ossianic world in the previous section; yet, this does not mean Celtic nations were completely devoid of faith and belief in his eyes, as he remarks:

The doctrine concerning the Divinity, which Pythagoras and his disciples first broached in the South of Europe, was the same with that of the Druids, and perhaps borrowed by the philosopher from that order of men. They looked upon the Divinity as the soul of the world; a spirit, which diffusing itself through all nature, gave, in a particular manner, life to men and all other animals. (Macpherson 1771, 164)

They believed in a universal life force, the presence of which was most felt in beautiful places in nature where action is most likely to take place—which to them meant mountains, forests, and great collections of water. Therefore, there existed a sense of something holy near streams, lakes, hills or storms; which are presented as able to hear Ossian's songs:<sup>30</sup>

When shall Ossian's youth return, or his ear delight in the sound of arms? When shall I, like Oscar, travel in the light of my steel? Come, with your streams, ye hills of Cona, and listen to the voice of Ossian! The song rises, like the sun, in my soul; and my heart feels the joys of other times. (*The War of Inis-thona*, PO 115)

It seems that these natural phenomena are used as symbols of the divinity. In Macpherson's words:

According to the system of theology it was natural for the Caltæ to direct their attention to those objects in which the active principle which diffused itself through the universe seemed most apparently to exert itself. The heavenly bodies, and what philosophers call the elements, were proper emblems of a Divinity, whose chief properties were immensity, activity, and force. It is likely, therefore, that the veneration which the Caltæ shewed, upon every occasion, for the Sun, Moon, Stars, Fire, great

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<sup>30</sup> This notion probably originated with the belief that fairies lived underneath lakes and hills.

collections of water, and for Forests and Mountains proceeded originally from an opinion that these great objects were the best symbols of the Supreme Being. (Macpherson 1771, 165)

While this statement can shed light on James Macpherson's perspective on how the Celtic peoples looked at the idea of a 'divinity', it can also provide some insights into what the Ossianic 'spirits' are. In a nutshell, it seems that they are the traces of the departed heroes that pass onto the leaves of trees, the blowing wind, or the rocks and the heath. Macpherson has Ossian speak about these heavenly beings in order to inspire his warriors — "crossing the duty-boundaries of the bards" which is in accordance with John Macpherson's claim that theology-related subjects were brought up by Celtic bards for encouragement (quoted above). The deceased warriors of Ossian are presented as slowly dissolving into the nature. For instance Oscur's death is depicted in the *Fragments*:

He fell as the moon in a storm; as the sun from the midst of his course, when clouds rise from the waste of the waves, when the blackness of the storm inwraps the rocks of Ardannider. (*Fragment VII, PO 16*)

In another episode Ossian speaks of the death of Ryno and Orla:

Not unequalled shall Ryno lie in earth when Orla is by his side. Weep, ye daughters of Morven; and ye maids of the streamy Loda.<sup>50</sup> Like a tree they grew on the hills; and they have fallen like the oak<sup>51</sup> of the desert; when it lies across a stream, and withers in the wind of the mountain. (*Fingal: Book V, PO 95*)

The bard speaks of these incidents, relating the heroes to nature and natural phenomena (like sun, storm, rolling of waters) in an attempt to keep the memories of their heroic actions alive and inspire both other warriors and Ossian, himself.

The divinity, as the soul of the universe, was believed to be dispersed into everything in nature by the Celts; while due to their attention to principal objects of nature they gradually came to believe that the heavenly bodies and elements were spirits and not

merely symbols of the supreme deity. These residences of subaltern intelligences were also known as “Aise, a word expressive of their feebleness and imbecility in comparison of DE, the Supreme Divinity” (Macpherson 1771, 169). Macpherson claims the relation of the word ‘Aise’ to the Scandinavian tradition:

Aise generally used in the Galic language with the article D’ or T’ prefixed to it, signifies a ghost or spirit. Aise is perhaps the original of the Asæ of the northern nations. [...] DE ALMEGTE-AAS, in the language of Scandinavia, signifies Almighty God. It is remarkable that the Highlanders, when they speak contemptuously of the person and parts of any man, call him An D’AISE, or the ghost; which is an argument that their ancestors did not worship the AISE, or the spirits which resided in the elements. (Macpherson 1771, 169 [footnote])

This is a significant observation as it might indicate a commonality between the language, and more importantly, the belief system of the two cultures. The Highlanders’ belief in the ‘Aise’ is further reinforced by Macpherson as he explains that Slia Grian-Ais (an area near River Spey named after the ‘Aise’, which will be focused on later in the chapter) is honoured among the Highlanders (Macpherson 1771, 169). Since the ‘Aise’ were immediately subordinate to god and had access to his intentions they had the power to warn mankind about these intentions by certain tokens or signs (Macpherson 1771, 167). That is to say, for the Celts:

God was not only the sole agent of the operations of nature, but even the principal of which nature itself consisted; not so much the giver and the preserver of life, as he was that life itself which animated every living thing. (Macpherson 1771, 166)

Fingal’s men going on a ‘dead hunt’ by retiring to their ‘hill of ghosts’ expecting a sign from the metaphorical realm of the spirits is illustrative of this belief:

The night came down; we strode, in silence; each to his hill of ghosts: that spirits might descend, in our dreams, to mark us for the field. (*Cathlin of Clutha*, PO 295)

A very similar scene occurs in *Cath-loda: Duan Second* when, again, heroes wait for a sign from the spirits to decide the leader of the army in the coming battle:

But who shall now lead the war, before the race of kings? Mist settles on these four dark hills: within it let each warrior strike his shield. Spirits may descend in darkness, and mark us for the war." They went, each to his hill of mist. (*Cath-loda: Duan Second*, PO 314)

It can effectively be argued that the 'ability' to exist in natural objects or elements after death and being able to 'communicate' with the living, give Ossianic heroes a god-like characteristic or at least make them akin to god in Macpherson's Celtic world:

Fingal himself was next to the foe; and listened to the tales of bards. His godlike race were in the song, the chiefs of other times. (*Fingal: Book III*, PO 77)

The belief in spirits also portrayed in the *Poems* is indicative of an attempt to honour those intelligences that were thought to reside in elements. This convention finds its foundations in primitive rituals present in the ancient Celtic tradition even though Macpherson seems to dismiss the idea of spirits himself—he regards the ancient sacrifices made for these spirits as quite similar to those of the barbarians (i.e. the Scandinavians):

They [Celtic nations] originally believed that the Supreme Deity DE, as the soul of the world, pervaded the whole body of nature. This philosophical idea degenerated among the bulk of the people, into a supposition that some objects of nature, instead of being animated by God himself, became the residences of spirits, who, in subordination to him directed the operations of their respective portions of matter. (Macpherson 1771, 178)

Sir James Frazer also reports that "as distinguished from gods, spirits are restricted in their operations to definite departments of nature. Their names are general, not proper. Their attributes are generic, rather than individual; [...]" (Frazer 1994 [1890], 411) in confirmation to Macpherson's distinction between gods and such spirits that exist in elements—'spirit(s)

of the hill', 'spirit of a storm', 'spirit of the wind', 'spirit of the mountain', are mentioned a total of nine times in the *Poems*. Incidentally, Macpherson's spirits are of principal objects of nature too, as suggested by the common Celtic belief of 'Aise'.

### **Spirit(s) of the hill**

Blair emphasizes that these are "gentle spirits; descending on sun-beams; fair-moving on the plain; their forms white and bright; their voices sweet; and their visits to men propitious"; and the greatest praise that can be given a woman is to liken her beauty to the "spirits of the hill" (Blair, *PO* [1763] 368) which indicates that the spirits of the hill are female gendered.

This is observed in a *Fragment* and in *Fingal: Book I*:

Fair with her locks of gold, her smooth neck, and her breasts of snow; fair, as the spirits of the hill when at silent noon they glide along the heath; fair, as the rain-bow of heaven; came Minvane the maid. (*Fragment VIII, PO* 18)

Weep on the rocks of roaring winds, O maid of Inistore, bend thy fair head over the waves, thou fairer than the spirit of the hills; when it moves in a sun-beam at noon over the silence of Morven. (*Fingal: Book I, PO* 60)

And Ossian shares his thoughts about Carril's song at the end of *Fingal: Book V* with similes to nature, again in accordance with admiration towards nature and its 'spirits':

But sit thou on the heath, O Bard, and let us hear thy voice. It is pleasant as the gale of spring that sighs on the hunter's ear; when he wakens from dreams of joy, and has heard the music of the spirits of the hill. (*Fingal: Book V, PO* 96)

Here, it is certainly not the image of strong warriors in battle that is represented by the spirits, but rather the idea of fallen angels, singing of the heroic exploits of Fingalian warriors, is evoked by Macpherson.

It seems that the Ossianic spirits of the hill have a basis in early Irish legends for certain similarities strike the eye: legends suggest that the Sidhe (as the Irish call spirits), once angels, were cast out from heaven to earth as a punishment for their sinful pride (Wilde 1887/*The Fairies as Fallen Angels* par. 1). The spirits are beautiful and gentle creatures that reside in their fairy palaces of pearl and gold underneath hills<sup>31</sup> and lakes, where they dance, sing and live in luxury (Wilde 1887/*The Sidhe Race* par. 4). Several tales relating to these fairies living deep down in the heart of the hills have been passed on through generations and it is very likely that Macpherson was familiar with them. According to a story:

The fairies are passionately fond of music; it is therefore dangerous for a young girl to sing when she is all alone by the lake, for the spirits will draw her down to them to sing to them in the fairy palace under the waves, and her people will see her no more. Yet sometimes when the moonlight is on the water, and the waves break against the crystal columns of the fairy palace far down in the depths, they can hear her voice, and they know that she is singing to the fairies in the spirit land beneath the waters of the lake. (Wilde 1887/*The Sidhe Race* par. 10)<sup>32</sup>

Another tale explains how the fairies could influence the songs of the bards:

It is not right, the people say, to sing or whistle at night that old air, "The pretty girl milking her cow; "for it is a fairy tune, and the fairies will not suffer a mortal to sing their music while they are dancing on the grass. But if a person sleeps on the rath the music will enter into his soul, and when he awakes he may sing the air he has heard in his dreams.

In this way the bards learned their songs, and they were skilled musicians, and touched the harp with a master hand, so that time fairies often gathered round to listen, though invisible to mortal eyes. (Wilde 1887/*The Fairy Rath* par. 3)

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<sup>31</sup> There is an Irish folktale titled 'The Fairy Hill is on Fire', where the fairy women are deceived to leave their houses. A discussion of the story can be found in O'Neill's article, 'The Fairy Hill is Fire!' (O'Neill 1991, 189-96).

<sup>32</sup> Although Lady Wilde's accounts might include her own embellishments the traditional core seems valid.



Considering that Macpherson's Highland sprits and the Sidhe have much in common, it is not hard to imagine that he was inspired by these fairy legends and beliefs.

### **Spirit of the storm**

They fell, like two hinds of the desert, by the hands of the mighty Swaran; when, in the midst of thousands he roared; like the shrill spirit of a storm, that sits dim, on the clouds of Gormal, and enjoys the death of the mariner. (*Fingal: Book I, PO 60*)

Cairbar heard their words, in silence, like the cloud of a shower: it stands dark on, till the lightning bursts its side; the valley gleams with red light; the spirits of the storm rejoice. So stood the silent king of Temora; at length his words are heard. (*Temora: Book I, PO 228*)

These spirits seem to be presented as of superior nature to those of the 'ghosts or spirits of the dead' since they are considered secondary to god as mentioned above and can also bring winds and storms, "pour them on the land of strangers; overturn forests and send death among people" when needed (Blair, *PO* [1763] 369). It is interesting to see that both of the extracts speak of a battle coming to an end and it seems that the spirit of the storm denotes bravery, enthusiasm and strength. It is a symbol of chaos and change as after the destruction caused by the storm old and frail is 'blown away' bringing upon silence, peace and joy.

Sound is very significant for the blind bard, Ossian, as for him, it is the fundamental means of communication with the outside world; thus the 'roaring' sound of the spirit of the storm and the silence of the king of Temora are emphasized (detailed below).

### **Spirit(s) of the wind**

Do I hear the sounds of thy grove? or is it the voice of thy songs?  
The torrent was loud in my ear, but I heard a tuneful voice; dost thou praise the chiefs of thy land; or the spirits of the wind? But, lonely dweller of the rock! look over that heathy plain: thou seest

green tombs, with their rank, whistling grass, with their stones of mossy heads: thou seest them, son of the rock, but Ossian's eyes have failed. (*The Battle of Lora*, PO 119)

In a note to the poem, Macpherson says that the spirits of the wind “alludes to the religious hymns of the Culdees” (*The Battle of Lora*, PO 441 n. 3 [M]). Here, too, the importance of sound for Ossian is displayed as while he underlines the fact that his eyes are failing, a ‘tuneful voice’ praising the spirits is stressed, which presumably stands for the traces of the dead chiefs.

In fact, the importance of sound is signified by all the Highland spirits and throughout the *Poems* in general, due to not only Ossian's blindness but presumably also because music and sound are the defining features of the Sidhe—it is the ‘shrill spirit of a storm’, ‘the tuneful voice of the spirits’ or ‘the music of the spirits of the hills’ that bring back the memory of the past along with melancholy and inspiration which give raise to Ossian's poems.

### **Spirit of the mountain**

We sat, that night, in Selma round the strength of the shell. The wind was abroad, in the oaks; the spirit of the mountain shrieked. The blast came rustling through the hall, and gently touched my harp. The sound was mournful and low, like the song of the tomb. (*Dar-thula*, PO 145)

The wind is up. The shower descends. The spirit of the mountain shrieks. Woods fall from high. Windows flap. The growing river roars. The traveller attempts the ford. Hark that shriek! he dies: [...] (*Croma: A Poem*, PO 190).

Mountains are very significant to the Highland landscape and in turn, to Celtic culture; they are the witnesses to battles, lover meetings and deaths. Therefore, not surprisingly, it was believed that spirits existed in mountains. In both cases, ‘shrieking mountain spirit’ does not

convey a positive image—in fact; it is a foreteller of bad news, resulting in a ‘mournful and low’ sound of the harp or the death of ‘the traveller’. Thomas Burnet had depicted mountains as the ‘Ruins of a broken World’ in his *The Sacred Theory of Earth* (1681):

[...] but all that we have hitherto observ'd concerning Mountains, how strange soever and otherwise unaccountable, may easily be explain'd, and deduc'd from this original; we shall not wonder at their greatness and vastness, seeing they are the ruines of a broken World; [...]. (Burnet 1691 [1681], 114-15)

Macpherson might have based this portrayal of the spirit on the traditional view of mountains as symbols of decay and corruption, which can be associated with the theme of degeneration observed in Ossianic poetry. Stafford also remarks that the idea of a ruined world was popular in the literary world of the eighteenth century, “inspiring poets and writers with thoughts of mortality and collapse of Empires” (Stafford 1988, 147). Macpherson’s effective evocation of a bleak and wild mountainous landscape was an important factor in sensitizing the eighteenth-century readership to its ‘terrible beauty’.

## **The Fairy Tradition**

The presentation of the Highland spirits in Macpherson’s Ossianic poetry is important and requires attention since it demonstrates Macpherson’s understanding of his native tradition. In order to fully comprehend the spiritual world of the *Poems* it is necessary to look at the popular Celtic belief in fairies or the Shee—fallen angels living in the hills since Macpherson’s Ossianic writings coincide with the fairy craze which took hold of the eighteenth-century literary world (Henderson and Cowan 2001, 9). This is a valid remark considering that Macpherson-Ossian’s departed heroes are like fallen angels whose traces continue to exist in nature.

The good neighbours, the good people, the honest folk, the fairfolk, the green goons, the gentry, the little people, the forgetful people, the still people, the restless people and the people of peace are all euphemisms for fairies in Scotland while the Gaelic words for fairy are *sith*, *sluagh* and *Daoine Sith*, meaning people of peace (Henderson and Cowan 2001, 14). Alexander Carmicheal's *Carmina Gadelica* (1900) which is a significant collection of hymns, charms, incantations and literary-folkloric poems of Gaelic-speaking Scots, reports the evocative words of an old man of Barra, speaking in the voice of the fairies:

Not of the seed of Adam are we  
Nor is Abraham our father,  
But of the seed of the Proud Angel  
Driven forth from Heaven. (Carmicheal 1900, 353)<sup>33</sup>

It seems that connections between fairy belief and Christian belief existed due to the notion of Lucifer, who was expelled from heaven; however, with the publication of Ossianic writings in the 1760s, Macpherson could be understood to support the theory that fairies represented a folk memory of Celtic ancestors. Even though he does not mention such fairies, his departed spirits of the *Poems of Ossian* usurp the role of fairies—as the combinations of fallen angels and ancestral memories since he “had the classical authority for associating the ancient Celtic warriors with the underworld” (Stafford 1998, 172).

### ***Ossian* and Native Gaelic Tradition**

Macpherson would have been familiar with fairy motifs and stories since he was a native of Badenoch, a district of the Highlands. Anne Grant's *Essay on the Superstitions of the Highlands*

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<sup>33</sup> *Carmina Gadelica* was collected and published much later than Macpherson's works, but it is mentioned here merely to show that fairy legends and stories have a noteworthy role in Gaelic-speaking Scotland.

(1811) provide us with great deal of information and material on the local belief in fairies, including descriptions of the 'fairy plains' near Spey valley:

In the narrow part of the valley through which the Spey makes its way from the parish of Laggan downwards to that of Kingussie, there is some scenery of a very singular character. To the south, the Spey is seen making some fine bends round the foot of wooded hills. It is bordered by a narrow stripe of meadow, of the richest verdure, and fringed with an edging of beautiful shrubbery. On the north side rises, with precipitous boldness, Craigow, or the Black Rock, the symbol and boundary of the clan who inhabit the valley. It is very black indeed, yet glitters in the sun, from the many little streams which descend from its steep, indeed perpendicular surface. [...] This singular spot has too many minute beauties to be pictured in description. All its terrors, and all its beauties, however, conspire to give it the air of a nook, separated by surrounding barriers for some purpose of enchantment. It did not require a belief in fairies to look round for them in this romantic scene. If one had merely heard of them, an involuntary operation of fancy would summon them to a place so suited for their habitation. (Grant 1881, 265-68)

No matter what his opinion of fairy beliefs is, Macpherson seems to have certainly acknowledged their imaginative and inspiring potential realizing that the "Highland legends could provide a supernatural dimension to his poetry without seeming artificial or merely ornamental" (Stafford 1988, 55). Therefore, it can be argued that when he wrote about his Highland spirits—dealt with in the previous section, i.e. the spirits of the mountain, the hill, the storm and the wind—he might have had the images from his childhood or stories he heard about fairies as a child.

Macpherson left Scotland when he was twenty-five, but after the completion of *Fingal* (1761-62) it is clear that his attitudes in subsequent works, including the second Ossianic volume, *Temora* (1763), continue to be informed by his early experiences of the Scottish Highlands and his native culture. Macpherson grew up in the Highlands at a time when Highlander was synonymous with 'rude', 'savage' and 'uneducated'. According to

Anne Grant's *Essays*, getting an education and experiencing the outside world could, however, alter the Highlander's understanding of traditional customs—Highlanders tried to avoid speaking about their traditions and beliefs to an outsider in case they would become a subject of ridicule:

[...] the illiberal, ignorant, and bigoted prejudice, with which the lowlanders formerly regarded this insulated, and, in a manner, concealed people, whom they only knew as rude warriors or valiant robbers—these prejudices I say, usurped some power over the mind of every highlander who received the benefit of a lowland education—in fact who had any education at all. [...] Nothing was so terrible to punctilious pride of a highlander as ridicule. To any, but his countrymen he carefully avoided mentioning his customs, his genealogies, and above all, his superstitions. Nay, in some instances, he affected to speak of them in contempt, to enforce his pretensions to literature or philosophy. (Grant 1881, 34-35)

It is likely that as one of the 'educated' Highlanders Macpherson was caught in between such influences of the Lowlands and the will to preserve his native heritage. The reserve in mentioning Highland superstitions and beliefs is evident in Macpherson's *Ossian* and he expresses his concerns regarding this:

If the Irish poems, concerning the *Fiona*, should appear ridiculous, it is but justice to observe, that they are scarcely more so than the poems of other nations, at that period. On other subjects, the bards of Ireland have displayed a genius worthy of any age or nation. It was, alone, in matters of antiquity, that they were monstrous in their fables. Their love-sonnets, and their elegies on the death of persons worthy or renowned, abound with such beautiful simplicity of sentiment, and wild harmony of numbers, that they become more than an atonement for their errors, in every other species of poetry. But the beauty of these pieces, depends so much on a certain *curiosa felicitas* of expression in the original, that they must appear much to disadvantage in another language. (*A Dissertation, PO* [1763] 224)

Therefore, since Macpherson adapted the popular stories of the Highlanders for the English speakers and readers, he deliberately cut out some of the material he thought to be

unnecessary. Anne Grant's observation proves to be accurate after all, as we see that his university education in Aberdeen was highly influential on Macpherson, for there, "while he learnt to value 'primitive' virtues on one hand, he was also being taught that a refined taste was essential to both art and morality" (Stafford 1988, 36).

Nevertheless, the authentic tradition asserts itself in spite of Macpherson's attempt to suppress it. For instance, the heroes of the poems, which the Highlanders were familiar with—Fingal, Ossian, Oscar and Cuchullin—were characters from well-known legends from the earliest ages. J. F. Campbell's account (writing in 1860-62) from Barra, is illustrative of the enthusiasm toward Ossianic stories:

In the Islands of Barra, the recitation of tales during the long winter nights is still very common. The people gather in crowds to the houses of those whom they consider good reciters to listen to their stories. [...] During the recitation of these tales, the emotions of the reciters are occasionally very strongly excited, and so also are those of the listeners, almost shedding tears at one time, and giving way to loud laughter at another. A good many of them firmly believe in all the extravagance of these stories. They speak of the Ossianic heroes with as much feeling, sympathy, and belief in their existence and reality as the readers of the newspapers do of the exploits of the British army in the Crimea or in India; and whatever be the extravagance of the legends they recite respecting them, it is exceedingly remarkable that the same character is always ascribed to the same hero in almost every story and by almost every reciter. Fingal, or rather Fionn, is never called the king of any country or territory, but the king of the Finn, a body of men who were raised, according to the traditions current in the Long Island and other parts of the Highlands, in Ireland and in the Highlands, to defend both countries against foreign invaders, more especially against the Scandinavians. (Campbell 1890, iv-v)

Macpherson, too, acknowledges the existence of this tradition and the continuing interest to traditional tales in the Highlands:

Their language is pure and original, and their manners are those of an antient and unmixed race of men. Conscious of their own antiquity, they long despised others, as a new and mixed people.

As they lived in a country only fit for pasture, they were free of that toil and business, which engross the attention of a commercial people. Their amusement consisted in hearing or repeating their songs and traditions, and these intirely turned on the antiquity of their nation, and the exploits of their forefathers. It is no wonder, therefore, that there are more remains of antiquity among them, than among any other people in Europe. (*A Dissertation, PO* [1763] 206)

Macpherson was aware that the legends of Fionn and his followers, the Fiana, were highly valued as symbols of the Highland spirit, a fact which he seems to benefit from in an attempt to reinforce the antiquity of the Highland race. As mentioned earlier, the impact of his university education and life outside the Highlands on his literary understanding and development cannot be overlooked: he began to realize that absorbing the changes brought by the 'corrupt' civilization of modern Britain would be destructive to the Highland culture. It seems that he wanted to be the preserver of his native tradition without being regarded as 'savage' and it is not unlikely that he felt the need to come up with a new way of introducing these legends with his *Ossian* to the English-speaking population by finding a 'happy medium' between the proud Highland spirit and the cynicism of the English.

In the legends of the Fiana that Macpherson would most likely have heard in his childhood, Fionn is surrounded by magic and the music of the fairies (shee) while he, himself, is a courageous hero, who can fight supernatural creatures. For instance, a tale recites his fight with the fairy, Aillen Mac Midna, who attacks the city of Tara each Samhain:

The text tells us that when he was ten years of age, Fionn arrived at the court of the High-King at Temhair (Tara) for the feast of *Samhain* [November]. The king was desperate, for every year on that night the citadel was burned by an otherworld being called Aillén. This Aillén used to arrive playing magical music which put everyone to sleep, and then used to blow fire from his mouth to affect his purpose. Fionn undertook to face the burner, was given a shield and spear, and stood on guard:

Before long he heard the magical music, and he placed the sharp point of the spear to his forehead. Aillén was playing



his harp to put everyone to sleep as usual. And then he released a blaze of fire from his mouth to burn Temhair. Fionn saw that, and he placed his purple-fringed cloak before the blaze and made it fall from the air.

When Aillén saw that his magic had been overcome, he turned back towards the otherworld for of Fionnachadh on top of the Mount of Fuad. Fionn followed him to the Cairn of Fionnachadh, and as Aillén was passing in by the door of the fort Fionn put his finger in the cord of his spear and gave it a strong accurate throw. It struck Aillén high in the back, putting his heart out through his mouth as dark mass of blood. (Ó hÓgàin 1988, 9)

J. F. Campbell also acknowledges the significance of Fiann-lore for the Celts and its popularity all over the Highlands—relying on his observations in Barra and South Uist—what the natives call *Tir nam Beann, 's nan Gleann, s nan Gaisgeach* or 'the land of hills, and glens, and heroes' (Campbell 1890, xxv):

That which is called Seanachas na Finne, or Feinnie, or Fiann, that is, the tradition or old history of the Feene. This is now the rarest of any, and is commonest, so far as I know, in Barra and South Uist. There are first fragments of poems which may have been taken from the printed book, which goes by the name of the History of the Finne in the Highlands, and the Poems of Ossian elsewhere. I never asked for these, but I was told that the words were "sharper and deeper" than those in the printed book. (Campbell 1890, xxv)

Additionally, he points out that some of the poetical fragments which he believes to be attributed to Ossian recite the encounters of the Fiana with a Norway witch—one can relate Fingal's battle with the spirit of Loda to Fionn's fight with the Norwegian witch:

Patrick Smith, in South Uist, intoned a long fragment; I should guess, about 200 lines. He recited it rapidly to a kind of chant. The subject was a fight with a Norway witch, and Fionn, Diarmaid [Ossian], Oscar and Conan, were named as Irish heroes. There were "ships fastened with silver chains, and kings holding them"; swords, spears, helmets, shields, and battles, were mentioned; in short, the fragment was the same in style and machinery as the famous Poems; and it was attributed to Ossian. [...] The same account of the manner of reciting similar poems was given me by

a clergyman in Argyllshire, who said that, within his recollection, the "death of Cuchullin" used to be so recited by an old man at the head of Loch Awe. (Campbell 1890, xxv-xxvi)

In some stories Fionn is even believed to have a magic sword forged by a fairy smith (Campbell 1890, lxvi); besides, interestingly, as explained by Carmicheal, a place in the district of Badenoch (where Macpherson grew up) is called 'Creag a bhalgaire' meaning rock of the rogue (thief) where fairies would come down to carry a baby up to this rock and away to the fairy-land ("Balgairé" Carmicheal 1900, 226 [notes]). Therefore, all in all, it is safe to assume that Macpherson had the opportunity to use the Highland legends to add to his poetry a supernatural dimension. His surviving early compositions can shed light on the poet's personal experiences greatly and thus, their investigation is important to the study of *Ossian* as well as the representation of Scottish folk belief in Ossianic poems.

### ***The Hunter (1756) and The Highlander (1758)***

Macpherson's pre-Ossianic poetry reflects his attempts to fuse his native culture with his university education and life—while *The Hunter* is his earliest trial of an 'epic' it also inspires his second, *The Highlander* which seems to have strong influences of Gaelic tradition. In fact in a note to the poem, Malcolm Laing proposes that "this poem, which has no name in the MS, I have entitled the HUNTER, to distinguish it from the HIGHLANDER, of which, perhaps, it is the first rough and imperfect draught" (Macpherson 1805, 465 [L]).

Once on a time, when Liberty was seen  
 To sport a revel on the northern plain,  
 Immortal fair! And was supremely kind  
 On Scotia's hills to snuff the northern wind;  
 There lived a youth, and DONALD was his name.  
 To chance 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 contended in his tartan plaid.  
 [...]
   
 And more than happy in his temperate toil,  
 Our Donald lived; but, oh! how soon the light  
 Of happiness is sunk in blackest night! (*The Hunter*, 465-66: 1-20)

It has been observed that *The Hunter* “lacks coherence and is clumsily written, but it reflects his artistic frustration and hold clues to Macpherson’s intellectual development” (Kersey 2004, 63). The strong political messages of the poem are already evident in the opening lines with the emphasis on ‘Liberty’ which can be associated with nostalgia for the past; the Highlander’s tartan, his gun and his harmony with nature.<sup>34</sup> The sportive image of liberty— pictured as diminishing the harshness of the northern wind— “is more suggestive of polite recreation than necessity, yet its presence favours the simple life of ‘thrice happy Donald’” (Kersey 2004, 63).

One day when Donald is hunting, he accidentally kills a fawn that belonged to a fairy princess:

It chanced the Fairie's king a daughter had  
 A beauteous, blooming, and a sportive maid.  
 She took delight, upon the flowery lawn  
 To frisk, transported, round a female fawn.  
 The hunter aims the tube: the powder flies  
 The fawn falls, roars, and shakes her limbs, and dies.  
 (*The Hunter* 466: 21-26)

The fairy flies back to the ‘fairy hill’ where fairies dance and sing:

A hill there is, whose sloping sides of green  
 Are by the raptured eye at distance seen;  
 Rocks intersperse the variegated space:  
 Here columns rise; there smiles the virid grass;  
 There timid deers, and shaggy goals abound;  
 There tripping fairies dance the fleeting round; [...].  
 (*The Hunter*, 467: 51-56)

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<sup>34</sup> At this time (in 1750s), wearing tartan and carrying guns were banned by law in the Highlands.

For revenge, the Fairy Court decides to “wound the heart” of the fawn-killer (*The Hunter*, 468: 104) and so, the fairies introduce ambition to the untroubled Highlander’s mind:

Around the hunter the black humour shed,  
And fill, with vile ambition, all his head;  
Then, damn’d to care, the deer destroying man  
Shall rue the slaughter of the bounding fawn.  
(*The Hunter*, 469: 117-20)

Pushed into internal conflict, discontented with his life, he goes south, to Edinburgh, which is under attack by the English army. Here, the Highlander becomes the leader of the Lowland army and defends his country gaining victory at the end. His heroic deeds impress the Scottish King Fergus whose beautiful daughter, Egidia, he falls in love with. However, thinking he lacks social manners, Donald cannot approach Egidia until he finds out that he is the lost son of the King. Once he realizes their status is equal Donald can propose and with the acceptance of Egidia who was secretly in love with him, the poem ends happily.

*The Hunter*, as a mock-heroic<sup>35</sup> work, seems to be inspired by Pope’s “satiric vision of the insidious influence of imported luxuries” (Kersey 2004, 63) while it is also a reflection of Macpherson’s optimism and his attitude towards ambition, which is presented as bringing success and happiness. His ideals that would take him beyond Badenoch show themselves here as the state of confusion and guilt for leaving his home fades towards the end. The conflict between native tradition and modernization is seen in the words of the fairy:

How oft with thee I sported on the lawn,  
But shall no more: but what thy Flavia grieves,  
Her abject strength no hopes of vengeance gives.  
But stop! what nature does not still impart,  
Maybe amended by the wiles of art. (*The Hunter*, 466-67: 43-46)

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<sup>35</sup> “Only in a mock-heroic work would a fawn ‘roar’ [*The Hunter* 466: 26] when shot” (Kersey 2004, 64).

Moreover as observed by Stafford “the traditional association between fairies and fallen angels, [...] gave Macpherson the opportunity to draw on both the Highland beliefs and English literature” (Stafford 1988, 55), i.e. for instance, Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Similar to Milton’s Devils that send evil to earth for destruction, Macpherson’s fairies decide to punish Donald with ambition:

Content upon the green the peasant lives,  
 While damn’d in the courts of state the courtier grieves  
 For power, for grandeur, pours the eternal pray’r,  
 Wakes sleepless nights, and yawns whole days of care.  
 Should some foe-fairy glide through the fields of light,  
 And to the regal seat direct his flight,  
 Take the black humour, boiling round the brain,  
 Then, soft-transported, seek the northern plain;  
 Around the hunter the black humour shed,  
 And fill, with vile ambition, all his head;  
 Then, damn’d to care. The deer-destroying man  
 Shall rue the slaughter of the bounding fawn.  
 (*The Hunter*, 468-69: 109-20)

Stafford suggests that “by drawing parallels between the Fairies’ Court and Milton’s Hell, the Highlands become a kind of Paradise, which must then be lost” (Stafford 1988, 55). Interestingly, the motif of the revenge of the fairies are presented in Gaelic tradition too. A tale about the origin of fairies which can be related to fallen angels is told in *Carmina*

*Gadelica*:

The Proud Angel fomented a rebellion among the angels of Heaven, where he had been a leading light. He declared that he would go and found a kingdom of his own. [...] Many angels followed him so many that at last Son called out ‘Father! Father! The city is being emptied!’ Whereupon the Father ordered that the gates should be closed. This was instantly done; and those who were in were in, and those who were out were out; while the hosts who had left heaven and had not reached hell, flew into the holes of the earth. [...] These are the fairy folks—ever since doomed to live under the ground, and only permitted to emerge when and where the King permits. (Carmicheal 1900, 352-53)

Macpherson's use of the supernatural to reflect his 'social reality' becomes apparent: Donald's ambition is attributed to the fairies in the setting of the Highlands where the influence of the fairies on humans is an acceptable notion. Under this 'spell' the young Highlander leaves home with his ideals which eventually bring him good fortune. Once the setting of the poem changes from nature to city the influence of the fairies disappears—they no longer guide or influence Donald. The fairies are presented as providing young Donald with the necessary motivation in order to begin the journey to the next step of his life only in the Highlands environment.

On downy tracts of air the fairy glides,  
 And all the north hill shaded, backward slides.  
 Thus on the main, when favouring zephyr sings  
 Through the swift frigate's wide extended wings,  
 Ports, rocks, and cities, seem to glide away,  
 And the cloud-wounding hills themselves decay.  
     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 scribes, and English'd whores.  
 Here blooming Xanthe slopingly descends,  
 And, softly lighting, all her journey ends  
 Invisible; for Fergus' Scottish line  
 Disdain'd not yet on barren fields to reign.  
 (*The Hunter*, 469: 131-46)

The scenery of the city is hardly welcoming and it is apparent that he is disgusted by the English degeneration: it should be underlined, however, that Macpherson is not simply criticizing the English in the above extract; he is also disturbed by the 'English'd' Scots who, he believes, have abandoned their own roots and adopted southern manners. Yet, it is this setting that allows the Highlander to prove himself. Therefore, we see that the native tradition acts as a starting point that provides assets for fulfilling his natural potential. It is possible to find parallels between Donald and Macpherson whose talents gave him the

chance to experience life outside the Highlands and made it hard for him to settle back in Badenoch. Just as Donald's natural Highland spirit makes him a hero in the Lowlands, Macpherson's *The Hunter* becomes a reflection of his own Highlander heritage that would set him on the path to success—Macpherson adapts to the eighteenth-century modernization just as he has Donald familiarize himself with the Lowlands.

Even though *The Hunter* was never published, *The Highlander* (1758) which also displays elements of traditional Gaelic heroic verse was ready for publication two years later. The lack of fairy material in this second work is significant as it can be reflective of Macpherson's changing interests and inspirations. Macpherson was frustrated by living with the limitations of a small Highland village, Ruthven, after his university education in the city, but his interest in history and the Gaelic tradition remained intact. When there seemed to be no more threat of another Jacobite Rebellion, the image of the Highlands changed: they became a source of sentimentality and Romantic wildness; and as the attitude towards the Highlands changed it seems that Macpherson's tendency to shift from the traditional to the Classical increased—so that, in his *Ossian*, the 'gliding fairies' became 'floating ghosts'.

In *The Highlander* too, a young hero saves Scotland and finds out his father is a king; but the poem shows differences when the main hero, Duffus (whose old name in the Highlands was Alpin) actually ascends to the throne. It is important to realize that in both poems, Macpherson has his hero prove himself worthy of success and fortune rather than simply inheriting power:

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; [...]  
 My Duffus! Tears hung in his joyful eyes:  
 [...]  
 To thee with joy the sceptre I resign;  
 And waft the kingdom to the coming line."  
 (*The Highlander*, 573: 235-72)

One striking difference between the two poems is the invading enemy: here, instead of coming from the south (England) the forces attack from the north—Scandinavia. Thus, the influence of the Gaelic tradition can be observed since dealings with the ‘Lochlinners’ or ‘Vikings’ were very common in heroic Highland ballads (Christiansen 1931, 5). Writing in 1900s Christiansen emphasizes the importance of what the Irish and the Highlanders had to tell about the Vikings in their prose and verse compositions:

The most extraordinary feature of this tradition is its continuity, which is almost unparalleled. It has its source almost as far back as the time of the Vikings themselves, or at least as we know them in Ireland, and it had lived on into our own time. In the old manuscripts legends and songs about the Norsemen are to be found, and down to 1900 the ballads, such as that concerning king Magnus of Norway, were familiar throughout the Isles, where no doubt fragments of this poetry is still known.  
(Christiansen 1931, 5)

Thomson agrees that the Magnus ballad which Macpherson uses extensively for his *Fingal* (1761-62) was very popular in the Highlands (Thomson 1952, 21). The ballad recites the victory of the Scottish army led by Fingal against Lochlin’s fleet commanded by Magnus. Besides, Macpherson’s evocation of the legend of Fionn or Finn MacCumhail (Fingal) who discovers his long-lost father and ascends to his position as the head of the military is plainly visible. The features of the legendary Fiana, highly trained warriors, are attributed to the chiefs of *The Highlander* who are presented as ready to fight for Scotland:

The mountain-chiefs, in burning arms incased,  
And carrying all their country in their breast,  
Undaunted rear their useful arms on high,  
Now fought for food, now for liberty,  
Now met the sport of the hills, now of the main,  
Here pierced a stag, and there transfixed a Dane.  
Though nature’s walls their homely huts inclose;  
To guard their homely huts, though mountains rose;  
Yet feeling Albion in their breasts, they dare  
From rocks to rush, and meet the distant war.  
(*The Highlander*, 537: 31-40)



The nature, which is presented as the home of the Highlander, needs to be protected and might need to be saved at times; and it is being part of this nature (living in the obscurity of the Highlands) that prepares the warriors for the fight for 'liberty'. Therefore, the plot is constructed around the theme of battle ornamented with natural phenomena and conflicts; motifs Macpherson employs extensively in his *Ossian* too—it can be deduced that *The Highlander* does not fit the Gaelic fairy tradition and represents Macpherson's transition of thought from traditional to modern. The poem became a preparation to his next bigger project, the *Fragments* followed by *Ossian*, which would arouse much more public interest. The war motif and the use of conflicts can be seen in his description of Magnus and his troops:

Far to the right fierce Magnus' fiery sway  
Compels the troops, and rears the quick array:  
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. (*The Highlander*, 538: 63-68)

Not only the *Magnus Ballad* but also George Buchanan's *History of Scotland* (1751; first published in Latin, *Rerum Scotticarum Historia*, in 1582) which explains the deeds of the Kings of Scotland (Malcolm, Indulphus and Duffus) in the tenth century, seems to have proved a good source for Macpherson—here, identical to the plot of *The Highlander* Duffus, King Malcolm's son, obtains the Kingdom after Indulphus is murdered by the defeated Dane army (Buchanan 1751, 222). In view of this, one can see that "conscious of Scotland's vulnerability, Macpherson turned to traditional legends to find the ideal warriors who would embody her essential greatness" (Stafford 1988, 74). So that, although it is possible to see *The Hunter* purely as a product of Macpherson's imagination *The Highlander* clearly owes something to historical and literary sources. He seems to have developed this approach later

in his *Ossian* (1760-63) where the ideas of the supernatural (inspired by the native Gaelic tradition) underlie the epic machinery of the poems:

Besides being temperately employed, machinery ought always to have some foundation in popular belief. A poet is by no means at liberty to invent what system of the marvellous he pleases: He must avail himself either of the religious faith, or the superstitious credulity of the country wherein he lives; so as to give an air of probability to events which are most contrary to the common course of nature. (Blair, *PO* [1763] 365)

Macpherson's ability to adapt history to his works can clearly be observed in *The Hunter* and especially in *The Highlander* where he converts historical sources directly to neo-classic verse. Although his Ossianic poetry is also driven by a similar motive—that is, the desire to translate Scotland's past into sentimental poetry—he attempts to achieve this without remaining faithful to his sources. In this context, one can observe that *The Hunter*, presented as a fairy tale, combines romance and epic, while in *The Highlander* medieval and Renaissance chronicles are transformed into heroic couplets. Its plot is so close to the events recounted in the chronicles that its sources can clearly be traced (to Buchanan's *History of Scotland* in particular). In *Ossian*, on the other hand, ancient Gaelic stories (mostly circulated orally in the Highlands and Western Isles) are converted into a rhythmic prose epic being frequently interrupted by digressions and tales.

*The Hunter* anticipates *Ossian* with its 'obscure' sources and its demonstration of Macpherson's growing interest and devotion to sentimental romance. Considering it was an attempt to 're-write' a heroic Scottish past and to give Scotland an epic, *The Highlander* also anticipates *Ossian*—they both take older works to adapt them into eighteenth-century epics with an added layer of romance; yet, their content, style and popularity show significant differences. What is, perhaps, their most striking difference is their treatment of 'defeat'. As Kristin Lindfield-Ott reminds us "*The Highlander* is pervaded by gleeful Unionism and pride

in newly united Britain” (Lindfield-Ott 2011, 142): the poem is set in both the Lowlands and the Highlands of ancient ‘Caledonia’. We are told that the Scottish senate meets in a city, which is the head of the country threatened to be invaded by the Scandinavians:

Prepar’d, at once, the city to invade,  
And conquer Caledonia in her head.  
His camp, for night the royal Sweno forms,  
Resolv’d with morn to use his Danish arms.  
(*The Highlander*, 528: 21-24)

These lines clearly imply that invading the city, which is the home of the senate and the King, would mean conquering Scotland. Thus, Lowlands are elevated over Highlands and Enlightenment over Primitivism. Moreover, the poem seems to display the curiosity towards Britishness through its pro-Union Highland celebration of military exploits. Therefore, it becomes more a presentation of victory than defeat. In other words, “victory and Britishness are to *The Highlander* what defeat and Scottishness are to the OC [*Ossian*]” (Lindfield-Ott 2011, 149).

All in all, both *The Hunter* and *The Highlander* are very much Scottish: set in ancient Caledonia, even set in the same period and written by a Scottish poet. The first mixes myth and tradition and provides insight into the inner-Scottish distinction between Highlands and Lowlands:

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! (*The Hunter*, 471: 1-8)

We are told that all the beauty and greatness that are missing in Edinburgh, still exist in the Highlands while Donald, as a Highlander, is presented as an ideal heroic Highland warrior:

in other words, Highlands are mythicized and are preferred to the anglicized Lowlands. Thus, the poem can clearly be seen as an expression of eighteenth-century attitudes to Scottishness and Englishness; one, where Macpherson presents himself as anti-English and against the Union.

In *The Highlander*, as mentioned earlier, England is not pictured as the enemy; instead, it highlights that the Danes are the common British enemy and the inevitability of war is presented as being in the past. That is to say, by focusing on history (or, tradition)—struggles against Scandinavians and Romans—Macpherson refrains from referring to the eighteenth-century conflicts at home. By doing so, he seems to encourage peace in traditional Scotland—one, which could only be achieved by the acceptance of Union. What relates *The Highlander* to *Ossian* is its portrayal of bardic Scotland, where memories are kept alive in verse:

Harmonious bards exalt 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. (*The Highlander*, 573: 294-98)

### **Circles and Need-fire**

Macpherson explains that according to Celtic belief “the element of fire, and above all, the Sun, which is the source of fire, were objects in which the soul of the world seemed most manifestly to exert itself (Macpherson 1771, 175); therefore, the Spirit of the Sun (Grian-Ais) was considered the most significant of the ‘Aise’ and it was peculiarly honoured in Caledonia (Macpherson 1771, 169). Even though his sources regarding this belief seems to be vague, Macpherson explains, in detail, the location of the circles of stones, located at a place named

'Slia Grian-Ais' (the plain of the spirit of the sun).<sup>36</sup> He claims this place was used as a worship site for the sun by the ancients:

Concerning the use to which these rude fabrics were anciently converted there remains not the vestige of a tradition in that country; but the name which the place bears, demonstrates that they were erected in honour of the Sun. (Macpherson 1771, 170)

John Macpherson states that Roman ruins discovered in the eighteenth century provide evidence of sun-worship among Celtic nations:

That the Caledonians, as well as other Celtic nations, worshipped the Sun under the name of Grannius, admits of no doubt. An inscription not many years since dug out of the ruins of the Roman prætenture between the firths of Forth and Clyde, is a demonstration that the sun was one of the deities of Caledonia. (John Macpherson 1768, 286)

He also emphasizes that the stone circles mentioned by Macpherson-Ossian, were used as a worship site of the Pictish Druids:

The circles of stones so often mentioned by Ossian, and so frequent in the northern Ebudes, were the works of the Pictish Druids, and though, simple in their construction, are not unworthy of the attention of the curious. They were the temples in which the old heathenish priests, employed by our ancestors in the service of their idols, performed the most solemn offices of their superstition. There are many of these temples to be met in the Eastern Ebuda of the Ptolomy, now called the Isle of Skye. In the language of the country they are usually called Druidical houses; and though the inhabitants have but a very confused idea of Druidism, still they agree on calling the circles holy places, and sometimes give them the name of temples. (John Macpherson 1768, 286)<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> A place between Strathspey and Badenoch, two districts of Inverness. A map of Scotland, showing Badenoch and its surroundings is included in chapter 5.

<sup>37</sup> It should be pointed out, however, that there is no evidence that this is the case in reality.

He finds the situations of these 'temples' romantic,<sup>38</sup> quite similar to the image drawn by Ossianic poetry:

The scene is frequently melancholy and wild, the prospect is extensive but not diversified. A fountain and the noise of distant river were always esteemed requisite as neighbours for those seats of dark and enthusiastic religion. (John Macpherson 1768, 288)

Attention is drawn to an interesting point made by Macpherson who comes to the conclusion that these circular stones standing only in plains were artificial eminences raised for the Bel-tein<sup>39</sup> celebrations, which required the presence of rocks. It is hard to imagine that these stones were erected specifically for the Beltein (today, Beltane) festival by the believers, as they must antedate even the ancient Gàidhealteachd by millennia. However, it is likely that people were impressed by these 'otherworldly' stones and thought it was appropriate to use them as a worship site.

According to the superstition, on the first of May every year, the believers had to light fire on a rock in honour of the sun, "giving to that luminary the title of DAY, and the *light of heaven* and avoiding to call him by his proper name, GRIAN" (Macpherson 1771, 172).<sup>40</sup> 'Fire of the rock' also known as the 'Bel-tein' was celebrated as a festival in order to welcome the advent of the sun and the fire kindled is known as need-fire. Frazer explains:

The history of the custom can be traced from the early Middle Ages, when it was denounced by the Church as a heathen superstition, down to the first half of the nineteenth century,

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<sup>38</sup> He states that he saw several stone circles in the Western isles of Scotland (possibly besides the ones in the Isle of Skye) as well as Stonehenge (John Macpherson 1786, 288).

<sup>39</sup> "Bel-tein is a combination of *Bel*, a rock; and *Tein*, fire. The first day of May is called *La Bel-tein* or the day of the fire of the rock" (Macpherson 1771, 172 [footnote]).

<sup>40</sup> Sceptics have occasionally pointed out that '*grian*' in Gaelic is feminine whereas Macpherson refers to the word in male form. In *Carthon*, he even compares Fingal and his men to the sun of heaven: "When thou, sun of heaven, shalt fail! if thou shalt fail, thou mighty light! if thy brightness is for a season, like Fingal; our fame shall survive thy beams" (*Carthon: A Poem*, PO 129).

when it was still occasionally practised in various parts of Germany, England, Scotland, and Ireland. [...]. The usual occasion for performing the rite was an outbreak of plague or cattle-disease, for which the need-fire was believed to be an infallible remedy. [...] The regular method of producing the need-fire was by friction of two pieces of wood; it might not be struck by flint and steel. (Frazer 1994 [1890], 638-39)

Branches of mountain-ash were decked with heath in order to light the first fire, i.e. the need-fire, which was also called the 'forced' or 'elementary' fire. Once it was lit, young men from different districts were expected to carry a part of the wood from the fire to their respective villages. These celebrations lasted in various places until the eighteenth century, possibly allowing Macpherson to witness rituals as he gives a detailed description of the area, which indicates he possibly had spent time there:

The river Spey, which is there deep and rapid, borders this heath on the south; and a chain of craggy mountains, in the form of a half moon, interspersed with precipices and a few naked trees, confines in the North. It is entered towards the West by a narrow pass formed by the near approach of the Spey and the mountains; and deep woods anciently skirted it on the eastern side. (Macpherson 1771, 169-70)

Nonetheless, it should be noted that Macpherson is inclined to find all these superstitions unnecessary and ridiculous. He argues that 'Grian-ais' is not a god of the ancient Caledonians, since it was unacceptable for a bard to treat him with so little respect in a poem which he quotes:

When Grian-ais sleeps, wrapt in his cloud, a sudden frost comes on all his wings.—He struggles, loudly roars [...]. (Macpherson 1771, 176)

Yet, he eventually acknowledges the intelligence that might be residing in the sun:

But if the intelligence who resided in the Sun, and who was peculiarly honoured by an unmixed branch of the Celtæ, could not, in their opinion, extricate his wings from the effects of a

frosty evening, we may justly conclude, that the spirits placed in less dignified objects of nature, were actually what they were called, AISE, or feeble shadows. (Macpherson 1771, 177)

Even so, these 'intelligences' did not have a place in Macpherson's idealized Celtic world, for it was not a fairyland or a world of giants, witches, monsters and magicians. Instead, it was the land of noble warriors and heroic deeds that did not involve praying to the spirits or a god and holding rituals.

## **Second Sight**

Perhaps among the most popular and widespread elements of Celtic history — and of course the belief in it is not restricted to Celts — we find the Seers or prophets. Some of these people have the complete gift of 'second sight', whereas some have a limited ability; which allows them to see what is going to happen to an individual in dreams. People who possess a straightforward second sight, on the other hand, do not need any aid to have a vision — they can see at random times and places, usually against their will. The Seers fear their gift and people around them do so too, as they are afraid of hearing bad news about themselves. It is also believed that they even have the ability to see their own 'doppelgänger' or 'other self'. Someone seeing his own ghost foretells his imminent death. The way the ghost or the person in his vision appears to the Seer indicates what is to take place — if the subject is in a coffin or wearing-grave clothes, it means death is very close; if he is wearing regular clothes, then he will live for a while longer; and when the vision actually occurs, the appearance would be repeated in detail. At times, the prophet can be haunted by an apparition, but can never reveal whose spectre it is. In his *Introduction* Macpherson too, points to this belief:



[...] The souls of the departed, among the Celtæ, retaining a warm affection for their friends, were transiently seen in the hour of peril, upon the near approach of death. (Macpherson 1773, 374)

Ossianic ghosts visiting their friends, lovers and relatives in order to warn them of the approaching danger or death are illustrative of this. For instance, Calmar's ghost appearing to his friend Connal informing him of the danger Cuchullin is in or Trenmor's ghost visiting Ossian giving him the news of war.<sup>41</sup>

Macpherson refers to the belief of 'second sight' as ridiculous in a note to the fifth book of *Fingal*, expressing his scepticism:

Allad is plainly a druid: he is called the son of the rock, from his dwelling in a cave; and the circle of stones here mentioned is the pale of the druidical temple. He is here consulted as one who had a supernatural knowledge of things; from the druids, no doubt, came the ridiculous notion of the second sight, which prevailed in the highlands and isles. (*Fingal: Fifth Book*, PO n.37, 433 [M])

However, it is still possible to find traces of this Gaelic tradition underlying the classical attributes of his work drawn from his academic education. For instance, Macpherson claims that people used to believe that ghosts of the deceased bards would appear to those who will fall and sing for them for three nights before their deaths. This would occur near the place where their tomb is to be after death round an insubstantial figure, which represents the body of the person who is going to die (*Temora: Book Seventh*, PO 500, n.40 [M]):

Joy meet the soul of Cathmor: his voice was heard on Moi-lena.  
The bard gave his song to Cairbar: he travels on the wind. My  
form is in my father's hall, like the gliding of a terrible light,  
which winds thro' the desert, in a stormy night. No bard shall be  
wanting at thy tomb, when thou art lowly laid. The sons of song  
love the valiant. Cathmor, thy name is a pleasant gale. The  
mournful sounds arise! On Lubar's field there is a voice! Louder  
still ye shadowy ghosts! the dead were full of fame. Shrilly swells

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<sup>41</sup> Chapter 4 provides a full account of Ossianic ghosts.

the feeble sound. The rougher blast alone is heard!—Ah, soon is  
Cathmor low.

(*Temora: Book Seventh*, PO 257-58)<sup>42</sup>

Even though the superstition seems to be Macpherson's own invention, one cannot help but notice the similarity of this to the Seer's 'other self'. Besides, according to popular belief, the return of the dead was not that uncommon. The deceased would usually come back to reveal secrets and give good advice; again, much like Ossianic ghosts. One tradition was to put the plant 'mòthan' (trailing pearlwort) above the door to keep away the spirits of the dead returning; another custom was to place a drink of water near the corpse just before the funeral in case the deceased returns (Black 2005, 265).

Black confirms the belief suggesting that when a person is about to die, especially if his death will be a violent one, his wraith or phantom is seen by people having the second sight. He gives the example of an incident which takes place in the island of Lismore in the beginning of the nineteenth century, where the minister (Rev. John Stewart) sees the fetch of a man soon before his funeral (Black 2005, 258). A similar event takes place in Caolas, Tiree, where a man, upon seeing his sister's ghost passes away. The story says that the man saw his own phantom three or four times as well (Black 2005, 259). In *The Folklore of the Scottish Highlands*, Ross explains that spectres of the living are not the same as the ghosts proper and are parts of different supernatural phenomena (Ross 1990, 39 [1976]). She goes on to say that there are several examples of this gift of 'second sight', which constitutes an important

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<sup>42</sup> Carril is the bard who sang the funeral elegy at the tomb of Cairbar (in the second book of *Temora*) and here he passes on the news of Cathmor's death to Cairbar's ghost who visits the hero. Towards the end of their conversation he foretells the death of Cathmor by listing signs of death according to the traditions of the time.

feature of Celtic societies, going back to the age of Fionn, whose magic power of seeing things is related in early Irish tales (Ross 1990, 39 [1976]).<sup>43</sup>

The gift of these people was not limited to the world of the living as they could also see ghosts of the dead: the literal meaning of the Gaelic name, *dá shealladh*, is ‘two sights’ which might stand for the ability to see both worlds (Black 2005, 248). It is also common to hear such tales where apparitions from the world of the dead punish the living (Black 2005, 250). Martin Martin tells of an experience of his regarding second sight, he came across in Lewis, in *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland* (c. 1695), in great detail:

A man [...] is much haunted by a spirit, appearing in all points like to himself; and he asks many impertinent questions of the man when in the fields, but speaks not a word to him at home, though he seldom misses to appear to him every night in the house, but to no other person [...]; the following day the same spirit appeared to him in the fields, and beat him severely, so as to oblige him to keep his bed for the space of fourteen days after. (Martin 1884, 316)

An account of spirits from Martin’s book goes:

There were spirits also that appeared in the shape of women, horses, swine, cats, and some like fiery balls, which would follow men in the fields; but there has been but few instances of these for forty years past.

These spirits used also to form sounds in the air, resembling those of a harp, pipe, crowing of a cock, and of the grinding of querns: and sometimes they have heard voices in the air by night, singing Irish songs; the words of which songs of my acquaintance still retain. One of them resembled the voice of a woman who had died some time before; and the song related to her state in the other world. These accounts I had from persons of as great integrity as any are in the world. (Martin 1884, 334-35)

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<sup>43</sup> According to an Irish legend, Fingal had the power to see the future by simply sucking his thumb: “Then Fionn began to chew his thumb, from which he always derived knowledge of the future, and by his magic power he saw clearly a great and terrible warrior riding fiercely towards the fort, and Fionn knew that unless he could be stopped before crossing a certain ford, they must all die, for they had been brought to Lis-na-Keeran only to be slain by their treacherous host; and unless the warrior was killed and his blood sprinkled on the Fenian knights, they must remain fixed on the wooden benches for ever” (Wilde 1887/*Fenian Knights* par. 3).

It has been observed that people with the second sight have a peculiar look about their eyes. For example they would not look people straight in the face, always looking up (Black 2005, 245). There is a constant melancholy in their nature, most probably caused by the visions of deaths and funerals they have. Apart from that, they are said to be the most temperate people, living the simplest life, eating simple foods in moderate amounts.

No matter how confusing or jumbled the traditions and prophecies of the Seer are, their powers have influenced the society of the Highlands, causing a great and lasting impact on their minds. It is easy to imagine that Macpherson could also be inspired by these traditions, like most of Celtic society. According to Ross:

The preoccupation with death and all its trappings is very typical of the Celts and goes right back to the ancient widespread cult of the dead and the worship of graves and the ancestors. It is also very much a reflection of the Celtic passion for the tabulation of everything, and listing all the things in a fit manner; nothing was left to happen as it would; everything must be explicable and predictable. (Ross 1996, 42)

Therefore, even though Macpherson affects not to be a believer in second sight, he certainly found ideas about second sight current in his native culture in the eighteenth century; and writing in the eighteenth century he applies some of these ideas to his own imagined world set in the third century.

## **Conclusions**

Even though Macpherson presents himself as unsympathetic of the witches, giants and magicians of the Gaelic tradition in his dissertation to *Temora*, his pre-Ossianic poetry (*The Hunter* [1756] in particular) plainly draws on such material and motifs like the revenge of the fairies and the enchanted fawn. In *A Dissertation* (1763), he dismisses such materials as the

product of the fifteenth century and claims that the legends of Fionn that introduce him as a giant, telling of his encounters with other kings as enormous as he is, are distasteful:

Every stanza, nay almost every line, affords striking proofs, that they cannot be three centuries old. Their allusions to the manners and customs of the fifteenth century, are so many, that it is matter of wonder to me, how any one could dream of their antiquity. They are entirely writ in that romantic taste, which prevailed two ages ago. Giants, enchanted castles, dwarfs, palfreys, witches and magicians form the whole circle of the poet's invention. The celebrated *Fion* could scarcely move from one hillock to another, without encountering a giant, or being entangled in the circles of a magician. Witches, on broomsticks, were continually hovering round him, like crows; and he had freed enchanted virgins in every valley in Ireland. In short, *Fion*, great as he was, passed a disagreeable life. Not only had he to engage all the mischiefs in his own country, foreign armies invaded him, assisted by magicians and witches, and headed by kings, as tall as the mainmast of a first rate. It must be owned, however, that *Fion* was not inferior to them in height. [...] The property of such a monster as this *Fion*, I should never have disputed with any nation. (*A Dissertation, PO* [1763] 217-18)

So many Irish legends, indeed, picture Fionn as a feared giant who fights equally scary monsters and who can shape or change landscapes—such as the formation of the lake Lough Neagh in Northern Ireland:

WONDERFUL tales are related about the formation of Lough Neagh; and the whole country round abounds with traditions. One of them affirms that the great Fionn Ma-Coul, being in a rage one day, took up a handful of earth and flung it into time sea; and the handful was of such a size that where it fell it formed the Isle of Man, and the hollow caused by its removal became the basin of the present Lough Neagh. (Wilde 1887/*Lough Neagh* par. 1)

Besides, in the legend telling of Fionn's discovery of his magic power of sight, he is captured by a giant and made to cook dinner for him:

It happened one time when he was quite a youth that he was taken prisoner by a one-eyed giant, who at first was going to kill him, but then he changed his mind and sent him to the kitchen to

mind the dinner. Now there was a great and splendid salmon broiling on the fire, and the giant said--

"Watch that salmon till it is done; but if a single blister rise on the skin you shall be killed." Then the giant threw himself down to sleep while waiting for the dinner. (Wilde 1887/ *Fenian Knights* par. 7)

Being well aware and informed about the Gaelic tradition that he grew up in, it seems that Macpherson knowingly omitted some of its elements in his 'adaptations' of Ossianic poetry. He clearly believed that some of the Ossianic material current in the eighteenth century was 'corrupt' and had lost its purity, over the centuries. Besides, it is likely that he had reservations about presenting the traditions of the Highlands to the eighteenth-century audience—it seems he was concerned about being regarded as a 'savage Highlander' himself while attempting to demonstrate that this notion (generally held by the English) was in fact misguided. As Moore remarks, the *Poems* "offer a non-threatening version of Gaelic culture, one that stresses the fact that the glories about which it speaks are gone forever" (Moore 2003, 28). This is evident in the lines of *Fragment VIII*:

Such, Fingal! were thy words; but thy words I hear no more.  
Sightless I sit by thy tomb. I hear the wind in the wood; but no  
more I hear my friends. The cry of the hunter is over. The voice of  
war is ceased. (*Fragment VIII, PO 18*)

Therefore, it can be observed that while Macpherson's early poetry is built on native tradition, in his Ossianic writings Gaelic material is 'adapted' according to a more 'refined taste'; so that, the fairy motif seems to have been converted to that of ghosts in his *Ossian*.

The 'fairy hill' becomes the 'airy hall of Fingal':

The aged oak bends over the stream. It sighs with all its moss.  
The withered fern whistles near, and mixes, as it waves, with  
Ossian's hair. Strike the harp and raise the song: be near, with all  
your wings, ye winds. Bear the mournful sound away to Fingal's  
airy hall. Bear it to Fingal's hall, that he may hear the voice of his  
son; the voice of him that praised the mighty. (*Berrathon, PO 197*)

As deGateno has pointed out “by combining history and legend with nationalistic fervour, Macpherson rediscovers [...] ancient traditions” (deGateno 1989, 16) in such a way that myth and tradition collides. *The Hunter* achieves this by creating a distinction between Highlands and Lowlands, mythical and traditional, while blending epic and romance. This is much more evident in *The Highlander*, which is based on traceable sources, where Macpherson constantly evokes the past in the mythical setting of ancient Caledonia—mentioning great battles which took place in the ancient past, but not in the present of the poem, in an attempt to emphasize his wish for peace. *Ossian*, as distinct from his earlier works, embodies myth in its structure—that is, in its reinvention of ancient Scotland: ghosts of the past are everywhere. Therefore, if we consider the first as more ‘myth-inspired’ attempt in preserving the past and the latter as ‘history-inspired’, *Ossian* can be viewed as the product of Macpherson’s evolved method in achieving this goal: a combination of both myth and tradition, fused together according to eighteenth-century literary and political expectations.

This kind of ‘adaptation’ certainly is a proof of his improved literary skills, but more importantly, it shows evidence of his consciousness regarding the integration of the Highlands into the rest of Britain: with this realization, he thought of his collection of Gaelic poetry as one last attempt to restore the Highland spirit, the ‘uncorrupted’ form of Gaelic Scotland. Ironically, it seems as though he was also caught up in the same ‘corruption’ process during his Ossianic ‘adaptation’ attempts. The permanent damage to Highland culture due to communication with the south, feared by Macpherson, is expressed in his dissertation to *Fingal*:

The genius of the highlanders has suffered a great change within these few years. The communication with the rest of the island is open, and the introduction of trade and manufactures has destroyed that leisure which was formerly dedicated to hearing

and repeating the poems of ancient times. Many have now learned to leave their mountains, and seek their fortunes in a milder climate; and though a certain *amor patriæ* may sometimes bring them back, they have, during their absence, imbibed enough of foreign manners to despise the customs of their ancestors. Bards have been long disused [...] When property is established, the human mind confines its views to the pleasure it procures. It does not go back to antiquity, or look forward to succeeding ages. The cares of life increase, and the actions of other times no longer amuse. (*The Antiquity &c. of the Poems of Ossian*, PO [1763] 51)

Once again, it seems that Macpherson associated himself with his 'creation', Ossian; like the ancient bard, he saw himself as the last person to pass on the memory of a 'greater' society to the eighteenth-century civilization. Macpherson saw the Gaelic ballads as the remains of an ancient tradition (that of the Scottish Highlands) which he wished to restore. In order to achieve this, he felt he had to skilfully hide or mask the more vulgar elements of Gaelic tradition, which still manifest themselves in between the lines of *The Poems of Ossian*, in an attempt to meet the expectations of the contemporary audience.<sup>44</sup> Looking through the eyes of an ancient bard, Macpherson felt free to, or could not help but, create his own stories to a certain extent, using traditional names and an 'ancient style': he shared a common belief in the Highlands that "Ossian's poems were distorted by the succession of bards who had recited or recreated his poetry" (Stafford 1988, 83).

In fact, Anne Grant who worked with a Gaelic scholar named Ewan Macpherson, who accompanied James Macpherson for part of his Highland tour in 1760, supports the idea that oral transfer deformed Ossianic ballads. She concurs with the necessity of restoring the fragmented relics of ancient poetry to their original form of 'purity':

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<sup>44</sup> In fact, even the name 'Ossian' originates from a Gaelic legend. According to the story, Ossian's mother, Sadb, was changed into a deer by a rival goddess and thus, her son was named Ossian, which means 'fawn' (Squire 1905, 208).



Something no doubt has been added, and much subtracted; and this latter it was necessary to do, in justice to the old Bard, to whom his successors had appended many extravagant and grotesque ornaments. (Grant 1803, 364)

She was one of the contributors to Mackenzie's *Report on Ossian* alongside Andrew Gallie who helped Macpherson with the Gaelic materials for *Fingal* after the latter's return to Badenoch. Gallie expresses his opinion on the task of the translator when he writes in a letter to Mackintosh which appears in Mackenzie's *Report*:

It was, and I believe still is well known, that the broken poems of Ossian, handed down from one generation to another, got corrupted. In the state of the Highlands, and its language, this evil, I apprehend, could not be avoided; and I think great credit is due, in such a case, to him who restores a work of merit to its original purity. ("Gallie to Mackintosh" Mackenzie 1805, 44)<sup>45</sup>

These remarks further reinforce the observation that Macpherson saw himself as the reviver of the corrupt remnants of an ancient tradition—the bardic tradition—and thus, the identification between the 'translator' and the 'actual poet, i.e. the bard' becomes more obvious:

Like Ossian and the bards, Macpherson heard the 'voices' of heroic age in the local recitations of Highland poetry. Just as Ossian knew that age of his father had passed, so Macpherson was aware that the traditional heroic verse was in danger of extinction. (Stafford 1988, 110)

In other words, similar to the legendary bard, Ossian who spent his declining years recreating the heroic acts of the heroes, by collecting Ossianic poetry Macpherson attempted to preserve these heroic verses in memory of Ossian and his heroes. While doing this, it

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<sup>45</sup> Macpherson turns to Gallie for assistance when attempting to put together an epic whole from the mixture of material he gathered from the lips of Highland speakers. Stafford suspects Gallie was more impressed by Macpherson's imagination and his own contributions to the 'ancient' poetry rather than the genuine Gaelic material (Stafford 1988, 124) as Gallie seems to be very impressed by Macpherson's creativity in correcting the detached parts of his collected material (Mackenzie 1805, 34).

seems that Macpherson tried to follow tradition with regard to the style, language and subject of the bardic conventions. However, not being able to separate himself from his Ossian “Macpherson identified too closely with the last of the heroes and, as the erosion of the ancient Gaelic language and culture accelerated, he seemed just as much a last Celtic bard as Ossian himself” (Stafford 1994, 102). His ambitious gesture, however, was not enough to stop the changes in the Highlands once the Highlanders were forced to become a part of the United Kingdom.

Just like Macpherson, the Ossianic supernatural world is left in conflict: on one hand, his ideals of preserving Scottish folk belief and loyalty to the native Gaelic culture, while on the other, the appeal of polished society. Therefore, *Ossian*, as sentimental literature, contains modern elements of the eighteenth century. Ossianic heroes possess a combination of classical and modern virtues that enable them to display respect for their past and traditional values, as hunter-warriors who are men of peace; they represent a unique breed—the Ossianic ‘Daoine sidhe’.



## Chapter 4: The Returning Dead in *Ossian*

### Introduction

Having observed that Macpherson tried to suppress Gaelic superstitions and beliefs, as much as he could, in the previous chapter, the focus, here, will be on the manner he attempted to achieve this. *Ossian's* 'preferred' supernatural beings were suitable to the sublimity of the story-line because they did not interfere with the presentation of other human characters and their actions, as the degree of what was considered to be incredible was lower than other kinds of poetical machinery, like that of Homer. Yet, his is a godless world, a feature which might have both fascinated and frightened his contemporaries. Even so, it is a world filled with spirits and ghosts. Therefore, an analysis of the reappearance of the dead in the poems is important simply for the reason that this might reveal and be a portrayal of Macpherson's possible contemporary concerns, superstitions, and popular beliefs of his society. To achieve this, it will be crucial to examine how ghosts and spirits are represented in the *Poems* and why they are chosen to be so widely used by Macpherson-Ossian. Macpherson wished his *Ossian* to be seen as among the world's best epics, i.e. Homer, Milton and Virgil (Stafford 1988, 138), and edited his material using these as models, to a certain extent, as he openly presents the similarities and the differences between these and his poems.<sup>46</sup> Thus, comparing the treatment of ghosts and spirits in such classical epics to that in *Ossian* would help understand better Macpherson's process of adapting his material in accordance with the 'realities' of the eighteenth-century audience.

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<sup>46</sup> He also published a translation of Homer's *Iliad* in 1773.

## Ghostly Apparitions

A ghost can be defined as a bodiless soul or spirit of a deceased person. It is a common belief held by people from various countries and cultures that ghosts can be seen if and when they haunt certain locations or be seen by people with whom they used to associate before or at the time of death. In *The Poems of Ossian*, ghosts are generally described as thin airy forms—and sometimes with an imperfect form. J. S. Smart, beautifully defines Ossianic ghosts as “disembodied, though personified, fragments of melancholic memory which float across the imaginative present of the poems” (Smart 1973, 24). They appear to people they knew, loved, cared about, had a special connection with or feared in life, “but their communication with this world can only ever be shadowy” (Manning 1998, 143). The departed spirits, in the poems, do have common features such as having a feeble voice, a weak arm and a knowledge that is more than the humans may possess. These visits are precise, lasting only for a few moments; conversations, if present, are short and the language of ghosts is difficult to understand, adding to the solemn gloom of these scenes, which suits Blair’s secret of achieving sublimity, which in his own words, is “to say great things in a few, or in plain words: for every superfluous decoration degrades a sublime idea. The mind rises and swells, when a lofty description or sentiment is presented to it, in its native form” (Blair, *PO* [1763] 394).

Apart from the general mentioning of ghosts and spirits as the souls of dead heroes or enemies, the poet makes use of their appearances more specifically by giving details of such encounters with several heroes. In *The Poems of Ossian*, which includes twenty-three poems (some with several chapters or books), there are fifteen significant instances where a character is visited by a ghost, which gives him/her advice, foretells the coming of a battle, warns about enemy activity or mourns the deaths of heroes. Sometimes, they do not speak at

all but their looks pass on information to that person. In the discussion about the 'returning dead' in *Ossian*, there are certain points that have to be mentioned. The names of ghosts or spirits, the way they look and they are introduced, who they appear to and the reason they come into sight are very important, as these features are intended to convey symbols, beliefs, traditions or conventions of the time.

Below is a table of ghostly appearances and the characters that are visited by them.

The name of the character they appear to is provided next to the name of the ghost:

<b>Ghostly Visitor</b>	<b>The Visited</b>	<b>Poem/Book/Page no.</b>
Crugal	Connal	<i>Fingal/Book II: 65</i>
Everallin	Ossian	<i>Fingal/Book IV: 84</i>
Agandecca	Fingal	<i>Fingal/Book IV: 84</i>
Erragon	Warriors	<i>The Battle of Lora: 122</i>
Aldo	Lorma	<i>The Battle of Lora: 122</i>
Moina	Clessámmor	<i>Carthon: 133</i>
Calmar	Cuchullin	<i>The Death of Cuchullin: 137</i>
Cuchullin	Nathos	<i>Dar-thula: 141</i>
Colmar	Calthon	<i>Calthon and Colmal: 173</i>
Cairbar	Cathmor	<i>Temora/Book IV: 257</i>
Fillan	Fingal	<i>Temora/Book VII: 279</i>
Cathmor	Sul-malla	<i>Temora/Book VIII: 291</i>
Trenmor <sup>47</sup>	1. Ossian & Oscar 2. Ossian 3. Oscar	<i>Cathlin of Clutha: 295</i> <i>Sul-malla of Lumon: 303</i> <i>War of Caros: 112</i>

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<sup>47</sup> Only the spirit of Trenmor appears more than once to different characters.

Ossianic ghosts are gentle and noble; yet, the news they present to the characters might not always be as gentle as their appearance. They carry out the same pursuits they used to do before they passed away: ghosts of the bards keep on singing, whereas those of the departed heroes ride on the wind and carry their bows. Connal explains the actions of spirits to Cuchullin in the second book of *Fingal*: “Ghosts fly on clouds and ride on winds, said Connal’s voice of wisdom. They rest together in their caves, and talk of mortal men” (*Fingal: Book II, PO 66*). Just as they have varying duties and responsibilities even in the afterlife, the reasons they appear to the mortals differ too.

### **Ghosts appearing on a meteor**

The first ghost to be seen is that of Crugal in the second book of *Fingal*. He appears to Connal, the King of Togorma, and a very close friend of Cuchullin, beneath an aged tree, near a flowing stream. His face is compared to the setting moon, while his robes are “of the clouds of the hill” (*Fingal: Book II, PO 65*) and his eyes look like two decaying flames. He has a dark wound on his chest. He emerges from the hill on a dark-red stream of fire (a meteor), and sits on a beam. His image is dim and he is in tears as he puts his pale hand over the hero and speaks with a feeble voice. After Connal asks him why he looks so sad, he informs him of the danger lying ahead—he wants the hero to let Cuchullin know that the next battle will be lost and the sons of Erin will fall. The fact that the spirit appears wounded and arrives on a meteor spreading red light is a symbol of death and disaster. Even so, the language of the poet is understated, attempting to attenuate the idea of horror as the ghost is about to disappear into nature.

Another such example is observed when the ghost of Calmar, who is a mighty warrior and son of Matha, lord of Lara, appears to Cuchullin in *The Death of Cuchullin*. He emerges near burning oaks after a battle; his hair disordered and loose. His wound is dark, but still “joy sits darkly on his face” (*The Death of Cuchullin*, PO 137). The ghost comes on a beam of red light in a cloudy night, inviting Cuchullin to his cave, which signifies the danger the hero is in.

One of the most striking appearances of a ghost is of Fillan in the seventh book of *Temora*. He is shown sympathy and is welcomed. Fingal sees the ghost of his son, Fillan, above the cave where his body lies. He comes into sight in a dusky, windy night. Even though he is also said to appear in blasts, his ‘lovely form’ distinguishes the spirit from others: “The blast, at times, rolled him together: but the lovely form returned again” (*Temora: Book Seventh*, PO 279). Despite this, he is mournful, has long dark hair of mist and slowly bends his eyes as he asks Fingal if he has already been forgotten, so soon after his death. His voice reaches the hero on the rock of Cormul.

“Sleeps the husband of Clatho? Dwells the father of the fallen in rest? Am I forgot in the folds of darkness; lonely in the season of dreams?” (*Temora: Book Seventh*, PO 279)

The father immediately answers that he can never forget his son; his anger rises and he bangs his spear on his shield to give the sign of war. It is at this moment that the poet mentions the mournful sound of the harps. Ossian’s harp is a powerful symbol throughout the poems. The poet mentions the instrument and its soothing sound as a representation of a significant moment or an event. For instance, the sound of the harp is heard when a disaster has been, or is about to be faced, or when a victory has been won. Therefore, it marks the importance of this incident.



### Ghosts foretelling a battle

In the fourth book of *Temora*, Cairbar's ghost visits his brother, Cathmor, in a dream. He is half visible to the hero, from his low-hung cloud. There is joy on his face, since he heard the elegy Cairbar sang for him at his funeral, near his tomb (at the end of the second book).

A king is lowly laid: give thou his soul to the wind. He is the  
brother of Cathmor! open his airy hall. Let thy song be a stream of  
joy to Cairbar's darkened ghost. (*Temora: Book Second, PO 242*)

The ghost appears on a cloud sustained by a blast. Cathmor is happy to see his brother, but also questions his presence, which is a foretelling of war. He gets up from his rest and takes his spear as the ghost disappears through the oaks. Even though the hero has a hard time accepting the prediction of the Cairbar's spirit, he does not run away from fight, knowing the next one might be his last battle.

A good example of receiving a warning and an invitation to war from a ghost is seen in the poem, *Calthon and Colmal*, where Colmar's ghost visits his brother, Calthon. Colmar is killed by Colmar's father, Dunthalmo. The daughter is secretly in love with Calthon and helps him escape from Dunthalmo's prison, fleeing with him to Fingal. The ghost appears at night time before Ossian's army attacks the enemy, when everyone is asleep, except Calthon. His voice is feeble and his wounds are visible. He lets the hero know that Dunthalmo will dishonour Colmar and invites him to fight for his brother:

I lie pale beneath the rock of Lona. O let Calthon rise! the morning  
comes with its beams; and Dunthalmo will dishonour the fallen.  
(*Calthon and Colmal, PO 173*)

Another ghost, that comes to pass on the news of war, is Trenmor's in *Sul-malla of Lumon*. Ossian, himself, is visited by the ghost, which is without form and looks more like a shadow. Trenmor is the great grandfather of Fingal. He appears to Ossian in his dream near a stream

in Selma—the ghost seemed to hit the shield, which symbolizes battle as that is how heroes announce the coming battle according to the traditions of Ossian’s supposed age. Macpherson refers to this tradition many times in his notes, by stating that the sound of Ossian’s shield was a common signal of battle (*Lathmon, PO* n.27, 468). He also points out that “when a chief was determined to kill a person already in his power, it was usual to signify that his death was intended, by the sound of a shield struck with the blunt end of a spear; at the same time that a bard at a distance raised the *death-song*” (*Temora: Book First, PO* n.31, 483). In this occasion, the appearance of the ghost as carrying a shield might also stand as an invitation for Ossian to sing the ‘death-song’ when the time comes.

The ghost of Trenmor appears twice more in two different poems: *The War of Caros* and *Cathlin of Clutha*. In the first one, he visits Oscar, coming down from his hill. Oscar is the leader of the army fighting in the war of Caros and upon witnessing the setting meteors over the heath, while old oaks shake with blasts, he asks the ghosts of his fathers what the future holds. The ghost is supported by a cloud, has a dark face which is not well-formed and wears a robe of mist. His words were not heard properly as his voice was feeble but “they were dark as the tales of other times, before the light of the song arose” (*The War of Caros, PO* 112-13).

The third appearance of Trenmor is in a valley where both Ossian and Oscar see him. This is an interesting example, because in this case, heroes go to the hill of ghosts and Fingal allows their dreams to determine who takes control of the expedition. The ghost is tall and mighty as he was in life. There are blue hosts behind him, hardly seen through the mist. Although Ossian listens intently, he can only hear the whistling sound of the wind. Oscar comes to Ossian after his dream in joy, as he, now, knows his future is bright and he is the one picked to be in command. This specific incident sheds light on the fictional world

conjured up in the Ossianic poetry, by suggesting the importance of dreams in people's lives, and in turn, the significance of ghosts and ancestors. Even Fingal, who is believed to be the strongest of heroes and leaders, can leave certain decisions up to dreams. Moreover, the concept of 'the hill of ghosts' might have a foundation in the 'fairy hills' discussed in the previous chapter.

### **Ghosts in mourning**

The ghosts mentioned so far act as foretellers of war, challenge heroes, or give the sign of a danger that awaits the hero. Besides these, there are some that appear to grieve over the death of warriors. In *Dar-thula*, Cuchullin (the leader of Erin's army) appears to Nathos, the eldest son of Usnoth, who takes command of his uncle Cuchullin's army upon the arrival of his death. The ghost stalks the wall of Tura, with eyes of decayed flame, holding a spear of mist. His voice is like "hollow wind" as the "sighing of his breast is frequent" (*Dar-thula*, PO 141). It is a dark, cloudy night and the mist of the ghost makes the stars look even dimmer. Cuchullin's spirit tells the story of grief, which causes Nathos to be very sad. The presence of mist is emphasized here—it stands for sadness, mourning and gloom. It is what stops the light of the sun and stars from reaching people, bringing darkness and sorrow with itself.

One other ghost that mourns the death of many people, as well as the ones that are about to die, is the ghost of Agandecca, Fingal's lover—also Swaran's sister—who visits him near the river of Lena, in the fourth book of *Fingal*. She not only laments for her people, but also for the Lochlinners. The hero is resting by his shield when the ghost gains form in front of him. Her face is pale like the mist; she has dark tears on her cheeks and a robe of cloud. The fact that her spirit arrives from the ocean signifies good news for Fingal's army and also acts as a symbol of hope for reconciliation between the two kings (Fingal and Swaran), who

are about to have their final battle. However, her main concern is to express her sadness, which adds greatly to the sentimentality of the poem. It is very likely that Fingal's later actions in the battle are influenced by Agandecca's ghost as she might have led the king to an understanding and lasting resolution. Bysveen suggests that, indeed, "this silent plea for understanding and lasting reconciliation, published only eighteen years after the Battle of Culloden, might well have wider connotations" (Bysveen 1982, 124).

In the same poem, Everallin's ghost is seen by her husband, Ossian. She comes with the intention to warn Ossian to save their son, Oscar, who was attacked by the enemy. She comes in all her beauty and light, even though she had tears in her eyes. Her appearance is a very precise one, causing Ossian to take immediate action to go help his son—standing on a cloud without blasts and the emphasis on light instead of darkness or mists, symbolizes the pleasant outcome of her apparition—Oscar is relieved by his father.

### **Silent ghosts**

There is another instance where a ghost appears as a shiny figure, similar to Evirallin's, but does not deliver good news. Here, Macpherson aims to stress the importance of complementary opposites, also discussed in the first chapter ('Joy of Grief') and in the next section. In the eighth book of *Temora*, Cathmor (brother of Cairbar of Atha, who takes control of the army after Cairbar's death) is seen by Sul-malla—the daughter of King Conmor, who loves Cathmor and follows him in disguise as a young warrior into war—in the valley of Lona. Cathmor's ghost is a large, gleaming form who, like Cuchullin's ghost, stalks his place. Sul-malla rises in joy when she first sees the ghost but soon after sadness descends on her, as now she is sure that her beloved Cathmor passed away. Joy turning to grief, a common

theme in *The Poems of Ossian*, is exemplified here as one can see the clash of these two opposite feelings:

Her eyes are turned to the hill; again the stately form came down.  
She rose, in the midst of joy. He retired in mist. Gradual vanish  
his limbs of smook, and mix with the mountain-wind. Then she  
knew that he fell! "King of Erin art thou low!" Let Ossian forget  
her grief; it wastes the soul of age. (*Temora: Book Eighth, PO 291*)

Erragon's ghost, on the other hand, is seen as a dark figure with a cloudy face. He does not speak, yet, several warriors see him near his tomb, soon after his burial. Erragon is the king of Sora, a Scandinavian country, who falls in a battle described in *The Battle of Lora*. Upon rejecting the peace offer from Fingal, he declares war and is slain by Gaul, the son of Morni. His death, however, stops the war and songs of peace are sung by bards.

We laid Erragon in that tomb; and I raised the voice of grief: the  
clouds of night came rolling down, and the ghost of Erragon  
appeared to some. (*The Battle of Lora, PO 122*)

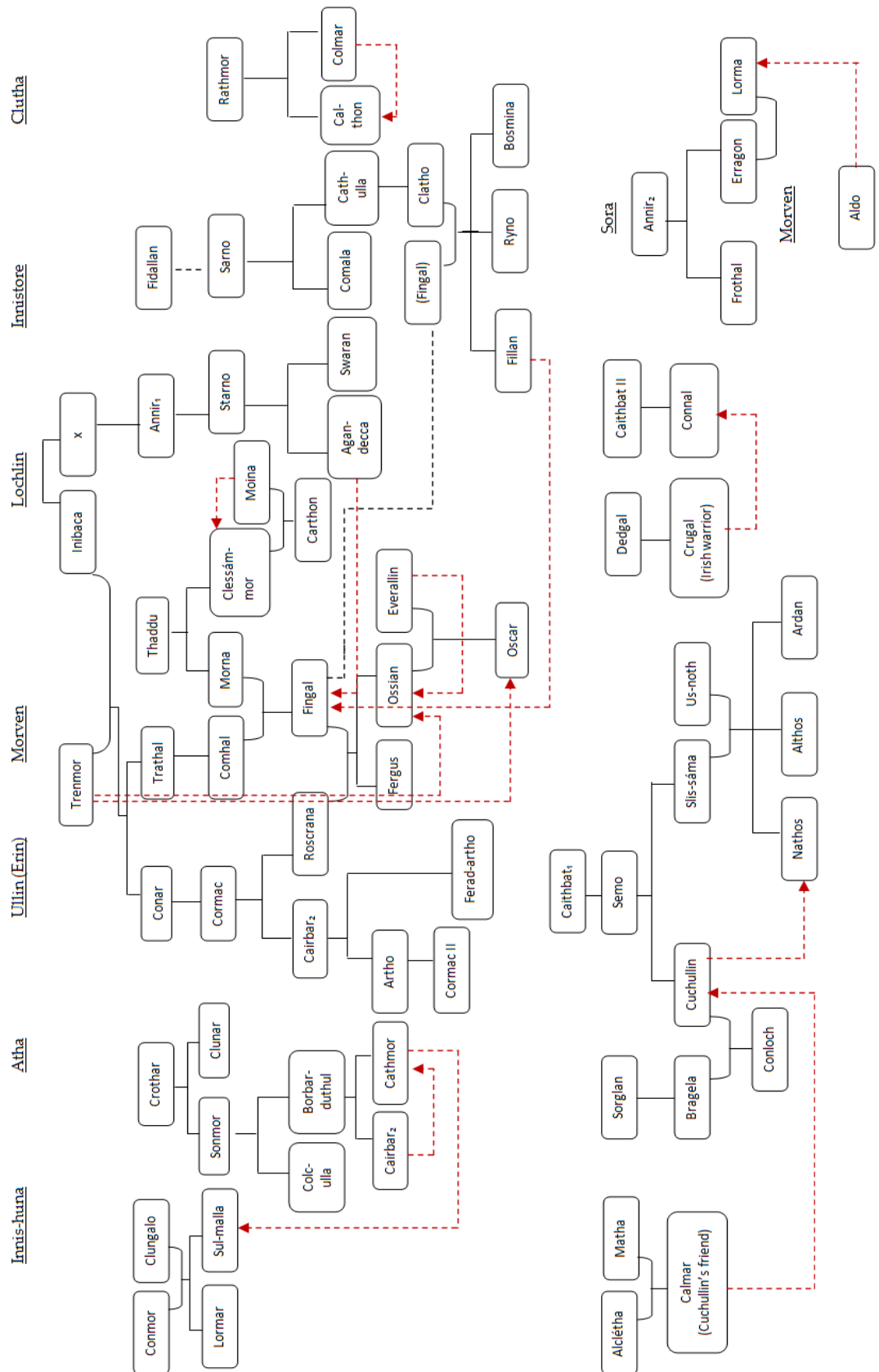
The ghost of Aldo appears to his beautiful wife, Lorma, on a rock, letting her know that her hero passed away. Again, he is said to have a thin, airy form that Lorma follows over the heath. She also dies, short after she finds Aldo's tomb. One cannot help but think that the ghost appears to her as a calling—an invitation to join him in death.

She came, she found her hero: her voice was heard no more: silent  
she rolled her sad eyes; she was pale as a watry cloud, that rises  
from the lake, to the beam of the moon.  
Few were her days on Cona: she sunk into the tomb: [...].  
(*The Battle of Lora, PO 123*)

Finally, the third and last female ghost mentioned in detail, is that of Moina in the poem, *Carthon*. She is Carthon's mother, who dies soon after she gives birth to him. Clessámmor sees her through the mist near Lara; she is said to resemble the new moon, which emphasizes her beauty. This is the only instance where a ghost appears among snowflakes. It

is very likely that snow stands for purity and innocence, as she receives praise from Fingal and the songs of his bards. Her unfortunate death brings sadness to everyone and that is why her ghost is called for:

Raise, ye bards, said the mighty Fingal, the praise of unhappy Moina. Call her ghost, with your songs, to our hills; that she may rest with the fair of Morven, the sun-beams of other days, and the delight of heroes of old. (*Carthon, PO 128*)



**Fig. 2.** A genealogical table of the Ossianic characters. Arrows indicate the ghostly appearances. (Caithbat<sub>1</sub> was originally from Skye, but was sent to Erin by Trathal).

## The Ossianic ghosts and the past

The other-worldly atmosphere in the poems feeds greatly on these ghostly appearances, while it also contributes to the balance of sentimentality and heroism. The *Poems* combine heroism with elegy, joy with grief, past with present, death with life, emphasizing, and constantly reminding the audience of the significance of complementary opposites. Most of the poems feed on the existence of dark and light, which stands for evil and good or happiness and sadness. Ghosts are described as being made of mist, or they are likened to mist, which covers the face of the sun, preventing its light from reaching the earth. In many instances, stars or the moon are said to look dimmer through the mist of a ghost:

His spear was a column of mist: the stars looked dim through his form. His voice was like hollow wind in a cave: and he told the tale of grief. The soul of Nathos was sad, like the sun in the day of mist, when his face is watry and dim. (*Dar-thula: A Poem*, PO 141)

The ghosts of Ardven pass through the beam, and shew their dim and distant forms. Comala is half unseen on her meteor; and Hidallan is sullen and dim, like the darkened moon behind the mist of night. (*The War of Caros*, PO 110)

The image of stars appearing dimmer has particularly influenced William Wordsworth as can clearly be seen in his *Effusion in the Pleasure-Ground on the Banks of the Bran, Near Dunkeld*:

What He—who, mid the kindred throng,  
Of Heroes that inspired his song,  
Doth yet frequent the hill of storms,  
The stars dim-twinkling through their forms! (*Effusion*, III, 1-4)

The passage from *Fingal: Book II* that inspired the above line of Wordsworth goes:

Son of Semo, replied the chief, the ghost of Crugal came from the cave of his hill. The stars dim-twinkled through his form; and his voice was like the sound of a distant stream. He is a messenger of death. He speaks of the dark and narrow house. (*Fingal: Book II*, PO 65).



Underlying the motif of dark against light is sadness and joy. The 'joy of grief' seen throughout the poems, also acts as an important constituent of Macpherson-Ossian's transcendent poetry. The characters either "covered grief with joy" (*The Battle of Lora*, PO 120) or joy rises in their face only to be covered with sadness again, continuously stressing the futility of life:

She thinks it is Aldo's tread, and joy rises in her face: but sorrow  
returns again, like a thin cloud on the moon. (*The Battle of Lora*,  
PO 122)

Perhaps, one of the best explanations of what joy of grief stands for can be seen in *The Death of Cuchullin*, where Carril says "the music was like the memory of joys that are past, pleasant and mournful to the soul" (*The Death of Cuchullin*, PO 136). However, above all, "The joy of grief belongs to Ossian, amidst his dark-brown years" (*Temora: Book Seventh*, PO 283).

The importance of the past remains dominant, as we see heroes seeking inspiration and guidance from their ancestors or past experiences. Needless to say, ghosts also, are part of one's past. The poet uses this type of machinery in order to meet the need of the supernatural in the epic, as well as, emphasizing the power and superiority of the past:

Come, ye dim ghosts of my fathers, and behold my deeds in war!  
I may fall; but I will be renowned like the race of the echoing  
Morven." (*The War of Caros: A Poem*, PO 113)

Considering this, it becomes possible to see Ossianic ghosts as representatives of the past—they may stand for previous mistakes and victories, also emphasizing the value of wisdom gained by experience. The superiority of past over present shows itself in an obvious way (Stafford 1988, 146). This is particularly evident in *The War of Caros*, where the aged father takes his own father's sword to execute his nameless son, who fails to achieve fame in war:

My son! go to Lamor's hall: there the arms of our fathers hang.  
Bring the sword of Garmállon; he took it from a foe. [...] He led

him to Garmállon's tomb. Lamor pierced the side of his son. (*The War of Caros: A Poem*, PO 112)

The fascination of past over present becomes so strong that it turns into a destructive force in this example and continues to exist throughout the poems. Although, it may not always be presented as obviously as in the poem above, upon careful investigation the significance of the past or the aged becomes apparent: we see parents outliving their children in many of the poems, such as Oscar dying before Ossian, Fillan before Fingal and so on.

Looking from another perspective, ghosts can be seen as decayed body forms, whereas old age stands for authority, control and knowledge. Even though the outcome of old age is desired and respected in all the poems, the physical decay cannot be denied and in many of the poems it is associated with approaching death:

Often have I fought, and often won in battles of the spear. But blind, and tearful, and forlorn I now walk with little men. O Fingal, with thy race of battle I now behold thee not. The wild roes feed upon the green tomb of the mighty king of Morven. Blest be thy soul, thou king of swords, thou most renowned on the hills of Cona! (*Fingal: Book II*, PO 79)

In this case, it is not only the death of one person in question but also, the death of a race; which according to Ossian, is glorious and has no match. As also pointed out by Nick Groom:

Ossian is the last of his race and keeps company only with the dead, with memories that remind him of the futility of his persistence: a living bard with dead characters and a dead audience, whose song seeks to summon the dead, whose song seeks to emulate nature, to become indistinguishable from the murmur of the breeze or the clatter of water, and whose dead are likewise indistinguishable from nature and song. (Groom 2002, 117)

The constant mentioning of ghosts in one way or another, may also suggest the poet's loneliness and liminality—not only his, but also the liminality of his surroundings seem to

be an important part of *Ossian's* success (Leerssen 1998, 7). Macpherson's Ossian lives in the midst of wild nature; he is aged and a survivor of his race, close to death. All these, point to his ultimate loneliness and isolation, where he is continuously in contact with ghosts of the past, sending messages from their world to ours. This is what brings him 'back to life' while he wants to bring back the years that have passed so quickly. Mists, clouds, waves that constitute a very large part of descriptions of nature, contribute to the melancholy present in the poems in no small way. Ghostly appearances are thrown in throughout the poems, alongside these dismal portrayals, completing the images of evanescence. Ossian is trapped in his memories and blurry thoughts, struggling to bring back his youth:

Light of the shadowy thoughts, that fly across my soul, daughter  
of Toscar of helmets, wilt thou not hear the song! We call back,  
maid of Lutha, the years that have rolled away. (*Oina-morul: A  
Poem, PO 323*)

However long he thinks of and remembers his past and the heroic age of Fingal, hoping to revive the glorious days, he is only confronted by the irreversibility of his 'loss'. Ossian is haunted by ghosts who are immediate family members and this has an important influence on his hopelessness too. Each time, his grief grows, leaving him incapable of taking any action. While Stafford says that "each poem is a variation on the 'ubi sunt' motif, and the very evocation of the past makes the present less and less easy to endure" (Stafford 1991, 63), according to Keymer, there is a big dilemma in Ossian's poems as they express the absence of what is being described—"the irrecoverability of a heroic past glimpsed only in the solitary incantations of an aged bard and entrusted thereafter to the vagaries of memorial transmission in a declining culture and language" (Keymer 1998, 90). Stafford, however, provides an explanation to this fragmentary form of a distant age, arguing that "this lack of

definition is essential to Macpherson's Celtic world, in which the reader is invited to become lost" (Stafford 1988, 103).

In some cases, heroes are likened to ghosts, rather than being visited by them. For example, in the third book of *Fingal*, Fillan and Oscar are referred to as "two dark clouds that are the chariots of ghosts" (*Fingal: Book III, PO 78*). In *The War of Caros*, Oscar is likened to a ghost again, while Gaul is said to rise in wrath like a ghost in the third book of *Temora*:

Oscar is like a beam of the sky; he turns around and the people fall. His hand is like the arm of a ghost, when he stretches it from a cloud: the rest of his thin form is unseen: but the people die in the vale. (*The War of Caros, PO 113*)

As the sudden rising of winds; or distant rolling of troubled seas, when some dark ghost, in wrath, heaves the billows over an isle, the seat of mist, on the deep, for many dark-brown years: so terrible is the sound of the host, wide-moving over the field. Gaul is tall before them: the streams glitter within his strides. (*Temora: Book Third, PO 245-46*)

Sublimity of the poems is also sustained by the emergence of ghosts, increasing the obscurity of the landscape with their features of darkness, murkiness and ability to cause fear. Edmund Burke finds fortitude, justice and wisdom in the sublime (Burke 1998 [1757], 145) and he regards magnificence, which is created by a "great profusion of things which are splendid and valuable, in themselves" as a source of sublimity (Burke 1998 [1757], 119). Blair uses the term extensively, mostly referring to an "air of solemnity and seriousness" where the poet "moves perpetually in the high region of the grand and the pathetick" (Blair, *PO* [1763] 356). He emphasizes that the poet does not speak of anything cheerful, reporting only the events that are serious and grave where the scenery is always wild and romantic (Blair, *PO* [1763] 356). While doing this, he points out that beauty is an outcome of using an ornamented language, which may reduce the level of sublimity:

But no sooner does the poet attempt to spread out this sentiment or description, and to deck it round and round with glittering ornaments, than the mind begins to fall from its high elevation; the transport is over; the beautiful may remain, but the sublime is gone. (Blair, *PO* [1763] 394)

Dafydd Moore observes a connection between the sentimental and the sublime (Moore 2003, 136). Even if it is possible to see this relation in *Ossian*, it still does not provide the poet with complete reconciliation, as the awareness of the sublime, “which in its ideological and cultural formulation might offer something of means of reconciliation, a masculine discourse of feeling” (Moore 2003, 137) reminds him of his past days, causing the gap between the past and present to become impossible to close. He becomes the old man in melancholy, looking back at the scenes of happier times, travelling back in memory to recover the past. Living in a world populated by ghosts, the characters, simply, cannot escape the tragic past, no matter how hard they try. Regarding this, Moore states that “it is perfectly natural to say that the actions of youth remind one of one’s own youth, yet this is such a frequent comment within the poems *Ossian* sings that it seems a symptom of a more profound non-progression” (Moore 1998, 192). Whenever the opportunity rises, days of old are celebrated and the bravery of today is thought to be of no match to that of the past. This can be seen when Oscar addresses his ancestors in *The War of Caros*, hoping they will provide him with guidance, as also mentioned previously, where an account of all ghostly appearances were given:

Come, said the hero, O ye ghosts of my fathers! ye that fought against the kings of the world! Tell me the deeds of future times; and your discourse in your caves; when you talk together and behold your sons in the fields of the valiant. (*The War of Caros: A Poem*, *PO* 112)

On the other hand, however, it is possible to say that the sublime provides the necessary wisdom and positive heroism for the occurrence of sentimentality. It is accompanied by

humanism, which can be seen in many of Fingal's actions, such as when he shows Swaran mercy at the end of the sixth book of Fingal, sending him and his army back to Lochlin:

King of Lochlin, said Fingal, thy blood flows in the veins of thy foe. Our families met in battle, because they loved the strife of spears. But often did they feast in the hall; and send round the joy of the shell. [...] Raise, to-morrow, thy white sails to the wind, thou brother of Agandecca. (*Fingal: Book VI, PO 101*)

Blair is the greatest admirer of the sublimity of Ossian's poetry, even saying that no literature can match his sublime descriptions. He believes that the most impressive evidence of his mastery over this can be observed throughout the poems, where we see godlike opponents, misty ghosts and a harsh nature. He goes on to say that "His poetry, more perhaps than that of any other writer, deserves to be stiled, *The Poetry of the Heart*. It is a heart penetrated with noble sentiments, and with sublime and tender passions; a heart that glows, and kindles the fancy" (Blair, *PO* [1763] 356).

The existence of such sentimentality and desire for the past has its downsides for the characters as well, since 'present' successes can never be fully celebrated and younger heroes cannot reach the fame of their fathers. This is because even if their actions are very promising for building a new heroic age, they (their actions and victories) only release the memories of the 'old' one. The burden of the past is too much for the new generation, despite the inspiration it may provide them with. Stafford raises a very good argument about Ossian, saying he, himself, may also have been sucked into this burden of older times, as his character tends to be double-sided:

In one light, he appears as a Romantic hero, solving an impossible situation by creating poetry. Setting himself apart from the inferior world of 'little men', he clings to the heroic values of the lost age, struggling to preserve the memory of Fingal and his warriors for prosperity. At the same time, however, the blind bard seems the mere shadow of his father; incapable of action, he is at

the mercy of his environment, and passively repeats the deeds of the past rather than achieves anything new. (Stafford 1991, 63-64)

The implied superiority of the old generation over the young one is portrayed in the third book of *Temora* and can clearly be seen in the episode where even though Fingal is proud of his son, Fillan, for his actions in battle, he begins telling a heroic story from his own youth:

My son, said car-borne Fingal; I saw thy deeds, and my soul was glad. The fame of our fathers, I said, bursts from its gathered cloud. [...] The memory of the past returns, my deeds in other years: when first I descended from ocean on the green-valleyed isle. We bend towards the voice of the king. The moon looks abroad from her cloud. The grey-skirted mist is near, the dwelling of the ghosts. (*Temora: Book Third, PO 250*)

This reflects the situation in the eighteenth century as well, in which, the contemporary writers or poets felt the pressure of having to equal the literature of the past. According to Stafford, this could be seen especially in Scotland, as “the self-consciousness about the Scottish language meant that many writers sheltered behind imitations of English masters, just as Macpherson had in his earlier attempts at poetry. Past masters could provide inspiration, but they could just as easily lead to depressing feelings of inadequacy” (Stafford 1988, 149).

One memorable point Moore makes is the idea of ‘reverse typology’ seen in *Ossian*, suggesting that the world of the poems is haunted not only by ghosts of the past, but also ghosts of future. That is to say, current victories are not regarded as the bringer of a glorious future as much as they are seen as a threat that might cause obscurity and weakness in the future. Moore points out that “the present is located within the context of a wide-turning circle of events which means that the downtrodden of today will be tomorrow’s conquerors; while on the other hand, the events of the present form part of a continuum, the way things were ‘meant’ to be and over which we have little or no control” (Moore 1998, 196).

The return of the dead helps make the gap between their and our world smaller. In other words, it reduces the fear of the unknown, also making death seem like a fulfilling solution to achieve peace. In a way, death is the means to gain immortality. Therefore, it is possible to say that Macpherson's *Ossian* makes death look appealing, which can be seen in Ossian's own words: "Happy are they who fell in their youth, in the midst of their renown!" (*The War of Caros*, PO 113). It is too painful for him to remember old times in his isolation, so death may serve as a way out of this misery. What brings him close to his loved ones, who are long dead, and their memories, are ghosts. The joy of dying in battle is also expressed by Fingal's words where he calls for the ghosts of his fathers to come and take his brave men who have fallen. It is expected that they will be accepted to the Otherworld joyfully, just like the way they have died:

O ye ghosts of heroes dead! ye riders of the storm of Cromla!  
 receive my falling people with joy, and bring them to your hills.  
 And may the blast of Lena carry them over my seas, that they  
 may come to my silent dreams, and delight my soul in rest.  
 (*Fingal: Book IV*, PO 85)

Nevertheless, Ossian's ghosts are not portrayed as happy. They are also looking back to older times with longing, while trying to warn their friends and family about coming disasters using their wisdom. They are trapped in a world where they cannot fight their enemies, no matter how strong or vigorous they are; but only know about the future and guide the next generation, brothers or their fellow warriors—which also increases their despair. In a way, they are hung up on their 'past' too, carrying the burden of the need to save the loved ones.

Friendly spirits can travel on the storms of Cromla in order to help the souls of the heroes that have died recently, find their way to the Otherworld. This idea of afterlife might suggest that the longer a spirit spends in the Otherworld, the more knowledge he can gain



about the future of mortal men; which is implied by Cuchullin's words to Connal regarding the appearance of Crugal's ghost:

Hast thou enquired where is his cave? The house of the son of the wind? My sword might find that voice, and force his knowledge from him. And small is his knowledge, Connal, for he was here today. He could not have gone beyond our hills, and who could tell him there of our death? (*Fingal: Book II, PO 66*).

In addition, the fact that Everallin's ghost delivers the exact place and time where Oscar is fighting the enemy in her appearance to Ossian in *Fingal: Book IV* is an evidence of this. She has been in the Otherworld for a long time as she died when she was rather young and thus, she knows more about the land of the living, being able to give better information about the danger:

O Ossian, rise and save my son; save Oscar chief of men, near the red oak of Lubar's stream, he fights with Lochlin's sons. (*Fingal: Book IV, PO 84*)

The joy of dying in the battle field, however, is never reduced for any reason. For Ossian, being with his 'ghosts' will bring peace and joy as he wants to be with his heroes again and believes his spirit will be free and 'happy' once he achieves this. Death is the means to gain this—even though the days of glory might not come back while he is still alive, his spirit can be with his heroes in the afterlife.

In *The Poems of Ossian*, the Otherworld, where the fallen heroes go, is presented to be in caves among the hills. Once there, all spirits start exploring this 'ghostly world' which allows them to acquire knowledge of the future. In *Cathlin of Clutha*, for example, there is a very clear reference to the Otherworld when Ossian and Oscar "[...] strode in silence; each to his hill of ghosts: that spirits might descend, in our dreams, to mark us for the field" (*Cathlin*

of *Clutha*, PO 295). Also, in the seventh book of *Temora*, Ossian addresses the hill of ghosts in an attempt to hear from the bards of old times—Ullin, Carril and Ryno:

Green thorn of the hill of ghosts, that shakest thy head to nightly winds! I hear no sound in thee; is there no spirit's windy skirt now rustling in thy leaves? Often are the steps of the dead, in the dark-eddying blasts; when the moon, a dun shield, from the east, is rolled along the sky. (*Temora: Book Seventh*, PO 283)

The expression of Cuchullin as he questions the knowledge of Crugal's ghost implies the existence of the Otherworld among the hills as well—"He could not have gone beyond our hills [...]" (*Fingal: Book II*, PO 66).

Once again, Macpherson seems to be inspired by the Gaelic belief in 'fairy hills': he replaces fairies with his Ossianic ghosts. Moreover, the idea of a 'spirit world' and spirits 'marking' the heroes on the battle field brings to mind the Valhalla, also known as Odin's Hall, of *Edda*. Similarly, in the Norse myth, all the departed heroes are welcomed to the Valhalla with joy, where they carry on doing the same activities they did in their previous life. Valkyries, who are female hosts who decide who will die in battle, escort them to their destination; like the friendly spirits of Ossian.

We know that Macpherson became familiar with Norse mythology and beliefs as he wrote about them extensively in his *Introduction* (1771) too, besides mentioning 'the circle of Loda' in the *Poems*. Here, he explains that "the Valhalla of Odin, and the dark regions of Hela, immediately succeeded this life. The first was a mansion of joy for the warlike; the latter a seat of misery and distress for cowards" (Macpherson 1773, 355). However, certain differences between the paradise of the Celts and the Scandinavians are seen. Macpherson's words regarding this, not only suggests that he (or perhaps, generally Celts) believed in the existence of a world of spirits, but also sheds light on who would be accepted to this world; and it would not be surprising to see him reflect these in his poems as well:

Among the Sarmatae, only those who fell through violence were admitted into the presence of Odin; such as died of disease or rage went to the black regions of Hela. Men slain in battle were, among the Celtæ, intitled to a more elevated degree of happiness in their paradise; but the peaceable and unwarlike had also a beautiful island of their own. Fighting, drinking and the ministration of young virgins, comprehended all the joys of the Valhalla: The Celtic heroes wandered after a variety of rural pleasures over the face of a beautiful and extensive country. The warriors of Scandinavia remained in the presence of Odin: [...]. (Macpherson 1773, 373-74)<sup>48</sup>

### **The ghosts of Ossian compared with those in Homer, Virgil and Milton**

The first edition of *Fingal* (1761-62) contains footnotes that refer directly to particular extracts from Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Virgil's *Aeneid* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. One of the reasons Macpherson did not try to conceal the similarities between his and the classic epics, is because his aim was for *Ossian* to be seen as a rival to them. However, in *Temora* (1763) and in the later editions of *Fingal* (1765 and after), most of these notes were omitted, most likely due to the controversies regarding the authenticity of the translations (Stafford 1998, 164). Despite this, Macpherson, and especially Blair, never retracted their claims about Ossian's poetry being as impressive as these Classic works of literature. In fact, Milton's *Paradise Lost* might have inspired and raised the need for an ancient 'Scottish bard' and an epic that could be compared to the greatest poets of the West. As Stafford suggests, "never could the idea of a Scottish epic have been more welcome than in 1760" (Stafford 1988, 113-14), at a time when "a Scottish nostalgia for a remote or aggrandising past" was dominant (Simpson 1988, 86).

Blair chooses to compare Ossian, particularly, with Homer as to him, "Homer is greatest of all the great poets, the one whose manner, and whose times come the nearest to

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<sup>48</sup> Macpherson's familiarity with Scandinavia and the Circle of Loda is discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

Ossian's" (Blair, *PO* [1763] 357). Macpherson, on the other hand, resurrects Ossian in the eighteenth century in a way that, he thinks, will bring out what is best in Homer, leaving out what he thinks would not suit the Ossianic story-line. According to Blair's observations, Macpherson-Ossian follows quite a similar path when creating his machinery—Homer blended his country's legends about the gods to create his epics, just like Macpherson, who found the tales of his country inspiring and amusing "the fancy" (Blair, *PO* [1763] 365). His comparisons of the representation of spirits and ghosts in the works of the two poets constitute an important part of Blair's *Critical Dissertation*. He makes them only to establish that, even though the two poets' idea of ghosts seems to be quite alike, Macpherson's descriptions are "drawn with much stronger and livelier colours than those of Homer. Macpherson-Ossian describes ghosts with all the particularity of one who had seen and conversed with them, and whose imagination was full of the impression they had left upon it" (Blair, *PO* [1763] 366). However, Homer's descriptions are more extended, adding a greater variety of incidents, whereas Ossian's are precise, only sufficient enough to make the reader visualize the scene. His ghostly appearances fit this pattern by being brief. Still, Macpherson emphasizes in a note to *The War of Inis-thona*, that "the notion of Ossian concerning the state of the deceased, was the same with that of the ancient Greeks and Romans. They imagined that the souls pursued, in their separate state, the employments and pleasures of their former life"; he, then, gives quotations from Homer's *Odyssey* and Virgil's *Aeneid* to support his argument<sup>49</sup> (*The War of Inis-thona*, *PO* 440 n.14 [M]):

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<sup>49</sup> All quotations are deleted in the 1773 edition of the *Poems* and the editions following it.

Ossian	Virgil	Homer
<p>King of Inis-thona, said Oscar, how fell the children of youth? The wild boar often rushes over their tombs, but he does not disturb the hunters.<sup>13</sup> They pursue deer<sup>14</sup> formed of clouds, and bend their airy bow.—They still love the sport of their youth; and mount the wind with joy. (<i>The War of Inis-thona</i>, PO 116).</p>	<p>The chief beheld their chariots from afar; Their shining arms and coursers train'd to war: Their lances fix'd in earth, their steeds around, Free from the harness, graze the flow'ry ground. The love of horses which they had, alive, And care of chariots, after death survive. DRYDEN. (<i>The Aeneid: Book VI</i> 181: 651-655).</p>	<p>Now I the strength of Hercules behold, A tow'ring spectre of gigantic mold; [...] Where woodland monsters grin in fretted gold, There sullen lions sternly seem to roar, The bear to growl, to foam the tusky boar, There war and havock and destruction stood, And vengeful murder red with human blood. POPE. (<i>The Odyssey: Book XI</i> 210-11).</p>

The similarity of Macpherson's expressions, especially with Virgil's, strikes the eye.<sup>50</sup> Much like Ossianic ghosts, Homer's too, are not totally incorporeal, looking like thin airy forms; they can appear and disappear whenever they want, their arm is weak, yet they ride on winds and clouds. While the ghosts of the bards continue singing, those of departed warriors wander the battlefields. The image of spirits displayed when Ulysses visits the land of the dead in the eleventh book of the *Odyssey*, is a good illustration of this similarity. (Blair, PO [1763] 366):

When lo! appear'd along the dusky coasts,  
Thin, airy shoals of visionary ghosts;  
Fair, pensive youths, and soft enamour'd maids;  
And wither'd elders, pale and wrinkled shades;  
Ghastly with wounds the forms of warriors slain  
Stalk'd with majestic port, a martial train  
These and a thousand more swarm'd o'er the ground,  
And all the dire assembly shriek'd around. (*Odyssey: Book XI*, 191  
[trans. Pope])

<sup>50</sup> It should be kept in mind that what we have here are three translations from three different people, all of which are from separate texts. And of course Dryden, Pope and Macpherson himself, all had their own ideas as to what literary translation should be.

It is also interesting to see that Ossianic ghosts can be damaged by a man, like those of Homer. When Ulysses travels through Hades in the eleventh book, he meets the shade of Elpenor, who is mournful and crying. They have a short conversation, in which the ghost tells him how he ended up in the land of the dead and asks for a tomb. Even after his request was fulfilled he keeps groaning and Ulysses sends him away with his sword:

Due to thy ghost, shall to thy ghost be paid.  
 Still as I spoke the phantom seem'd to moan,  
 Tear follow'd tear, and groan succeeded groan.  
 But as my waving sword the blood surrounds,  
 The shade withdrew, and mutter'd empty sounds.  
 (*Odyssey: Book XI*, 192 [trans. Pope])

Even though we do not come across an occasion where a spectre is hurt by a hero, Cuchullin's speech when he is not satisfied with the information Crugal's ghost brings to Connal implies that he would be able to hurt the ghost if he had drawn his sword through its form:

My sword might find that voice, and force his knowledge from  
 him. And small is his knowledge, Connal, for he was here today.  
 (*Fingal: Book II*, PO 66)

Despite his discomfort for not gaining enough information, Cuchullin is encouraged by the prophecy of the ghost (even if it is not good news) and displays heroic determination by not giving up against possible disaster:

I fear not death, but I fear to fly, for Fingal saw me often  
 victorious. Thou dim phantom of the hill, shew thyself to me!  
 come on thy beam of heaven, and shew me my death in thine  
 hand; yet will I not fly, thou feeble son of the wind. Go, son of  
 Colgar, strike the shield of Caithbat, it hangs between the spears.  
 (*Fingal: Book II*, PO 66)

Ulysses tells the ghost of Achilles and Patroclus that he is lost to his country and friends in their conversation and the fact that Ulysses goes to the land of the dead in search of

information about the future and advice from the Gods he worships might be related to Ossian's Oscar, who also seeks guidance from his fathers, who are in the Otherworld<sup>51</sup> in the poem, *The War of Caros*. The passage from Homer is given below:

To whom with sighs: I pass these dreadful gates  
 To seek the Theban, and consult the fates:  
 For still distress'd I rove from coast to coast,  
 Lost to my friends, and to my country lost.  
 But sure the eye of Time beholds no name  
 So bless'd as thine in all the rolls of fame;  
 Alive we hail'd thee with our guardian gods,  
 And dead, thou rul'st a king in these abodes.  
 (*Odyssey: Book XI*, 206 [trans. Pope])

Besides their ghostly features, the ways they disappear show certain resemblances—for instance, in the twenty-third book of the *Iliad*, the ghost of Patroclus, after visiting Achilles, vanishes almost exactly like one of Ossian's ghosts (Crugal's); with a feeble cry, dissolving like smoke into nature:<sup>52</sup>

[...] Like a thin smoke he sees the spirit fly,  
 And hears a feeble, lamentable cry.  
 (*The Iliad: Book XXIII*, 241: 117-118 [trans. Pope])

[...] Like the darkened moon he retired, in the midst of the  
 whistling blast. (*Fingal: Book II*, PO 65)

One of Ossian's most remarkable expressions, 'joy of grief', is also seen by Blair as being paralleled by this specific appearance of Patroclus in the *Iliad*; similarly, when Ulysses meets his mother in the shades in the *Odyssey*, signifying the delight of seeing a loved one and the sorrow brought by the realization of their eternal absence:

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<sup>51</sup> "Come, said the hero, O ye ghosts of my fathers! ye that fought against the kings of the world!—Tell me the deeds of future times; and your discourse in your caves; [...]" (*The War of Caros: A Poem*, PO 112).

<sup>52</sup> Macpherson draws attention to this similarity in his notes to the *Poems* quoting from Homer. See page 425, note 8 in *PO*.

Or has hell's queen an empty image sent,  
That wretched I might e'en my joys lament.  
(*The Odyssey*, Book XI, 197 [trans. Pope])

It is again Blair, who points out that “in both these occasions, the heroes, melted with tenderness, lament their not having it in their power to throw their arms round the ghost, “that we might,” say they, “in a mutual embrace, enjoy the delight of grief” (Blair, *PO* [1763] 381).

It is possible to conclude that Macpherson has drawn much from the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*, especially in the episodes of ghostly appearances, as here, not only the manner the two ghosts vanish are similar, but also we can see other parallels between the two passages. Both Crugal's and Patroclus' ghosts are restless as their bodies are not buried—Patroclus is not accepted to Hades, while Crugal is in pain upon seeing his unburied body. Yet, the latter also serves as a messenger foretelling the future.

Bysveen suggests that Ossian combines conjugal love with heroism, without letting sentimentality take control of the scene or the characters; and “since conjugal love is a common theme in Homer, particularly in the *Odyssey*, Macpherson again ties his own epic to the classical tradition” (Bysveen 1982, 122). An example of this can be seen when Ossian follows the instructions from Everallin's ghost, as well as pointing out that the enemy is threatened by even his song. Here, we also see that Macpherson acknowledges the resemblance of the passage to one of Homer's:<sup>53</sup>

My spear supported my steps, and my rattling armour rung. I  
hummed, as I was wont in danger, the songs of heroes of old.  
Like distant thunder Lochlin heard; they fled; my son pursued.  
(*Fingal: Book IV*, PO 84)

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<sup>53</sup> “Ossian gives the reader a high idea of himself. His very song frightens the enemy. This passage resembles one in the eighteenth *Iliad*, where the voice of Achilles frightens the Trojans from the body of Patroclus” (*Fingal: Book IV*, PO 430 n.9 [M]).



Forth march'd the chief, and distant from the crowd,  
 High on the rampart raised his voice aloud;  
 With her own shout Minerva swells the sound;  
 Troy starts astonish'd, and the shores rebound,  
 As the loud trumpet's brazen mouth from far  
 With shrilling clangour sounds the alarm of war,  
 Struck from the walls, the echoes float on high,  
 And the round bulwarks and thick towers reply;  
 So high his brazen voice the hero rear'd:  
 Hosts dropp'd their arms and trembled as they heard:  
 [...]. (*The Iliad: Book XVIII*, 150: 255-64 [trans. Pope])

Spirits and deities (such as the Spirit of Loda, dealt with in Chapter 5) are observed to inspire the warriors in both *Ossian* and the *Iliad*. However, Ossianic spirits are never presented as being able to interfere with battles; whereas, the gods of Homer frequently do so. It is also clear from one of Macpherson's notes to the first book of *Fingal* that "it was the opinion then, as indeed it is to this day, of some of the highlanders, that the souls of the deceased hovered round their living friends; and sometimes appeared to them when they were about to enter on any great undertaking" (*Fingal: Book I*, PO 422, n.62 [M]). It is reasonable to think that this belief might be Macpherson's starting point when he brings down the spirits of the departed to encourage Ossian's heroes. Cuchullin says:

Peace, [...], to the souls of the heroes; their deeds were great in danger. Let them ride around me on clouds; and shew their features of war: that my soul may be strong in danger; my arm like the thunder of heaven. But be thou on a moon-beam, O Morna, near the window of my rest; when my thoughts are of peace; and the din of arms is over. Gather the strength of the tribes, and move to the wars of Erin. (*Fingal: Book I*, PO 58)

Even though the ghosts of Ossian do not affect the events directly, they do have indirect influence on the events, which gives them similar functions as the gods of the *Iliad*:

But Pallas now Tydides' soul inspires,  
 Fills with her force, and warms with all her fires,  
 Above the Greeks his deathless fame to raise,

And crown her hero with distinguish'd praise.  
 High on his helm celestial lightnings play;  
 His beamy shield emits a living ray;  
 The' unwearied blaze incessant streams supplies,  
 Like the red star that fires the' autumnal skies,  
 When fresh he rears his radiant orb to sight,  
 And bath'd in ocean, shoots a keener light.  
 Such glories Pallas on the chief bestow'd,  
 Such, from his arms, the fierce effulgence flow'd:  
 Onward she drives him, furious to engage,  
 Where the fight burns, and where the thickest rage.  
 (*The Iliad: Book V*, 141 [trans. Pope])

It seems likely that Macpherson was inspired by the above passage from the *Iliad* as well as the idea of a superior power that guides, gives the heroes courage and strength, when composing his own version. Since Ossian does not paint a picture of a world full of gods like Homer or Virgil, he has the spirits of fallen heroes fulfil their function—their actions are magnified, respected and taken for granted. In his *The Antiquity, &c. of the Poems of Ossian*, Macpherson provides an explanation:

Had Ossian brought down gods, as often as Homer hath done, to assist his heroes, this poem had not consisted of eulogiums on his friends, but of hymns to these superior beings. (*The Antiquity &c. of the Poems of Ossian*, PO [1763] 46)

In his comparison of the ghosts of Virgil and Ossian, Moore suggests that those of Virgil have “the substance and muscularity of living in their grotesque manifestations, Macpherson’s are little more than a tearful voice. And where the admonishments of the former are usually heeded, the latter are dismissed” (Moore 1998, 193). Interestingly, the past that is so unforgettable, glorious and significant is set aside only when a disaster would have been avoided by paying more attention to it. For example, when Cuchullin is faced by the ghost of Calmar (warning him of his death), in *The Death of Cuchullin*, he overlooks the importance of his message:

But, Calmar, I never fled. I never feared the ghosts of the desert.  
Small is their knowledge, and weak their hands; their dwelling is  
in the wind. (*The Death of Cuchullin*, PO 137)

Crugal's ghost appearing to Connal is paralleled with that of Virgil's Hector, while Swaran is associated with Achilles. Macpherson draws attention to these resemblances in a note to the second book of *Fingal*, in an attempt to show how Virgil handled the subject in a similar manner.

When Hector's ghost before my sight appears:  
A bloody shroud he seem'd, and bath'd in tears.  
Such as he was, when, by Pelides slain,  
Thessalian coursers drag'd him o'er the plain.  
Swoln were his feet, as when the thongs were thrust  
Through the bor'd holes, his body black with dust.  
Unlike that Hector, who return'd from toils  
Of war triumphant, in Æacian spoils:  
Or him, who made the fainting Greeks retire,  
And launch'd against their navy Phrygian fire.  
His hair and beard stood stiffen'd with his gore;  
And all the wounds he for his country bore. DRYDEN.  
(*Fingal: Book II*, PO 425, n.1 [M]) [*The Aeneid: Book II*, 43: 273-84  
[trans. Dryden]]

Even though the ways the two ghosts are described and introduced show certain similarities, Crugal has a less horrifying image. The gruesome look of Hector's ghost is due to his humiliating defeat and even though Crugal's ghost is also wounded, his 'feeble voice' and 'decaying' bodily features give him an otherworldly appearance:

My hero saw in his rest a dark-red stream of fire coming down  
from the hill. Crugal sat upon the beam, a chief that lately fell. He  
fell by the hand of Swaran, striving in the battle of heroes. His  
face is like the beam of the setting moon; his robes are of the  
clouds of the hill: his eyes are like two decaying flames. Dark is  
the wound of his breast. (*Fingal: Book II*, PO 65)

However, like the Ossianic Crugal, Hector serves the role of a messenger by warning the hero about the coming disaster.

References to Virgil's *Troy* can be related to the Celtic war, as "Macpherson consistently deploys Jacobite iconography in such a way as to stress its play on slippage and diaspora, to the point of creating what amounts to an admission of defeat" (Moore 1998, 188). Although Fingal gains an epic victory, the hidden remnants of despair remain. The table below summarizes the similarities between Crugal's ghost and those of Homer's Patroclus and Virgil's Hector:

<b>Crugal</b>	<b>Patroclus</b>	<b>Hector</b>
He appears to Connal as he rests alone.	He appears to Achilles while he is away from his men at the shore.	He appears to Aeneas at night when everyone is asleep.
He tells Connal that his body is not buried yet: "but my corse is on the sands of Ullin" ( <i>Fingal: Book II, PO 65</i> ).	Patroclus visits Achilles because he still has not buried his body: "Let my pale corse the rights of burial know, / And give me the entrance in the realms below" ( <i>The Iliad: Book XXIII 240</i> ).	He appears in tears as his body was dragged in the ground and slain.
Conversation continues until the ghost vanishes having delivered his message.	Only after their dialogue comes to a conclusion, the ghost disappears.	Leaves when he delivers his message and their conversation comes to an end upon hearing noises from afar.

Moina's ghost, on the other hand, who is seen by Clessámmor, in *Carthon*, can be associated with Virgil's Phoenician Dido (in terms of description, appearance and way of introduction). The way Macpherson and Virgil play with the words 'light and night', as well as the correspondences made with moon, mist and the ghosts' appearances show great similarities.<sup>54</sup>

Nor Clutha ever since have I seen: nor Moina of the dark brown  
hair. She fell in Balclutha: for I have seen her ghost. I knew her as  
she came through the dusky night, along the murmur of Lora: she

<sup>54</sup> Macpherson has also pointed to this connection in his notes (*Carthon, PO 446 n.16 [M]*).

was like the new moon seen through the gathered mist: when the sky pours down its flaky snow, and the world is silent and dark. (*Carthon*, PO 128)

Not far from her wound, her bosom bathed in blood;  
Whom when the Trojan hero hardly knew,  
Obscure in shades, and with a doubtful view  
(Doubtful as he who sees, through dusky night,  
Or thinks he sees, the moon's uncertain light).  
(*The Aeneid: Book VI*, 174: 454-59 [trans. Dryden])

In addition, Ossian's Cuchullin can be linked with Milton's Satan. Even though the connection is not an obvious one, it is made clear in Macpherson's own notes to the 1762 edition of *Fingal* (*Fingal: Book I*, PO 422, n.67 [M]). Milton's description of the falling angels applauding Mammon: "[...] such murmur filled/ The assembly, as when hollow racks retain/ The sound of blustering winds, [...]" (*Paradise Lost*, II, 284-86) is compared to Ossian's "What murmur rolls along the hill like the gathered flies of evening? The sons of Innis-fail descend, or rustling winds" (*Fingal: Book I*, PO 58). Instead of comparing the satanic forces of *Paradise Lost* to the Scandinavian army in *Ossian*, the poet chooses to liken Cuchullin's warriors to the fallen angels. Stafford emphasizes that:

Although the poem ostensibly describes the victory of Fingal against the invaders, the persistent reference to *Paradise Lost* thus contributes underlying notions of defeat, and evokes a heroic culture particularly noticeable in the description of Cuchullin's warriors in Book II, where a sense of heroic grandeur is balanced by feelings of loss (Stafford 1998, 169)

They stood on the heath, like oaks with all their branches round them; when they echo to the stream of frost, and their withered leaves rustle to the wind. (*Fingal: Book II*, PO 66)

The image of Ossianic warriors as doomed spirits from Milton's Hell recurs symbolizing their ultimate defeat even at moments of victory, for Ossian knows life is fleeting but death is

certain. At the end of the fifth book of *Fingal*, Ossian reminds the reader of the inevitable disappearance of Fingal and his men, as well as his eventual isolation with these lines:

But sit thou on the heath, O Bard, and let us hear thy voice. It is pleasant as the gale of spring that sighs on the hunter's ear; when he wakens from dreams of joy, and has heard the music of the spirits of the hill.<sup>55</sup> (*Fingal: Book V, PO 96*)

Macpherson relates this to a passage from *Paradise Lost* in his notes (*Fingal: Book V, PO 433, n.59 [M]*).

[...] Others more mild,  
Retreated in a silent valley, sing  
With notes angelical. —  
  The harmony,  
What could it less when spirits immortal sing?  
Suspended hell, and took with ravishment  
The thronging audience. (*Paradise Lost I, 546-55*)

Therefore, the relation between Ossianic Highland spirits and those of Milton's Hell is significant since it displays Macpherson's understanding of his native tradition, as well as pointing to a rather deeper cultural association: "For in Highland folklore, the fallen angels were said to be living beneath the hills as fairies or 'sith'" (Stafford 1998, 171).

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<sup>55</sup> The 'music of the spirits of the hill' most likely refers to the songs of the deceased bards, whose ghosts continue singing in the Otherworld, situated in caves among the hills (discussed in chapter 3).

## Conclusions

Without doubt, returning souls of the departed play a very significant role in Ossian's poetry, by contributing extensively to the general atmosphere of the poems. It may even be argued that they are the essence of the sublime, the sentimental, the melancholy, the primitivism and the inspiration. As Groom explains "ghosts are everywhere: on the weeping wind, on the airs that Ossian draws from his lyre, on the waves and storms and tempests. The ghosts outnumber the living [...]" (Groom 2002, 117). It seems that Macpherson masks some aspects of native Gaelic superstitions and beliefs with his Ossianic ghosts, which he considers as suiting the contemporary trend better. Yet, he replaces the primitive elements of his epic models with the polished manners of the eighteenth-century; so that, in his *Ossian*, ancient heroism meets modern politeness. The ancient bard was primitive but eloquent, stricken but honourable: he was even blind like Homer and Milton; all in all, he was everything the enlightened wanted (Kelly 2010, 25).

It seems that Ossianic poems and Macpherson's reflection through his Ossianic poetry should not only be seen as a representation of loss or defeat—against time, bringing old age and solitude—but also as an expression of its results and the means for such consequences. In Stafford's words "on the surface of the text, Ossian seems a helpless observer, whose own vulnerability in the face of relentless passing in time is projected onto the sun itself" (Stafford 1998, 181). However, the world evoked has a destructive side, which cannot be overcome, neither by him nor his characters. Stafford finds associations between Ossian and Satan (through the study of Milton's *Paradise Lost*) coming to the conclusion that the nature of Ossianic heroes causes their collapse, which has led them to chase the memories of their ancestors, without any true desire for revival (Stafford 1998, 182). To Macpherson-Ossian, memory becomes a form of afterlife. Macpherson's Ossian is left in

constant admiration towards the legend created by himself, doomed by what he values the most, which is the 'ancient' past; yet, providing him with enough wisdom and sentiment to create his poetry that portray him as the 'decaying' bard, whose poems can 'raise the dead'.





## Chapter 5: The Spirit of Loda

### Introduction

In this chapter, the focus will be on Macpherson's knowledge of the religious ceremonies of pagan Scandinavia as his vision of Scandinavia and Scandinavian traditions are reflected throughout *The Poems of Ossian*. In order to achieve this, the supposed Ossianic expeditions to Scandinavia and impressions from the places inhabited by the Scandinavians, as presented in the *Poems*, will be concentrated on. In particular, a study of Ossianic expeditions to Scandinavia and the 'Circle of Loda' will be carried out along with a detailed account of Macpherson's references to 'Loda'. Macpherson's *An Introduction to the History of Great Britain and Ireland* (1771) and Blair's *Critical Dissertation* (1763) will be studied, as these are most likely to shed light on the pair's view of Scandinavia. Such an investigation is significant as it would reveal how Ossian became acquainted with Scandinavian gods according to Macpherson, and how Scandinavian gods and rituals are represented in the poems. More importantly, it would help understand the meaning of the representation of Scandinavia in the poems, as well as demonstrate the possible universality of the poems. It would also portray the commonalities and above all, the differences between cultures according to Macpherson which he employs to highlight the Gaelic-Scottish identity.

### Macpherson's References to Loda

In the poems, there are eleven cases where 'Loda' is referred to (a total of forty-three references as it is mentioned more than once in some of these occurrences). To be more

specific: Loda is referred to as a 'Divinity' twenty-three times (Cruth-loda, Spirit of Loda, Son of Loda); fifteen times as a 'Place' (Circle of Loda, Stone of Loda, Hall of Loda, misty Loda and trees of Loda) and finally, five times as a 'River' (Sound of Loda, streamy Loda, Song of Loda). Beside these, Macpherson seems to feel the need to define or to explain what is meant by 'Loda' in his notes to the poems six times. Looking at these 'appearances' of Loda chronologically, whether in poems or notes, will enable us to see what Loda stood for Macpherson, how he treated the matter and whether or not his ideas developed/changed over time.<sup>56</sup>

***Fingal: Book III. [December] 1761, dated 1762.***

He sat in the hall of his shells in Lochlin's woody land. He called the grey-haired Snivan, that often sung round the circle of Loda: when the stone of power heard his cry, and the battle turned in the field of the valiant. (*Fingal: Book III, PO 73*)

A note concerning Loda follows the extract:

This passage most certainly alludes to the religion of Lochlin, and *the stone of power* here mentioned is the image of one of the deities of Scandinavia. (*Fingal: Book III, PO 428 n.7 [M]*)

The circle of Loda comes up in the opening of the poem where Carril sings about Fingal's actions in Lochlin, upon Cuchullin's insisting on hearing more from the bard—Fingal's strength, wrath and good heart for returning Starno back to his ship after defeating him are told. King Starno is said to reside in his hall in Lochlin, whereas his bard, Snivan, sings by the circle that is pictured as having the power to influence battles.

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<sup>56</sup> The chronological order of the poems is taken from Jiriczek's *James Macpherson's Ossian: Faksimilie-Neudruck der Erstaussgabe von 1762/63 mit Begleirband*. Vol 3. Heidelberg: Carl Winter's Universitäts-Buchhandlung, 1940, 5-6.

As pointed out in the quotation above and earlier in the chapter, Macpherson relates the spirit to Odin, the great Scandinavian deity, who is the chief god in Norse mythology and “was the irresistible principle which gives motion to everything that breathes” (Macpherson 1773, 344). Therefore, the Circle of Loda is assumed to be a worship site for Odin, where the god would be able to answer the prayers of his believers. The description and the purpose of the circle as portrayed in the poems matches Macpherson’s insights into Scandinavian worship sites at a later date:

They erected a log of wood, a sword, or a spear, before them, when they offered sacrifices and prayers to God, rather as a conspicuous mark in the centre of the consecrated circle, than a representative of the supposed person of the power whom they adored. In established places of worship, an oak growing in the middle of a piece of ground, surrounded by a very thick henge, was the object to which devotees turned their eyes in prayer. The Gods were said to descend, at times, into this sanctified circle; but it was thought a kind of sacrilege to suppose, that the Divinity could be confined within walls, or that a human figure could give any idea of his person. (Macpherson 1773, 342)

***Fingal: Book V. [December] 1761, dated 1762.***

King of Morven, said the hero, lift thy sword, and pierce my breast. Wounded and faint from battle my friends have left me here. The mournful tale shall come to my love on the banks of the streamy Loda; when she is alone in the wood; and the rustling blast in the leaves.

No; said the king of Morven, I will never wound thee, Orla. On the banks of Loda let her see thee escaped from the hands of war. Let thy gray-haired father, who, perhaps, is blind with age, hear the sound of thy voice in his hall. With joy let the hero rise, and search for his son with his hands. But never will he find him, Fingal; said the youth of the streamy Loda. [...] Oscar and Fillan, my sons, raise high the memory of Orla. Here let the dark-haired hero rest far from the spouse of his love. Here let him rest in his narrow house far from the sound of Loda. (*Fingal: Book V, PO 92-93*)

During the fight Fingal's sword breaks Orla's (a chief of Lochlin) shield and the latter accepts defeat, asking his enemy to kill him. Even though Fingal refuses to attack Orla when he is already badly wounded, Orla eventually dies on the battlefield. Touched by his death, Fingal withdraws his army and heads back to Swaran, when he is informed that his youngest son, Ryno was also killed. He laments his death too and buries his son with the chief of Lochlin:

And here my son shall rest, said Fingal, the noise of their fame has reached my ears. Fillan and Fergus! bring hither Orla; the pale youth of the stream of Loda. Not unequalled shall Ryno lie in earth when Orla is by his side. Weep, ye daughters of Morven; and ye maids of the streamy Loda. Like a tree they grew on the hills; and they have fallen like the oak of the desert; when it lies across a stream, and withers in the wind of the mountain. (*Fingal: Book V, PO 95*)

The fact that Orla mentions Loda just before he dies and assumes the bad news will be received by his love on the banks of Loda might be regarded as an indication of it being a place of worship—near a stream—where they used to mourn for the deceased heroes too. Macpherson has Fingal acknowledge the Scandinavian tradition and understands the importance of Loda for them; at first, before Orla dies Fingal encourages the chief to picture himself reunited with his spouse and father on the banks of Loda. Later, he feels sorry that the Lochlinner dies away from Loda.

***The Death of Cuchullin. [December] 1761, dated 1762.***

He rushed, in the sound of his arms, like the terrible spirit of Loda, when he comes in the roar of a thousand storms, and scatters battles from his eyes. He sits on a cloud over Lochlin's seas: his mighty hand is on his sword, and the winds lift his flaming locks. So terrible was Cuchullin in the day of his fame. (*The Death of Cuchullin, PO 138*)

Regarding the passage Macpherson writes in his notes with reference to the above extract from the poem:

Loda, in the third book of Fingal, is mentioned as a place of worship in Scandinavia: by the *spirit of Loda*, the poet probably means Odin, the great deity of the northern nations. (*Death of Cuchullin*, PO 450 n.29 [M])

The Spirit of Loda also appears in a simile here. Cuchullin is likened to a god by Ossian in order to emphasize his strength and determination—even though he is told that he might not survive the next battle by his friend Connal, who received the prophecy from Crugal's ghost, he does not abandon his warriors in the battle. In a note regarding the simile, Macpherson states that the description of Cuchullin is similar to that of Mars in Homer's *Iliad* (*The Death of Cuchullin*, PO 450 n.29 [M]):

So stalks in arms the grisly god of Thrace,  
When Jove to punish faithless men prepares,  
And gives whole nations to the waste of wars.  
Thus march'd the chief tremendous as a god;  
Grimly he smil'd; earth trembled as he strode.  
(*The Iliad: Book VII*, 36 [trans. Pope])

It is common to find similes in Ossian's poems—such as: “The form fell shapeless into air, like a column of smoke [...] (*Carric-thura: A Poem*, PO 161); “my voice is like the last sound of the wind, when it forsakes the woods” (*Berrathon: A Poem*, PO 197)—but according to Derick Thomson, the one relating to Cuchullin seems to be inspired by an Irish tale about the famous ‘Tón láith’ of Cù Chulainn and the sign of his battle frenzy (Thomson 1952, 53)—referring to *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, The Cattle Raid of Cooley. Here, Cù Chulainn's ‘warp-spasms’ and extraordinary fighting skills are described:

The Warp-Spasms overtook him: it seemed each hair was hammered into his head, so sharply they shot upright. You would swear a fire-speck tipped each hair. He squeezed one eye narrower than the eye of a needle; he opened the other wider than

the mouth of a goblet. He bared his jaws to the ear; he peeled back his lips to the eye-teeth till his gullet showed. The hero-halo rose up from the crown of his head. (Kinsella 1969, 77)

Beside this, here, the parallel with *berserkr*s should be pointed out too. According to Old Norse sagas, the stereotypical *berserkr* is a ferocious Norse warrior who would fight almost uncontrollably in a trance-like state (Pulsiano and Wolf 1993, 37/ “berkerkr”). *Heimskringla* gives a depiction of Odin’s berserkr in battle:

Odin could make his enemies in battle blind, or deaf, or terror-struck, and their weapons so blunt that they could no more but than a willow wand; on the other hand, his men rushed forwards without armour, were as mad as dogs or wolves, bit their shields, and were strong as bears or wild bulls, and killed people at a blow, but neither fire nor iron told upon themselves. These were called Berserker. (*Heimskringla: of Odin’s Accomplishments*, 6)

This possible association of Cuchullin with a Norse berserker stands as a portrayal of masculinity and bravery, for the hero will not yield even to Odin’s best warriors as he can be just as fierce and deadly as them himself.

More importantly, unlike the ghosts proper, such material spirits, like the Spirit of Loda, do have some foundation in authentic tradition—William Shaw has already recognized in his *Enquiry into the Authenticity of the Poems Ascribed to Ossian* that the encounter with the Spirit of Loda seems to be based on the legend of Muilgheartach:

The Spirit of Loda is ingeniously translated from Ireland into a Scandinavian god, taken from a tale called “Muirarlach mor o Laidhan”. Mr. Macpherson, not perhaps knowing that Laidhan was the Irish name of Leinster, turns it to Loda, and calls it a part of Scandinavia. The tale makes Muirarlach a sort of monster, and sometimes a knight-errant engaging a windmill, and then a giant striding from hill to hill across Erin. It afforded, however, to an author, a good hint; and Mr. Macpherson accordingly conjured it to the Spirit of Loda. The tale is common in the Highlands to this day. (Shaw 1781, 25-26)

Muilgheartach (the spelling varies; such as *Muirgheartaich* or *Mhuileirteach*) is a monstrous hag, of whom tales are told in some of the Gaelic ballads. J. F. Campbell's *Heroic Gaelic Ballads: Collected in Scotland Chiefly from 1512 to 1871* describes Muilgheartach as a "woman, having one terrible eye swift as a mackerel, shaggy hair, black blue complexion, and teeth encumbered with splinters of bone. According to some versions, an eagle, or a griffin with claws like a tree was on her head" (Campbell 1872, 68).<sup>57</sup> In the ballads, she comes across the sea to fight the Féinn; at first, she is seen on top of the waves and attacks Féinn "like the sea against the stones of a shingle beach" (MacInnes 1986/87, 117). Eventually, she is killed by the warriors, who make a battle ring of their seven battalions.

It should be mentioned that various associations have been made to the monster. For instance, the Rev. J. G. Campbell, who is a respected collector and translator of Gaelic oral tradition, calls it the "ocean itself in flesh" (Campbell 1891, 131). She is also linked with the Ocean Smith and so, when she dies, the Smith informs her father, the High King, who is thought to be the King of Lochlann (Lochlin).<sup>58</sup> Moreover, it is said that she was an ally of the Norsemen and that she represents one of Odin's choosers, the valkyries who carry the fallen warriors to Odin's Hall (Campbell 1872, 68).

It is not hard to see the close connection with Lochlin and Odin the monster has, which might have possibly guided Macpherson-Ossian in creating this association in his poems. Similarity may also be observed between Macpherson's descriptions of the Spirit of Loda and the way the Muilgheartach is depicted:

His eyes appear like flames in his dark face (*Carric-thura*, PO 161)

Bha Haodin dughlas air Dhreich Guail

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<sup>57</sup> Although the monster is presented as a female, John MacInnes suggests some of the earlier accounts make it a male (MacInnes 1986/87, 117).

<sup>58</sup> In some related stories the Muilgheartach is said to be the King's (foster-) mother (MacInnes 1986/87, 117).



“Her face was dark-grey, the colour of coal” (*Caillich Ghraund: stanza 3*, Campbell 1872, 59)<sup>59</sup>

***Carric-thura*. [December] 1761, dated 1762.**

A rock bends along the coast with all its echoing wood. On the top is the circle of Loda, and the mossy stone of power. A narrow plain spreads beneath, covered with grass and aged trees, which the midnight winds, in their wrath, had torn from the shaggy rock. The blue course of a stream is there: and the lonely blast of ocean pursues the thistle’s beard.

The flame of three oaks arose: the feast is spread around: but the soul of the king is sad, for Carric-thura’s battling chief. The wan, cold moon rose, in the east. Sleep descended on the youths: Their blue helmets glitter to the beam; the fading fire decays. But sleep did not rest on the king: he rose in the midst of his arms, and slowly ascended the hill to behold the flame of Sarno’s tower.

The flame was dim and distant; the moon hid her red face in the east. A blast came from the mountain, and bore, on its wings, the spirit of Loda. He came to his place in his terrors, and he shook his dusky spear.—His eyes appear like flames in his dark face; and his voice is like distant thunder. Fingal advanced with the spear of his strength, and raised his voice on high. (*Carric-thura*, PO 160-61)

It appears from tradition, that this poem was addressed to a Culdee, or one of the first Christian missionaries, and that the story of the *Spirit of Loda*, supposed to be the ancient Odin of Scandinavia, was introduced by Ossian in opposition to the Culdee’s doctrine. (*Carric-thura*, PO 460 n.1 [M])

*The circle of Loda* is supposed to be a place of worship among the Scandinavians, as the spirit of Loda is thought to be the same with their god Odin. (*Carric-thura*, PO 461 n.21 [M])

Perhaps, the extract above is the most picturesque description of the Circle and the Spirit of Loda in the *Poems of Ossian*. The spirit shows himself to Fingal, appearing with a blast from the mountain near Samo’s tower. The hero challenges the spirit by questioning his presence, stating that his form is weak like the meteor he is holding as a sword and tells him to fly

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<sup>59</sup> Translations from Gaelic to English are taken from Thomson’s *Gaelic Sources of Macpherson’s Ossian* (1952).

back to where he came from. At the end of the episode in which they challenge each other, Fingal attacks the spirit with his sword, causing him to lose his shape. The spirit, on the other hand, claims he is so strong that his breath can bring people death:

Son of night, retire: call thy winds and fly! Why dost thou come to my presence, with thy shadowy arms? Do I fear thy gloomy form, dismal spirit of Loda? Weak is thy shield of clouds: feeble is that meteor, thy sword. The blast rolls them together; and thou thyself dost vanish. Fly from my presence son of night! call thy winds and fly!

Dost thou force me from my place, replied the hollow voice? The people bend before me. I turn the battle in the field of the valiant. I look on the nations and they vanish: my nostrils pour the blast of death. I come abroad on the winds: the tempests are before my face. But my dwelling is calm, above the clouds, the fields of my rest are pleasant.

Dwell then in thy calm field, said Fingal, and let Comhal's son be forgot. Do my steps ascend, from my hills, into thy peaceful plains? Do I meet thee, with a spear, on thy cloud, spirit of dismal Loda? Why then dost thou frown on Fingal? or shake thine airy spear? But thou frownest in vain: I never fled from mighty men. And shall the sons of the wind frighten the king of Morven? No: he knows the weakness of their arms.

Fly to thy land, replied the form: receive the wind and fly. The blasts are in the hollow of my hand: the course of the storm is mine. The king of Sora is my son, he bends at the stone of my power. His battle is around Carric-thura; and he will prevail. Fly to thy land, son of Comhal, or feel my flaming wrath. (*Carric-thura*, PO 161)

In the poems, Loda is pictured as an old, gloomy and cruel god, who uses his might to kill. Although he cannot be killed himself, as now he is only a "thin airy form" (Blair, PO [1763] 366), similar to the ghosts of the departed, the Spirit of Loda is also semi-corporeal, tangible, can be physically damaged and as Fingal shows in *Carric-thura*, can be sent packing. We see another such instance when Cormar fights off the spirit of a storm:

He sported through the storms of the waves. His black skiff bounded on ocean, and travelled on the wings of the blast. A spirit once embroiled the night. [...] When the low-hung vapour passed, he took it by the curling head, and searched its dark

womb with his steel. The son of the wind forsook the air. The moon and stars returned. (*Fingal: Book III, PO 75*)

However, it is interesting to see that an ‘enemy’ spirit is said to have a voice like a thunder whereas all friendly spirits—ones that come in peace to warn Fingal and his men of possible danger—speak with a feeble voice. His loud and dreadful voice completes his dismal image, which might stand as a representation of the strength of the Lochlin’s army and Fingal’s awareness of this; yet, just as he tells the spirit, he does not yield even to the strongest of foes:

He lifted high his shadowy spear; and bent forward his terrible height. But the king, advancing, drew his sword; the blade of dark-brown Luno. The gleaming path of the steel winds through the gloomy ghost. The form fell shapeless into air, like a column of smoke, which the staff of the boy disturbs, as it rises from the half-extinguished furnace. The spirit of Loda shrieked, as, rolled into himself, he rose on the wind. Inistore shook at the sound. The waves heard it on the deep: they stopped, in their course, with fear: the companions of Fingal started, at once; and took their heavy spears. (*Carric-thura: A Poem, PO 161*)

In connection with this passage, Thomson argues that the way Fingal sends away the Spirit of Loda shows similarity with the ballad, *Muilgheartach*, as he thinks the sword in question modelled on the sword Fionn uses to kill the Muilgheartach (also mentioned in the section above)—it is suggested that the smith, mentioned in the ballad, is the same who forged Fionn’s sword (Thomson 1952, 52-53). The ballad, *Duan a Mhuilleartich*, stanzas 14-15, goes:

Deichin cha duair e mar shin.  
O La Ceardich Loin Mhic Liobhain

“A trial such as this it (or “he”) did not have since the day of the smithy of Lon MacLiobhain.” (*Duan a Mhuilleartich: stanza 14-15* Campbell 1982, 68)

After their combat, the Spirit of Loda rises on the wind and disappears with a very loud noise which shakes Inistore and thus, a peaceful atmosphere returns as the song of gladness

is raised by Ullin, along with the rising moon. It is not uncommon to see Ossian comparing his heroes to spirits and ghosts rather than gods. Nevertheless, only the Spirit of Loda has a terrifying voice, and the spirit of a storm, to which Swaran is compared, is shrill and roaring:

They fell, like two hinds of the desert, by the hands of the mighty Swaran; when, in the midst of thousands he roared; like the shrill spirit of a storm, that sits dim, on the clouds of Gormal, and enjoys the death of the mariner. (*Fingal: Book I, PO 60*)

The spirit of Loda is last seen behind the ships of Frothal, the king of Sora, who is defeated by Fingal after invading Inistore at the end of the poem. Unlike his previous horrifying image, the spirit has now withdrawn to his cloud as Fingal sails back to Morven—a scene which portrays Fingal’s superiority over the spirit of a Scandinavian god, for the Spirit of Loda is pictured as being afraid of the hero:

The winds of the north carry the ship of Fingal to Morven’s woody land. But the spirit of Loda sat, in his cloud, behind the ships of Frothal. He hung forward with all his blasts, and spread the white-bosomed sails. The wounds of his form were not forgot; he still feared the hand of the king. (*Carric-thura: A Poem, PO 165*)

***Temora: Book V. 1763.***

Rothmar, the shield of warriors, stood between two chinky rocks. Two oaks, which winds had bent from high, spread their branches on either side. He rolls his darkening eyes on Fillan, and silent, shades his friends. Fingal saw the approaching fight; and all his soul arose. But as the stone of Loda falls, shook, at once, from rocking Druman-ard, when spirits heave the earth in their wrath; so fell blue-shielded Rothmar. (*Temora: Book Fifth, PO 264*)

The book tells the story of the battle between the armies of Fingal and Foldath, chief of Ireland who assumes command of Cathmor’s army. On the other side, Fillan is given the command of the army by Fingal; and his success by killing Rothmar, an Irish chief in

Cathmor's army and Culmin, a warrior, is reported. The poet emphasizes the significance of the death of Rathmor and the sadness this has caused, by finding a parallel between the chief's fall and the stone of Loda, which in turn, is a reflection of the stone's importance and the 'supposed' effect the fall of the stone would have on earth. The meaning of the stone of Loda and the sacred purpose alluded by it, is further explained by Macpherson in a note to the quotation—this has been discussed in detail earlier in the chapter.

***Temora: Book VI. 1763.***

Soft, as the song of Loda, is the voice of Selma's maid. Pleasant to the ear of Clatho is the name of the breaker of shields. Behold, the king comes from ocean: the shield of Morven is borne by bards. The foe has fled before him, like the departure of mist. I hear not the sounding wings of my eagle; the rushing forth of the son of Clatho. Thou art dark, O Fingal; shall he not return? (*Temora: Book Sixth, PO 276*)

This passage is from a fragment Gaskill appends at the end of the respective text.<sup>60</sup> This part of the poem (fragment) in question speaks of the death of Fillan. It is in the form of a dialogue between Clatho, the mother, and Bos-mina, the sister of this warrior; and it can be assumed that by Loda here, the river in Lochlin is implied. Fillan is badly wounded by Cathmor in a fight and when he dies Ossian takes his body to a neighbouring cave. Like Clatho, Fingal mourns the death of his son. A melancholic mood is dominant throughout the poem.

***Cathlin of Clutha. 1763.***

Wide, in Caracha's echoing field, Carmal had poured his tribes.  
They were a dark ridge of waves; the grey-haired bards were like

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<sup>60</sup> Originally Macpherson gives this extract as a note to *Temora: Book Sixth* giving his notes at the foot of the page.

moving foam on their face. They kindled the strife around with their red-rolling eyes. Nor alone were the dwellers of rocks; a son of Loda was there; a voice, in his own dark land, to call the ghosts from high. On his hill, he had dwelt, in Lochlin, in the midst of a leafless grove. Five stones lifted, near, their heads. Loud-roared his rushing stream. He often raised his voice to winds, when meteors marked their nightly wings; when the dark-cruled moon was rolled behind her hill. Nor unheard of ghosts was he! They came with the sound of eagle-wings. They turned battle, in fields, before the kings of men.

But, Trenmor, they turned not from battle; he drew forward the troubled war; in its dark skirt was Trathal, like a rising light. It was dark; and Loda's son poured forth his signs, on night. The feeble were not before thee, son of other lands! (*Cathlin of Clutha*, PO 296-97)

Fingal's army under the command of Oscar engages in battle with that of Duth-carmor of Inis-huna. The latter is slain and Oscar carries his helmet to Cathlin, the daughter of Cathmol of Clutha who is discovered to be trying to escape in disguise of a young warrior. The passage above relates to the older times, telling the story of Trenmor and his battle with Carmal in Caracha. It can be assumed that a Scandinavian warrior, druid or some kind of priest is implied by 'a son of Loda' and he is depicted as trying to evoke the ghosts of his ancestors—possibly Odin as he is the god of war. The hill described in Lochlin also seems like to stand for the Circle of Loda where worships for Odin took place according to the *Poems*.

Looking at Macpherson's word choices, when speaking of the Lochlinners—'dark land', 'leafless grove', 'loud-roared', 'dark-cruled'—we see that he evokes gloomy and terrifying images: the enemy attacks ("Loda's son poured forth his signs, on night" [*Cathlin of Clutha*, PO 297]) showing they would not give up easily. The tenderness of the poetry leaves its place to darkness, where the only ray of light seen is the arrival of Trathal, the son of Trenmor.

***Sul-malla of Lumon. 1763.***

We rushed on either side of a stream, which roared thro' a blasted heath. High broken rocks were round, with all their bending trees. Near are two circles of Loda, with the stone of power; where spirits descended, by night, in dark-red streams of fire. There, mixed with the murmur of waters, rose the voice of aged men, they called the forms of night, to aid them in their war. [...]

Come, ye dwellers of Loda! Carchar, pale in the midst of clouds! Sluthmor, that stridest in airy halls! Corchtur, terrible in winds! Receive, from his daughter's spear, the foes of Surandronlo. (*Sumalla of Lumon, PO 302*)

Here, too, the Circle of Loda is depicted as a site where spirits would descend in an attempt to help the worshippers in times of need. The battle between two Scandinavian kings is portrayed in detail and the atmosphere of the poem when speaking of the circle and Scandinavians is similar to the one previously given in *Cathlin of Clutha*—“They strove for the fame of the deed: and gloomy battle rose. From isle to isle they sent a spear, broken and stained with blood, to call the friends of their fathers, in their sounding arms” (*Sul-malla of Lumon, PO 302*). The mention of the Circle of Loda itself stands as a symbol of Scandinavian tradition, to which Ossian is presented to be estranged, for he is not present at the rites held at the circle. This can be viewed in the below extracts:

The Scandinavians	The Celts (the Irish, Scots and Welsh)
<p>“There, mixed with the murmur of waters, rose the voice of aged men, they called the forms of night, to aid them in their war.” (<i>Sul-malla of Lumon, PO 302</i>)</p>	<p>“Heedless I stood, with my people, where fell the foamy stream from rocks.” (<i>Sul-malla of Lumon, PO 302</i>)</p>

**Cath-loda: Duan First. 1763.**<sup>61</sup>

Starno sent a dweller of Loda, to bid Fingal to the feast; but the king remembered the past, and all his rage arose. [...]

Go, son of Loda; his words are but blasts to Fingal: blasts, that, to and fro, roll the thistle, in autumnal vales. [...]

Starno, of lakes, is before me, and Swaran, the foe of strangers. Their words are not in vain, by Loda's stone of power. (*Cath-loda: Duan First, PO 307*)

But I behold thee, chief of Lulan, sporting by Loda's hall, when the dark-skirted night is poured along the sky. [...] Thou kindlest thy hair into meteors, and sailest along the night. Why am I forgot in my cave, king of shaggy boars? Look from the hall of Loda, on lonely Conban-carglas. [...]

Torcul-torno, she said, once dwelt at Lulan's foamy stream: he dwelt but, now, in Loda's hall, he shakes the sounding shell. He met Starno of Lochlin, in battle; long fought the dark-eyed kings. My father fell, at length, blue-shielded Torcul-torno. (*Cath-loda: Duan First, PO 308*)

Fingal, again, advanced his steps, wide thro' the bosom of night, to where the trees of Loda shook amidst squally winds. Three stones, with heads of moss, are there; a stream, with foaming course; and dreadful, rolled around them, is the dark-red cloud of Loda. From its top looked forward a ghost, half-formed of the shadowy smoak. He poured his voice, at times, amidst the roaring stream. Near, bending beneath a blasted tree, two heroes received his words: Swaran of the lakes, and Starno foe of strangers. On their dun shields, they darkly leaned: their spears are forward in night. Shrill sounds the blast of darkness, in Starno's floating beard. (*Cath-loda: Duan First, PO 308-09*)

Swaran threw his gleaming spear: it stood fixed in Loda's tree. Then came the foes forward, with swords. [...] He struck Loda's tree, with his spear; he raised the hum of songs. They came to the host of Lochlin, each in his own dark path; like two foam-covered streams, from two rainy vales. (*Cath-loda: Duan First, PO 309*)

While watching enemy movement Fingal comes across a place of worship—the Circle of Loda—where Starno and his son, Swaran, consulted the Spirit of Loda regarding the issues of war. The spirit appears from the top of a dark-red cloud and is described through Fingal's eyes as he hides in the trees, watching the two Lochlinners talk to him; and what he sees is

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<sup>61</sup> 'Cath-loda' means the 'battle of Loda'.



dreadful to him. Loda is said to look like a half-formed shadowy smoke, speaking with his mighty voice. The scene, which is narrated in considerable detail by Ossian, is a good example of the portrayal of ‘darkness’ and the violence of Fingal’s enemy. They listen to Loda’s dark words with their spears ready for fight. At the end of the first *Duan* of *Cath-loda* Ossian describes Odin’s airy hall:

U-thorno, that risest in waters; on whose side are the meteors of night! I behold the dark moon descending behind thy echoing woods. On thy top dwells the misty Loda, the house of the spirits of men. In the end of his cloudy hall bends forward Cruth-loda of swords. His form is dimly seen, amidst his wavy mist. His right-hand is on his shield: in his left is the half-viewless shell. The roof of his dreadful hall is marked with nightly fires.<sup>62</sup>

The race of Cruth-loda<sup>63</sup> advance, a ridge of formless shades. He reaches the sounding shell, to those who shone in war; but, between him and the feeble, his shield rises, a crust of darkness. He is a setting meteor to the weak in arms. Bright, as a rainbow on streams, came white-armed Conban-carglas. (*Cath-loda: Duan First, PO*, 309)

According to *Snorra Edda*, the Æsir race descends from Odin and his wife, Frigg, which gives him the name of ‘All-father’ for he is the “father of all gods and of men and of everything that has been brought into being by him and his power” (Sturlusson 1995, 13). He has a complex role in the mythology but he is mainly associated with wisdom, battle, death, victory, magic and prophecy—he sacrifices one of his eyes for knowledge, hangs himself on the World Tree for wisdom and also receives the prophecy from the völvu (seeress). In the *Introduction to Hávamál*<sup>64</sup> (*The Words of Odin*), we read that the *Poetic Edda* presents Odin as the cause of every misfortune for he creates dissension between kinsmen. He is the god of

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<sup>62</sup> U-thorno is the hill in Lochlin, near Gomal, Starno’s (King of Lochlin) seat. According to the description Odin’s hall is depicted as being above this hill.

<sup>63</sup> Cruth-loda refers to the Scandinavian deity, Odin.

<sup>64</sup> “*Hávamál*” can be translated as “the words of the High One” (Edwards & Pálsson 1998, 7).

war and is also known as 'Father of the Slain' since he adopts the heroes, who are killed in battle, as his sons (Edwards & Pálsson 1998, 7).

Odin is the ruler of Valhalla, his Hall located in Asgard,<sup>65</sup> where only brave warriors, who die in combat, are accepted to reside with him till Ragnarök (the Final destiny of the Gods). Odin had many names in eddic poetry—Macpherson prefers, Father of the Slain, as a representation of Odin's character and, more importantly, the attributes of those who worship him, since he believes people 'give their own passions and prejudices to the Divinities whom they adore'. According to his view, Odin's reign begins at the time of death and therefore, to the worshippers of Odin, the events of this life, except for the manner of leaving it—with violence and fame—carry very little importance (Macpherson 1773, 340). It is not hard to see how Macpherson comes to this conclusion—this is the time of universal destruction of nature, which would lead to a new creation and a new beginning. This belief can also be observed in the words of Conban-Carglas to Fingal where she says her father is fallen and now resides in Loda's hall (quoted above).

In a note related to the above extract, Macpherson stresses the association between Loda and Odin once more and claims that such graphic and picturesque definition of the hall did not exist in any other work, including the *Edda*:

The description of the airy hall of Loda (which is supposed to be the same with that of Odin, the deity of Scandinavia) is more picturesque and descriptive, than any in the *Edda*, or other works of the northern Scalders." (*Cath-loda: Duan First, PO 537 n.44 [M]*)

***Cath-loda: Duan Second. 1763.***

Like the murmur of waters, the race of U-thorno came down.  
Starno led the battle, and Swaran of stormy isles. They looked

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<sup>65</sup> One of the nine worlds of Norse mythology.

forward from iron shields, like Cruth-loda fiery-eyed, when he looks from behind the darkened moon, and strews his signs on night. (*Cath-loda: Duan Second, PO 313*)

The chiefs stood silent around, as the stones of Loda, on their hill. The traveller sees them, thro' the twilight, from his lonely path. He thinks them the ghosts of the aged, forming future wars. [...]

Why is thy head so gloomy, in the ocean's mist? From thy vales came forth a race, fearless as thy strong-winged eagles; the race of Colgorm of iron shields, dwellers of Loda's hall. (*Cath-loda: Duan Second, PO 314*)

Duth-maruno leads Fingal's army in the battle with Lochlinners the next day and successfully drives them over the stream of Turthor; however, he is badly wounded in combat and dies. Ullin introduces the story of Colgorm and Strina-dona in honour of the fallen hero.

Loda is again pictured as fierce and as spreading darkness, while 'Loda's hall' refers to Odin's Valhalla, where only brave warriors go when they die in battle. Thus, the poet emphasizes the fact that the enemy is fearless and strong. The parallel formed between the chiefs and the stones of Loda gives similar attributes to the leaders for they are said to stand in obscurity as if they are creating the wars of the future.

***Cath-loda: Duan Third. 1763.***

Cruth-loda bends from high, like a formless meteor in clouds. He sends abroad the winds, and marks them, with his signs. Starno foresaw, that Morven's king was never to yield in war. (*Cath-loda: Duan Third, PO 319*)

The king was pierced in battle; and Starno is to raise his tomb. Me, a son of Loda, he sends to white-handed Foinar-bragal, to bid her send a lock from her hair, to rest with her father, in earth. And thou king of roaring Urlor, let the battle cease, till Annir receive the shell, from fiery-eyed Cruth-loda. [...] There he laid the helmet of kings, and called the maid of Lulan, but she was distant far, in Loda's resounding hall. (*Cath-loda: Duan Third, PO 319-20*)

Setting and the situation surrounding Fingal's army are described by the poet. As one of the most significant and defining features of Lochlin is Loda, an account of the form of the spirit is included. The violent image of Loda and his dwellers can be seen in these passages as well, while the mentioning of Loda's hall supports the view that Loda stands for the deity, Odin. Being 'distant far, in Loda's resounding hall' is a synonym for being dead.

***Oina-morul. 1763.***

Son of the daring Trenmor, thy words are like the voice of Cruth-loda, when he speaks, from his parting cloud, strong dweller of the sky! Many have rejoiced at my feast; but they all have forgot Mal-orchol. I have looked towards all the winds, but no white sails were seen. But steel resounds in my hall; and not the joyful shells. (*Oina-morul, PO 323*)

Your fathers have been foes, but now their dim ghosts rejoice in death. They stretch their arms of mist to the same shell in Loda. Forget their rage, ye warriors, it was the cloud of other years. (*Oina-morul, PO 324*)

It is interesting to see Fingal (son of Trenmor), who sent Ossian to help the king of Fuärfed, being compared to Loda here by Mal-orchol. His words are said to be as strong and determined as those of the Scandinavian deity and the king is in admiration. However, the difference between Ossian and Loda is emphasized in the second quotation when he shows sensitivity and acts compassionately when needed, unlike the Scandinavians as illustrated in the poems. The poet stresses the importance of knowing how to show mercy and forgiveness, a virtue the Celtic heroes possess, which would lift 'the cloud of other years'.

**Concluding Thoughts — Ossianic References to Loda**

The chronological study of the appearances of Loda in the *Poems of Ossian* (1760-63) reveals that Macpherson's opinion of Scandinavia, Scandinavian customs and religion must have

already been shaped before he started working on the poems since he does not seem to reflect them in a different way as time progressed. There is a chance that even though he continued his investigation on Scandinavia, his interpretation of these sources stayed the same. Yet, it can be observed that he speaks of Loda and explains what it stands for extensively in the poems created in 1763. Poems of 1761, on the other hand, show that Macpherson claims the power and the significance of the spirit of Loda for the Scandinavians, especially in *Carric-thura* but the detailed descriptions of the Stone and the Circle of Loda are seen later. It is likely that he was mostly influenced by Blair or he got hold of more sources related to Scandinavia and stone circles or simply, he was influenced by the growing interest in the suspected link between druids and stone circles in the eighteenth century—as there was a lot of speculation about the standing stones in the early half of the eighteenth century such as the works of William Stukeley, an English antiquarian who was a pioneer of the archaeological investigation of the prehistoric monuments of Stonehenge and Avebury. In his *Stonehenge, A Temple Restor'd to the British Druids* (1740), he claims (wrongly) that the Stonehenge was a temple of the Druids along with other stone circles in Britain:

Tho' *Stonehenge* be the proudest singularity of this sort, in the world, as far as we know: yet there are so many others, manifestly form'd upon the same, or kindred design, by the same measure, and for the same purpose, all over the *Britanic* isles; that we can have no room to doubt of their being made by the same people, and that by direction of the *British* Druids. There are innumerable, from the land's end in *Cornwall*, to the utmost northern promontory in *Scotland*, where the *Roman* power never reach'd. They are to be found in all the islands between *Scotland* and *Ireland*, isle of *Man*, all the *Orkney* islands, &c. and numerous in *Ireland* itself. [...] They are circles of stones, generally rude, of different diameters, upon elevated ground, barren, open heaths and downs; chiefly made of stones taken from the surface of the ground. (Stukeley 1774, 3)

The connection between the megalithic monuments and druids was a part of the revival of interest in druidism which began in the eighteenth century with the views of Aubrey, Stukeley and Toland influencing the contemporary audience. Macpherson's unsympathetic stance towards druids becomes apparent when he expresses his ideas on the subject:

On occasion of a new war against the *King of the World*, as the poems emphatically call the Roman emperor, the Druids, to vindicate the honour of the order, began to resume their ancient privilege of chusing the Vergobretus. Garmal, the son of Tarno, being deputed by them, came to the grandfather of the celebrated Fingal, who was then Vergobretus, and commanded him, in the name of the whole order, to lay down his office. Upon his refusal, a civil war commenced, which soon ended in almost the total extinction of the religious order of the Druids. A few that remained, retired to the dark recesses of their groves, and the caves they had formerly used for their meditations. It is then we find them in *the circle of stones*, and unheeded by the world. A total disregard for the order, and utter abhorrence of the Druidical rites ensued. Under this cloud of public hate, all that had any knowledge of the religion of the Druids became extinct, and the nation fell into the last degree of ignorance of their rites and ceremonies. (*The Antiquity &c. of the Poems of Ossian*, PO [1763] 45)

As opposed to believing the stone circles were the construction of the druidic order Macpherson claims the druids tried to pursue their religious rites using the stones once their order was extinguished, an attempt which he finds ignorant. "The druidical superstition was, in the days of Ossian, on the point of its final extinction" (Blair, PO [1763] 355) and the poems "are full of the particulars of the fall of the Druids" (*The Antiquity &c. of the Poems of Ossian*, PO [1763] 417 n. 17 [M]). Besides, by making a connection between the druids, stone circles and the Scandinavians in *Ossian* Macpherson seems to have attempted to emphasize the strength of Ossianic heroes over religion of the druids and the magic of the Scandinavians:

It is said in many old poems, that the Druids, in the extremity of their affairs, had solicited and obtained aid from Scandinavia.

Among the auxiliaries there came many pretended magicians, which circumstance Ossian alludes to, in his description of the *son of Loda*. Magic and incantation could not, however, prevail: for Trenmor, assisted by the valour of his son Trathal, entirely broke the power of the Druids. (*Cathlin of Clutha*, PO 531 n. 11 [M])

In Macpherson's opinion, Fingal's confrontation with Loda is the "most extravagant fiction in all Ossian's poems" (*Carric-thura: A Poem*, PO 463 n.67 [M]) and even being so, Ossian does not express anything that is not considered to be a part of the notions of the times regarding supernatural beings. Furthermore, from this story of Fingal and Loda, he draws the conclusion that Ossian appears to believe that "superior beings ought to take no notice of what passed among men" (*Carric-thura: A Poem*, PO 463 n.67 [M]). This perspective might also justify why Ossian does not portray his heroes as worshipping or receiving help from any god, as that would diminish the magnitude of their achievements. Along with the portrayal of the difference in religious tendencies, perhaps, the reason Spirit of Loda is depicted as terrifying, is to stress the distinction between Celtic and Scandinavian tradition, which is presented as more barbarous by Macpherson-Ossian who has Fingal compare the two in these lines:

It is not the steel of the feeble, nor of the dark in soul. The maids are not shut in our caves of streams; nor tossing their white arms alone. They bend, fair within their locks, above the harps of Selma. Their voice is not in the desert wild, young light of Torcul-torno. (*Cath-loda: Duan First*, PO 308)

However, the absence of religion might have had its side effects—Thomas Warton, who was of great help to Percy in preparing his *Reliques*, declares stronger evidences would have appeared of Ossian's knowledge of the Scandinavian poets as well as creating new means for sublime descriptions if more religious elements existed in the *Poems of Ossian*:

Had Ossian found it convenient, to have introduced religion into his compositions, not only a new source had been opened to the

sublime, in describing the rites of sacrifice, the horrors of incantation, the solemn evocations of infernal beings, and the like dreadful superstitions, but probably many stronger and more characteristic evidences would have appeared, of his knowledge of the imagery of the Scandinavian poets. (Warton 1774-1781, liii-liv)

Admittedly, Warton makes quite a good point. Blair, however, thinks that Fingal's confrontation with the Spirit of Loda is one of the most sublime episodes:

If the engagement of Fingal with the spirit of Loda, in Carric-thura; if the encounters of the armies, in Fingal; [...] be not admitted as examples, and illustrious ones too, of the true poetical sublime, I confess myself entirely ignorant of this quality in writing. (Blair, *PO* [1763] 394)

In his *Critical Dissertation*, the spirit of Loda is mentioned twice, where Blair either praises the passage and the strength of Ossian's detailed descriptions or admires the sublime effect added to the poems by the sections related to Loda (as can also be seen in the quotation above):

But above all, the engagement of Fingal with the spirit of Loda, in Carric-thura, cannot be mentioned without admiration. I forbear transcribing the passage, as it must have drawn the attention of every one who has read the works of Ossian. The undaunted courage of Fingal, opposed to all the terrors of the Scandinavian God; the appearance and the speech of that awful spirit; the wound which he receives, and the shriek which he sends forth, "as rolled into himself, he rose upon the wind;" —["The spirit of Loda shrieked, as, rolled into himself, he rose on the wind." (*Carric-thura: A Poem*, *PO* 161)]—are full of the most amazing and terrible majesty. I know no passage more sublime in the writings of any uninspired author. (Blair, *PO* [1763] 369)

He goes on to state that:

The fiction is calculated to aggrandize the hero; which it does to a high degree; nor is it so unnatural or wild a fiction, as might at first be thought. According to the notions of those times, supernatural beings were material, and consequently, vulnerable. The spirit of Loda was not acknowledged as a deity by Fingal; he



did not worship at the stone of his power; he plainly considered him as the God of his enemies only; as a local deity, whose dominion extended no farther than to the regions where he was worshiped; who had, therefore, no title to threaten him, and no claim to his submission. (Blair, *PO* [1763] 369)

Contrary to the absence of a worshipped god, whose assistance is sought in the *Poems of Ossian*, various sagas in Norse mythology depict Odin as a great sage whose guidance and wisdom was highly valued. It needs to be clarified that Macpherson's sources seem to postdate the era in which Ossian is supposed to have lived and composed, as most of the earliest existing records of Norse mythology date from the eleventh century. Yet, archaeological evidence makes it possible for us to see that certain Scandinavian traditions (such as rituals held for Odin) were reflected accurately to a certain extent in the poems. Nevertheless, it is important to look at the poems as an important work of literature rather than as a historical document, although Macpherson encourages us to accept the latter with his extensive explanations. In the 'Introduction' to *The Words of Odin*, 'Hrolf Kraki's Saga' is told:

[...] Odin, disguised as a farmer called Hrani, offered hospitality and good advice to King Hrolf on three occasions. On his last visit the king made the fatal mistake of offending his host when, following an old custom, Hrani presented him with a shield, sword and corslet as a parting gift. But Hrolf refused to accept them and went on his way. They hadn't gone far when one of his champions warned that Hrani must have been Odin himself, so they went back to tell the farmer that Hrolf changed his mind about the gift. But when they reached the place where they had enjoyed Hrani's hospitality there was no sign of him or his farmstead. It was now obvious that Hrolf had lost Odin's protection, and he is advised not to fight any more battles. However, Hrolf's sister leads an army lurking about somewhere in the enemy ranks on the killing field; King Hrolf and all his champions lose their lives in the battle. (Edwards & Pálsson 1998, 14)

The story stands as an example of how Odin and his powers were considered to be of vital importance in battles at the time, which also sheds light on why we see the leader of Lochlin's army and their King visiting the Circle of Loda in Ossian's *Cath-loda: Duan First*—Lochlinners are presented as strongly believing in their gods, whereas Fingal does not acknowledge Loda as a deity, only seeing him as the god of his enemies. He is not a worshipper of Loda, and therefore, he is neither threatened by nor afraid of Loda—the dominion of the god reaches only to places where his worshippers exist. Therefore, Macpherson-Ossian has Fingal look superior to a Norse god as the hero challenges Loda, refusing to treat him as his worshippers, thus, in a way, raising himself to the status of a god. Blair finds a parallel to this in Homer:

We know there are poetical precedents of great authority, for fictions fully as extravagant; and if Homer be forgiven for making Diomed attack and wound in battle, the gods whom that chief himself worshiped, Ossian surely is pardonable for making his hero superior to the god of a foreign territory. (Blair, *PO* [1763] 369)

Yet, he feels the need to emphasize that even though the absence of a Supreme Being might have had poetical advantages, the poems would have been even more beautiful with the realization of such knowledge:

For the most august and lofty ideas that can embellish poetry are derived from the belief of a divine administration of the universe: And hence the invocation of a supreme Being, or at least of some superior powers who are conceived as presiding over human affairs, the solemnities of religious worship, prayers preferred, and assistance implored on critical occasions, appear with great dignity in the works of almost all poets as chief ornaments of their compositions. The absence of all such religious ideas from Ossian's poetry, is a sensible blank in it, the more to be regretted, as we can easily imagine what an illustrious figure they would have made under the management of such a genius as his; and how finely they would have been adapted to many situations which occur in his works. (Blair, *PO* [1763] 369-70)

As we have seen in earlier chapters, absence of a god and of religious beliefs in Ossian's Celtic realm owes something to Macpherson's attempt to mask superstition associated with the Highlands to please the eighteenth century audience as much as it does to underline the distinction he tries to make between Scandinavian and Celtic. Most of all, it provides insights into Macpherson's use of past and tradition: he transforms his historical sources into fiction,<sup>66</sup> he uses the past in such a way that he apprises and celebrates Scottish identity within a broader British framework.

### Ossianic Expeditions to Scandinavia



**Fig. 3.** Map of Scandinavian homelands and other areas in the British Isles settled by Scandinavians (in reference to figure 4 in *Viking Scotland*, Ritchie 1993, 14).

As can be seen in figure 3 above, the west coast of Scotland, the islands of Orkney and Shetland, large parts of Ireland and South Britain were settled by the Scandinavians between

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<sup>66</sup> As pointed out in the discussion on *The Highlander* in chapter 3 (and later on in this chapter), the presentation of Scandinavia as the enemy is suggested in historical sources.

the late eighth and early twelfth centuries.<sup>67</sup> In the *Poems of Ossian*, such islands and countries along with the Scandinavian mainland, the Kingdom of Lochlin (Norway, Sweden and Denmark, in the map above), are presented as under Scandinavian rule.

Even though most of the poems of Ossian are set in Scotland or Ulster (Ireland), the poet frequently refers to the expeditions of his heroes to other lands, including to Inis-huna (Wales), as well as ones which are under Scandinavian domination. The image of Ossian as a well-educated poet, endowed with both strong and tender emotions, created by Macpherson is reinforced by the help of these expeditions, for they include “the most illustrious scenes which that age could exhibit, both of heroism in war, and magnificence in peace” (Blair, *PO* [1763] 352). In a note to *Sul-malla of Lumon* where Fingal’s voyages to Inis-thuna (Wales) and his fame in distant lands are told Macpherson comments on the significance of travels and the advantages it has for Ossian’s poetry:

His [Fingal’s, and in turn, Ossian’s] expeditions to all parts of Scandinavia, to the north of Germany, and the different states of Great Britain and Ireland, were very numerous, and performed under such a character, and at such times, as gave him an opportunity to mark the undisguised manners of mankind. War and an active life, as they call forth, by turns, all the powers of the soul, present to us the different characters of men: in times of peace and quiet, for want of objects to exert them, the powers of the mind lie concealed, in a great measure, and we see only artificial passions and manners. It is from this consideration I conclude, that a traveller of penetration could gather more genuine knowledge from a tour of ancient Gaul, than from the minutest observation of all the artificial manners, and elegant refinements of modern France. (*Sulmalla of Lumon*, *PO* 532 n. 7 [M])

Ossianic expeditions to Scandinavia—which includes Lochlin,<sup>68</sup> Inis-thona (“the island of waves” [*The War of Inis-thona*, *PO* 439 n.1]), Inistore (Orkney), Berrathon, I-thorno and

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<sup>67</sup> Norse earldom of Orkney was established by Scandinavian settlers approximately in 800, while Scots arrived in Orkney from the fourteenth century onwards (Sandnes 2005, 173).

Fuärfed—inform the reader about the Scandinavian customs, manners and culture, which according to Macpherson and Blair are different from those of the Celts (examined later in the chapter). Therefore, looking at stories taking place in these countries or islands is a good starting point in understanding how Scandinavia is portrayed in the Ossianic poems.

## Lochlin

### In *Fingal: Book III* (1761-62)

Carril, the bard, tells the tragic love story of Fingal and Agandecca, sister of Swaran, in the third book of *Fingal*, where the actions of the hero in Lochlin are also related. According to this, the cruel King of Lochlin invites Fingal to a feast in order to give him his daughter, beautiful Agandecca. He is welcomed to Starno's kingdom for a feast and asked to fight the boars of "Lochlin's woody land" (*Fingal: Book III, PO 73*), so he can prove himself to the maid of the land. Falling in love with brave Fingal, Agandecca warns him that he should not trust Starno for he has set a trap for him in the forests. Realizing her daughter has helped his enemy the King kills Agandecca and a battle begins—Fingal takes the maid to his ship and builds a tomb for her in Ardven:

Fingal, high-descended chief, trust not Starno's heart of pride.  
 Within that wood he has placed his chiefs; beware of the wood of  
 death. But, remember, son of the hill, remember Agandecca: save  
 me from the wrath of my father, king of the windy Morven! [...]  
     Before the halls of Starno the sons of the chace convened.  
 The king's dark brows were like clouds. His eyes like meteors of  
 night. [...]

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<sup>68</sup> In *Ossian*, Lochlin seems to refer to "the Gaelic name of Scandinavia in general; in a more confined sense that of the peninsula of Jutland" (*Index 1996 "Lochlin" PO 565*). However, it should be pointed out that there is a lot of doubt as to the exact location of the 'Lochlin' (or *Lochlain*)—today, Isle of Man, the Hebrides, Norway, are all candidates (Etchingam 2010, 80).

Starno pierced her side with steel. She fell like a wreath of snow that slides from the rocks of Ronan; when the woods are still, and the echo deepens in the vale. [...]

The gloom of the battle roared, and Lochlin fled or died.  
(*Fingal: Book III, PO 74*)

This episode is a clear display of Starno's cold heart and his lack of human feeling while the gloomy and dark Scandinavian landscape is reflected as a setting for battle and echoes of death.

### **In *Fingal: Book VI* (1761-62)**

In the sixth book of *Fingal*, Trenmor's past adventures in Lochlin are introduced by the bard Ullin at the feast after the battle where Swaran is present too. Trenmor approaches the land of Lochlin on a misty day and pursues the boar as does Fingal many years later. His fame reaches the Lochlinners and he feasts with them for three days; all the warriors of Lochlin yield before Trenmor. As he leaves on the fourth day, Inibaca comes to him in disguise of a young warrior, named Lonval's son, and asks him to take her with him for she is not happy with Corlo. Trenmor challenges Corlo to a fight and waits for him on the shore but when the Lochlinner does not show up, the king gives his daughter, Inibaca to Trenmor.

This story is recited by Ullin as a "song of peace" to soothe the souls of the warriors (*Fingal: Book VI, PO 99*) for it is sung after the battle and it emphasizes that the two heroes—Fingal and Swaran—have things in common. Fingal's ability to show mercy and understanding when necessary, unlike the Lochlinners, is also portrayed:

King of Lochlin, said Fingal, thy blood flows in the veins of thy foe. Our families met in battle, because they loved the strife of spears. But often did they feast in the hall; and send round the joy of the shell. Let thy face brighten with gladness, and thine ear delight in the harp. (*Fingal: Book VI, PO 101*)

The horrifying image of the land of Lochlin appears as soon as Trenmor comes close to the shore and this continues throughout the episode:

The high rocks of the land of Lochlin, and its groves of murmuring sounds appeared to the hero through the mist; he bound his white-bosomed sails. Trenmor pursued the boar that roared along the woods of Gormal. Many had fled from its presence; but the spear of Trenmor slew it. [...]

Now when the fourth gray morn arose, the hero launched his ship; and walking along the silent shore waited for the rushing wind. For loud and distant he heard the blast murmuring in the grove. (*Fingal: Book VI, PO 99-100*)

### **Inis-thona**

Annir, the king of the island, is in need of assistance in a war against his son-in-law, Cormalo, who is on a mission to deprive Annir of his kingdom and has also caused the deaths of his two sons, Argon and Ruro. Resenting the injustice of Cormalo's actions Fingal grants Oscar the permission to go to Inis-thona as he proposes the expedition. The king explains how his sons were killed, also describing the features of the Scandinavian chief, Cormalo:

Cormalo, replied the king, is chief of ten thousand spears; he dwells at the dark-rolling waters of Lano; which send forth the cloud of death. He came to Runa's echoing halls, and sought the honour of the spear. The youth was lovely as the first beam of the sun; and few were they who could meet him in fight! My heroes yielded to Cormalo: and my daughter loved the son of Lano. [...]

They went to the hills of Runa, and pursued the dark-brown hinds. The arrow of Cormalo flew in secret; and my children fell. He came to the maid of his love; to Inis-thona's dark-haired maid. They fled over the desert and Annir remained alone. (*The War of Inis-thona, PO 116*)

Later, a battle takes place between the armies of Cormalo and Oscar—the latter obtains a complete victory by killing Cormalo and bringing home the daughter of the king.

Macpherson notes that “Lano, was a lake of Scandinavia, remarkable, in the days of Ossian, for emitting a pestilential vapour in autumn” (*The War of Inis-thona*, PO 440 n. 16 [M]). A similar attribute is observed in the first book *Fingal*:

And thou, O valiant Duchomar, like the mist of marshy Lano;  
when it sails over the plains of autumn and brings death to the  
people. (*Fingal: Book I*, PO 57)

## **Inistore**

### **In *Carric-thura* (1761-62)**

Fingal arrives in Inistore (Orkney) to visit King Cathulla whose palace of Carric-thura is kept under siege by Frothal, King of Sora. According to the poem, the wind drives Fingal’s ships to Rutha’s bay where he can see Carric-thura and the Circle of Loda at a distance; he is obliged to spend the night on the shore. The next day, he attacks Frothal, who is protected by the Spirit of Loda, and takes him prisoner in a single combat:

The king of Sora is my son, he bends at the stone of my power.  
His battle is around Carric-thura; and he will prevail. Fly to thy  
land, son of Comhal, or feel my flaming wrath. (*Carric-thura*, PO  
161)

Fingal’s deliverance of Cathulla’s palace along with the episode of Loda, where Fingal is victorious in the fight with the Spirit of Loda, is the main subject of *Carric-thura*. The reader becomes familiar with Scandinavian belief and tradition—the savagery of the Norse god is reflected. Besides, as Macpherson points out “it lets us into Ossian’s notions of a superior being; and shews that he was not addicted to the superstition which prevailed all the world over, before the introduction of Christianity” (*Carric-thura*, PO 460 n.1 [M]).



### **In *Cath-loda: Duan First* (1763)**

On a voyage to Inistore Fingal's ship is driven off course into a bay of Scandinavia, near the residence of Starno due to bad weather conditions. Starno immediately gathers his forces getting ready to attack but upon realizing it is Fingal's army he fears he will lose the battle like before. So, he invites Fingal to a feast, at which he planned to kill him. Remembering Starno's previous hostile attack, which cost Agandecca her life, Fingal refuses to go and Starno starts to get ready for combat—Fingal, approaching to observe enemy action witnesses Swaran and Starno speaking to the spirit of Loda about war. At the end of the duan there is a depiction of the spirit (provided later in the chapter).

Before Fingal arrives at the Scandinavian site of worship he finds the daughter of a chief, Conban-carglas, who is kept captive by Starno in the cave of Turthor. This leads Fingal to point out how his nation treats women in a much more polite and civilized way:

It is not the steel of the feeble, nor of the dark in soul. The maids are not shut in our caves of streams; nor tossing their white arms alone. They bend, fair within their locks, above the harps of Selma. Their voice is not in the desert wild, young light of Torcul-torno. (*Cath-loda: Duan First*, PO 308)

### **In *Cath-loda: Duan Third* (1763)**

In an attempt to take Fingal by surprise, who has retired alone to a hill,<sup>69</sup> Starno asks Swaran to stab Fingal; upon his refusal Starno attacks Fingal himself only to be captured by him. However, showing mercy, Fingal later frees the Lochlinner in memory of his lovely daughter Agandecca whom he was once in love with.

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<sup>69</sup> Macpherson explains that "Fingal, according to the custom of the Caledonian kings, had retired to a hill alone, as he himself was to resume the command of the army the next day" (*Cath-loda: Duan Third*, PO 539 n. 7 [M]).

Starno came murmuring on. Fingal arose in arms. "Who art thou, son of night?" Silent he threw the spear. They mixed their gloomy strife. The shield of Starno fell, cleft in twain. He is bound to an oak. The early beam arose. Then Fingal beheld the king of Gormal. (*Cath-loda: Duan Third, PO 320*)

In this poem, the reader gets the chance to see the difference in personalities of Swaran and Starno clearly: even though they are both presented as cruel and merciless, Swaran is not devoid of human feeling as much as Starno is pictured to be. In Macpherson's words:

The surly attitude of Starno and Swaran is well adapted to their fierce and uncompiling dispositions. Their characters, at first sight, seem little different; but, upon examination, we find, that the poet has dexterously distinguished between them. They were both dark, stubborn, haughty and reserved; but Starno was cunning, revengeful, and cruel, to the highest degree; the disposition of Swaran, though savage, was less bloody, and somewhat tinged with generosity. It is doing injustice to Ossian, to say, that he has not a great variety of characters. (*Cath-loda: Duan Third, PO 539 n. 2 [M]*)

### **Berrathon**

Fingal lands on Berrathon, an island of Scandinavia, in a voyage to Lochlin,<sup>70</sup> where the king Larthmor shows him great hospitality and kindness. Later, when the king is dethroned by his own son, Uthal, Fingal sends Ossian and Toscar to Berrathon in order to rescue his friend, Larthmor and punish Uthal for his behaviour. Fingal's warriors return home victorious, restoring Larthmor, re-establishing his kingship and killing Uthal in a single combat.

Long pined the king in his cave, beside his rolling sea. Morning did not come to his dwelling; nor the burning oak by night. But the wind of ocean was there, and the parting beam of the moon.

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<sup>70</sup> The details of this voyage to Lochlin are provided in the third book of *Fingal*, which is dealt with earlier in the section.

The red star looked on the king, when it trembled on the western wave. [...]

Stately was the son of Larthmor! but his soul was dark.  
Dark as the troubled face of the moon, when it foretels the storms.  
[...]

The children of the unhappy come to Berrathon; to the sword of car-borne Uthal. He spreads no feast in his hall: the blood of strangers is on his streams. (*Berrathon*, PO 194-95)

Even though *Berrathon*, also known as *Ossian's Last Hymn* (*Berrathon*, PO 472 n.1 [M]) is elegiac in nature with a strong melancholic atmosphere since it was composed close to Ossian's death, Scandinavia and Scandinavian manners are dispersed throughout the episodes in *Berrathon*. One of the differences between the manners of the two nations strikes the eye here: Ossian's heroes mourn over the fall of their enemies, a virtue not observed in the Scandinavian warriors. Macpherson claims this "reverence which the most barbarous highlanders have still for the remains of the deceased, seems to have descended to them from their most remote ancestors" (*Berrathon*, PO 474 n.25 [M]).

### **I-thorno**

Returning from the battle of Rath-col Ossian meets Sul-malla, the daughter of the king of Inis-huna. She invites Oscar and the bard to a feast, where Ossian introduces the episode of two Scandinavian kings—Culgorm and Suarandronlo. Ossian and Cathmor, who helped Sul-malla's father against enemies, were on opposite sides in this battle between the Scandinavians which took place in I-thorno. The poem, *Sul-malla of Lumon*, tells the story of this battle shedding more light on Scandinavia and its customs, to which Macpherson also refers to in his notes:

The exact correspondence in the manners and customs of Inis-huna, as here described, to those of Caledonia, leaves no room to doubt, that the inhabitants of both were originally the same people. Some may alledge, that Ossian might transfer, in his

poetical descriptions, the manners of his own nation to foreigners. The objection is easily answered: for had Ossian used that freedom in this passage, there is no reason why he should paint the manners of the Scandinavians so different from those of the Caledonians. We find however, the former very different in their customs and superstitions from the nations of Britain and Ireland. The Scandinavian manners are remarkably barbarous and fierce, and seem to mark out a nation much less advanced in civil society, than the inhabitants of Britain were in the times of Ossian. (*Sul-malla of Lumon*, PO 532 n. 1 [M])

According to the poem, the two kings kill a boar with their swords and start fighting for the fame of the deed. It turns out to be a gloomy and bloody battle which ends with the deaths of both kings. The description of their combat and their deaths are very picturesque and fierce, which is “expressive of that ferocity of manners, which distinguished the northern nations” (*Sul-malla of Lumon*, PO 533 n. 17).

Not so passed the striving kings. They mixed in echoing fray; like the meeting of ghosts, in the dark wing of winds. Thro' either breast rushed the spears; nor yet lay the foes on earth. A rock received their fall; and half-reclined they lay in death. Each held the lock of his foe; and grimly seemed to roll his eyes. The stream of the rock leapt on their shields, and mixed below with blood. (*Sul-malla of Lumon*, PO 302)

### **Fuärfed**

Sent by Fingal, Ossian undertakes an expedition to Fuärfed where he was sent to aid the king in the war with Ton-thormod, the chief of Sar-dronlo, who wants to marry the king's daughter, Oina-morul. Ossian fights and takes Ton-thormod prisoner the next day and is offered to marry Oina-morul. Realizing she has feelings for Ton-thormod he surrenders her to her lover, creating a peaceful and happy ending.

Such were the deeds of Ossian, while yet his locks were young:  
tho' loveliness, with a robe of beams, clothed the daughter of

many isles. We call back, maid of Lutha, the years that have rolled away! (*Oina-morul*, PO 324)

Here, the Scandinavian kings are pictured as too stubborn and as lacking in understanding, whereas Ossian's generosity and ability to bring about reconciliation are emphasized. The episode also draws attention to a motif in *Ossian*, which, interestingly, can be paralleled to a similar motif in the *Kalevala*: the unhappiness of the heroes when it comes to the matters of love. A pattern can be observed:

The hero is offered a wife due to his bravery and success (although no specific task is set as in the *Kalevala*) – the bride is or is not willing to get married – she is killed or in love with someone else – the hero returns or remains without a bride

In another case, for instance, Agendecca offers herself to Fingal but is killed by her own father, Starno due to her betrayal. More importantly, the ancient bard is presented as living with the memory of Evirallin, Oscar's mother, as is Fingal with that of Agendecca's. Their remembrances of lost loves take an active role in the story-line when their ghosts visit the heroes inspiring heroic actions or foreseeing future dangers (as discussed in chapter 4; the love pattern in the *Kalevala* will be dealt with in chapter 6).

### **Concluding Thoughts — Ossianic Expeditions to the Circle of Loda**

The myths of the Scandinavians tell the stories of Odin, Thor and Frey (the three main Scandinavian gods), along with several other supernatural characters. The world tree, Yggdrasil, is splendidly presented in the centre of the universe, with its three wells, three roots and holding together nine worlds (Larrington 1996, xiv). Belief and faith in these gods had naturally resulted in rituals being held and sacrifices being made for them. According to Adam of Bremen, they made use of temples such as the Uppsala Temple, yet Macpherson

stresses that it was considered as offensive to enclose the gods within walls referring to Tacitus in the *Introduction* (1771):

[...] it was thought a kind of sacrilege to suppose, that the Divinity could be confined within walls, or that a human figure could give any idea of his person. (Macpherson 1773, 342)<sup>71</sup>

Therefore, they worshipped their divinities in open air in an attempt to worship and support nature and all living creatures as well. They have built monuments and left behind artefacts which can be seen as the pieces of a puzzle that will provide insights into the mind of the ancient man when put together. Even today, millennia after their creation, it is possible to see altars, rocks or stones in the middle of a plain or on the top of a hill all around the world, marking the assembly point for religious ceremonies. *Ossian* too provides us with a depiction of a Scandinavian worship site: the 'Circle or Stones of Loda', which is said to be located in Inistore, identified as the islands of Orkney by Macpherson:

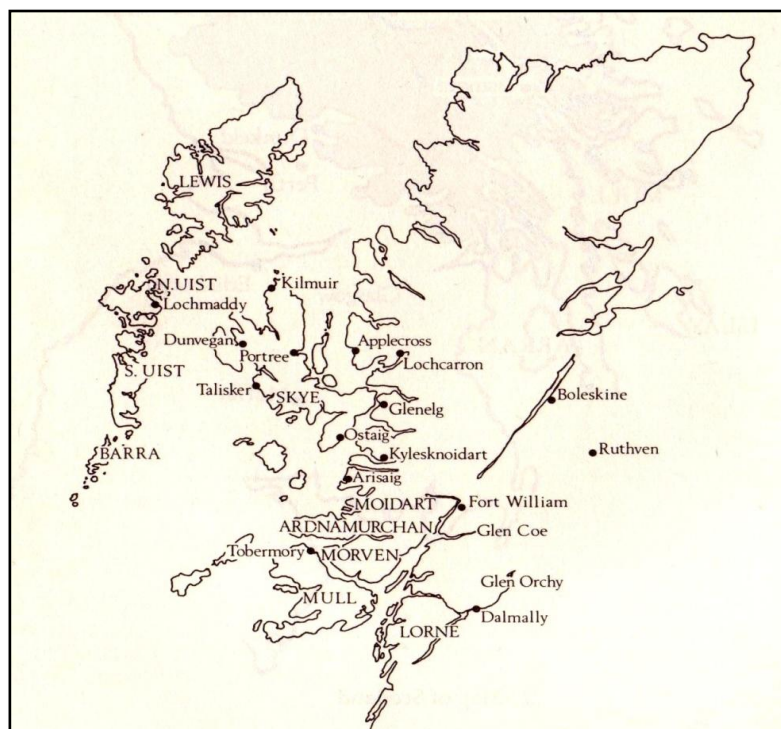
There are some ruins, and circular pales of stone, remaining still in Orkney, and the islands of Shetland, which retain, to this day, the name of *Loda* or *Loden*. (*Temora: Book Fifth*, PO 504 n.18 [M])

In consideration of this note, Stones of Stenness and the Ring of Brodgar seem most likely to be the stone circles mentioned in the *Poems*, Macpherson's explanatory notes and Blair's *Critical Dissertation* as among several isolated individually standing stones found in Orkney, these are built to form a round shape, a causewayed enclosure. However, Macpherson is not clear on how he achieved his knowledge about Orkney and the Circle of Loda, which as he claims, is located there. It seems logical to assume that neither Macpherson nor Blair would have actually gone prospecting to Orkney since it is not and never has been a Gaelic-

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<sup>71</sup> Nec cohibere in parietibus neque in ullam humani oris speciem assimilare (Macpherson 1773, 342 [Tacit. Germ.]).

speaking area<sup>72</sup> and they were in search of Gaelic material for Macpherson's Ossianic compositions. The map below shows the places Macpherson visited during his tour through the Highlands and the Isles (Figure 4).



**Fig. 4.** Map of the North-West Highlands and Islands showing places visited by Macpherson.<sup>73</sup>

Macpherson (and Blair) might have had access to early publications on Orkney monuments or seen their illustrations. The first printed account of the monuments in Orkney appeared in Wallace's *A description of the Isles of Orkney* which was printed in Edinburgh in 1693. Here, Wallace writes:

Some conceive that these Rounds have been places wherein two opposite Armies Encamped; But others more probably think that they were the High-Places in the *Pagan Times*, whereon Sacrifice

<sup>72</sup> In Macpherson's time, the language spoken in Orkney would most probably have been heavily influenced by Norse.

<sup>73</sup> Stafford 1988: illustration 4.

were offered, and that these two Mounts were the places where the Ashes of the Sacrifices were flung. And this is the more probable, because *Boethius*, in the Life of *Mainus K. Of Scots*, makes mention of that kind of high stones, calling them the Temples of the Gods. (Wallace 1693, 23)

He goes on to explain a natural phenomenon which amazes people greatly:

In the Parish of *Evie*, near the Sea, are some small *Hillocks*, which frequently in the Night time, appear all in a fire; likeways the Kirk of *Evie* called *St. Nicholas*, is seen full of light, as if torches or candles were burning in it all night. (Wallace 1693, 27)

Wallace's remark is particularly curious as it seems that it could have inspired Macpherson's presentation of the Circle of Loda, where his spirits descend at night in 'dark-red streams of fire':

We rushed on either side of a stream, which roared thro' a blasted heath. High broken rocks were round, with all their bending trees. Near are two circles of Loda, with the stone of power; where spirits descended, by night, in dark-red streams of fire. There, mixed with the murmur of waters, rose the voice of aged men, they called the forms of night, to aid them in their war. (*Sul-malla of Lumon*, PO 302)

Moreover, one of the earliest illustrations of the stone circles (the Ring of Brodgar) and the Stone of Odin is that by Richard Pococke, Bishop of successively Ossory and Meath, who travelled through Scotland in 1760 and kept a record of his observations (through correspondences to his mother or sister). He visited Orkney in July 1760 where he gives a detailed account of the Ring of Brodgar and the Stone of Odin along with their sketches:

[...] we had in sight the Lough of Stenhouse and Circles of Stones, and came in about 4 miles to the Sea Cliffs which are very fine perpendicular rocks, with several coves in them [...] we had a most pleasant ride between the two parts of the Lough, tho' the Country is mostly heathy, & we came to a very grand druid temple, some of the stones of which are 15 feet high and form three to six feet broad, and fifteen feet apart. [...] we came to another Circle of Stones which are 15 feet high, six feet broad, the



Circle is about 30 yards in Diameter, and the stones are about eight yards apart. (Pococke 1887 [1760], 140-44)<sup>74</sup>

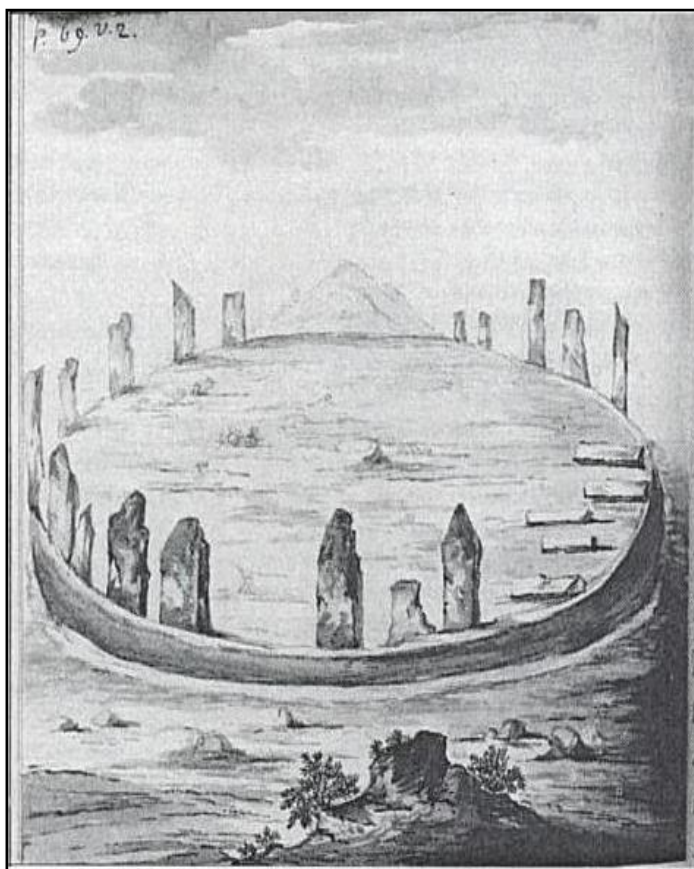


Fig. 5. Ring of Brodgar; pen and ink wash by Richard Pococke, 1760.<sup>75</sup>

Although there is no evidence suggesting that the paths of Pococke and James Macpherson actually crossed, the fact that an illustration of the Ring of Brodgar was available in 1760

<sup>74</sup> Before arriving in Orkney, Pococke visits the Western Isles (June 1760) where he becomes familiar with the works of Dr John Macpherson, praising his poems (Pococke 1887 [1760], 88-89). It is not clear whether or not they actually met but even if not, it is very likely that John Macpherson heard of Pococke who was on a lengthy journey in an attempt to provide glimpses of Scottish life and character. It is also likely that James Macpherson was aware of Pococke's tour as following Orkney, Pococke was received with respect and interest in Aberdeen by the Episcopal clergy, the Professors of the two Universities there and the civil authorities (Kemp 1887, liii). There is a possibility that James, on a similar mission as Pococke, was informed of the latter's travels through John Macpherson whom he met in September 1760 (only a few months after Pococke's visit in the Western Isles).

<sup>75</sup> Ruggles 1988, 342: fig. 15.2.

makes one consider the possibility that Macpherson could have seen or heard of detailed descriptions of the stone circles of Orkney in this way.<sup>76</sup>

Considering the lack of evidence suggesting Macpherson extended his tour to Orkney, we can presume that Macpherson drew inspiration from other stone circles he visited at other locations during his travels and related those experiences to the Stones in Orkney.<sup>77</sup> He might have had the opportunity to observe several stone circles both in his home area as well as in Aberdeenshire, where he spent many years. In fact, Macpherson speaks of a stone circle which stands near the River Spey in the east of the Highlands:

In the confines between Badenoch and Strathspey, two districts of the county of Inverness, there is a very extensive heath which goes by the name of SLIA GRIAN-AIS, or the plain of the spirit of the Sun. [...] This sequestered heath swells towards the centre into several eminences, upon the most of which there are still to be seen several circles of stones, resembling, though in miniature, the famous Stone Henge on the plain of Salisbury. These monuments of antiquity, standing in a place altogether unfit for culture, have received no injury but from time, and are consequently more entire than any other of the same kind in the Highlands and Scottish Isles. (Macpherson 1771, 169-70)

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<sup>76</sup> In 1772, Sir Joseph Banks produced some of the “most remarkable illustrations and surveys of both the Ring of Brodgar and the Stones of Stenness” (Ruggles 1988, 342)—Frederick Herm Walden, his draughtsman, prepared a measured drawing of Brodgar where he marks the circle as ‘the Circle of Loda’ (see Appendix B for illustration). This is a striking illustration as although it clearly could not have been a source for Macpherson’s *Ossian* it suggests that the relation he makes with the stone circles of Orkney and the Circle of Loda was reflected on a map produced in 1772, a few years after the publication of his poems.

<sup>77</sup> There are considerable number of Neolithic monuments, stone circles and standing stones allaround Scotland and the British Isles apart from those in Orkney that resemble one another in one way or another—eleven sites in Aberdeenshire, twenty-four in Argyll, thirteen in the Highlands, seven in the Western Isles and thirty-five in Perthshire (Ancient Scotland. 17 Feb. 2011). See Appendix B for a map showing the stone circles in the Scottish Highlands taken from Burl’s *A Guide to the Stone Circles of Britain, Ireland and Brittany* (1995). Each stone circle in the Inverness area is marked with a number from 149 to 163. As can be observed from the map, there are many stone circles in the Inverness area and near the river Spey, but it seems likely that Macpherson is referring to the stone circle of Aviemore, in the extract taken from his *Intoduction* above, which stands on level ground in the Spey valley (Burl 1995, 127), is miniature compared to the Stonehenge and is surrounded by heath (see Appendix B).

The existence of druidical circles and the appearance of a Roman encampment in the parish of Kingussie, between Spey and Pitmain, is mentioned also by the 'Statistical Account of Scotland' (1791-99) (Statistical Account of Scotland 1791-99, 43). Therefore, it is safe to presume that Macpherson's reflections of the stone circles in Orkney as presented in *Ossian* rely on Orkney being under Scandinavian rule once and the close proximity of Odin's Stone to the Stone Circles; and possibly to Mallet's observations regarding the customs and traditions of ancient Norse:<sup>78</sup>

The third [festival of the year], which seems to have been the most considerable in ancient times, was instituted in honour of Odin; it was celebrated at the beginning of the spring, [...]. There were also some feasts in honour of the gods, and they were often multiplied on occasion of particular events.

In the earliest ages, the offerings were simple, and such as shepherds and rustics could present. They loaded the altars of the gods with the first fruits of their crops, and the choicest products of the earth: Afterwards they sacrificed animals. [...] to Odin horses, dogs, and falcons, sometimes cocks, and a fat bull. [...] It is the nature of violent desires and excessive fear to know no bounds, and therefore when they would ask for any favour which they ardently wished for, or would deprecate some public calamity which they feared, the blood of animals was not deemed a price sufficient, but they began to shed that of men. (Mallet 1809 [1770], 112)<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> It should be made clear here that the stones antedate Scandinavians by millennia and they were not erected by them. However, it is suggested that these stones were used as a ritual ground by them.

<sup>79</sup> La Troisième enfin qui semble avoir été la plus considérable dans les anciens tems, étoit instituée à l'honneur d'Odin, on la célébroit à l'entrée du Printemps pour recevoir cette saison, & surtout pour obtenir du Dieu des combats d'heureux succès dans les expéditions projetées. Il y avoit encore quelques fêtes en l'honneur des autres Dieux, & on les multiplioit souvent à l'occasion de certains évènements. Dans les premiers tems les offrandes étoient simples & telles que des Bergers pouvoient les présenter. On chargeoit les autels des Dieux des prémices des récoltes, & des fruits les plus beaux de la terre; Dans la suite on immola des animaux. [...]; à Odin des chevaux, des chiens, & des faucons, quelquefois des coqs, & un Taureau gras. [...]. Enfin les desirs violents, & l'extrême crainte ne pouvant de leur nature reconnoître aucune borne, quand on eut quelque faveur vivement souhaitée à demander, ou quelque calamité publique à prévenir le sang des animaux ne parut plus d'un prix assez grand, & l'on fit couler celui des hommes (Mallet 1755, 81-82).

The connection between Ossian's poems and the Neolithic stones of Orkney has been documented by Low whose views from his manuscript (1774) are included by Anderson:

These stones are by some people thought to be the Circle of Loda, spoken by the poet Fingal, their situation and the face of the country resembling his description of the place, where Loda's Circle was erected. However, it is plain that they have been erected for places of worship in the times of paganism; [...]. (Anderson 1879, xxv [Low])

Walter Scott also visited the Stones in August 1814 and reported his observations the area, providing us, like Anderson, with a nineteenth-century understanding of the stones near Macpherson's writing. He also emphasizes that these monuments were considered of Scandinavian origin by the locals:

The most stately monument of this sort in Scotland, and probably inferior to none in England, excepting Stone-henge, is formed by what are called the Standing Stones of Stenhouse, in the island of Pomona in the Orknies, where it can scarcely be supposed that Druids ever penetrated; at least, it is certain, that the common people now consider it as a Scandinavian monument; and, according to an ancient custom, a couple who are desirous to attach themselves by more than an ordinary vow of fidelity, join hands through the round hole which is in one of the stones. This they call the promise of Odin. The Ting-walls, or places where the Scandinavians held their comitia, were surrounded by circles of stones as well as the places of Druid worship; and instances of this occur, even in Norway. But, indeed, the general idea of setting up a circle of stones to mark the space allotted for the priests, or nobles, while the vulgar remained without its precincts, seems likely to be common to many early nations. (Scott 1814, xiii [footnote])

However, the fact remains that Macpherson seems to have relied on some half remembered descriptions of Orkney monuments as the basis for his fictitious Ossianic stories. Yet, a reflection of the eighteenth-century vision of Scandinavian religious rituals is conveyed in his poetry.

While Scott ends his comment on Scandinavian worship sites by pointing out a possible commonality of early nations, Blair stresses the dissimilarity of Celtic traditions from others: he informs the reader about the scene of the poems and emphasizes the difference between the Scandinavian and the Celts:

The scene of most of Ossian's poems is laid in Scotland, or in the coast of Ireland opposite to the territories of Fingal. When the scene is in Ireland, we perceive no change of manners from those of Ossian's native country. For as Ireland was undoubtedly peopled with Celtic tribes, the language, customs, and religion of both nations were the same. They had been separated from one another by migration, only a few generations, as it should seem, before our poets age; and they still maintained a close and frequent intercourse. But when the poet relates the expeditions of any of his heroes to the Scandinavian coast, or to the islands of Orkney, which were then part of the Scandinavian territory, as he does in Carric-thura, Sulmalla of Lumon, and Cathloda, the case is quite altered. (Blair, *PO* [1763] 377)

As Moore brings to attention, politics, questions and matters of national and cultural identity became a part of the Ossianic phenomenon since its inception (Moore 2003, 7), Macpherson and Blair constantly reinforcing each other on their stance: the goal to protect and preserve Gaelic heritage in the wider Lowland and England context. It may be possible to interpret their attempt as misguided and radical since they might be seen as misrepresenting the culture they were trying to defend. Nevertheless, *Ossian* remains as a combination of myth and history. In fact, Pittock suggests that the past, depicted by Macpherson in the poems, “provides a sublimating elegy for Jacobite history, moving it into the historyless zone of primary epic” (Pittock 1995, 36) and his efforts can be interpreted as an attempt to adapt his values—his “Celtic Whiggism” as Colin Kidd indicates (Kidd 2003, 224)—to a Gaelic past in order to defend the Gaeltachd against the eighteenth-century vision of its Celtic savagery. Thus *Ossian's* bards and warriors who preach and teach reflect and mythologize the cultural values which the contemporary literati respected and wished to write about.

Eighteenth-century also saw a considerable increase in travel literature especially when more scholars began to travel to the Scottish Highlands (including Samuel Johnson, the biggest criticizer of Macpherson and *Ossian*). Therefore it is possible to read the Ossianic journeys and expeditions as a powerful contribution to Ossian's depicted image as a cultured moralist, with which he would be able to earn the respect and attention of contemporary audience. Expeditions to Scandinavia investigated here, in particular, not only allow Macpherson to make a distinction between cultures but are also Macpherson's way of injecting historical elements into the poems: while picturing Scandinavia as the enemy is inspired by ancient history and chronicles (see discussion on *The Highlander* in chapter 3), the Scandinavian setting with the spirit and the circle of Loda, religious rituals and epic love stories become mythic embellishments. All in all, it is safe to say that these Ossianic expeditions to Scandinavia are vital to the text as they are the tools which Macpherson uses to invoke Scotland's mythical past.

### **Macpherson's Sources on Scandinavian Gods**

**Macpherson's *Introduction to the History of Great Britain and Ireland*. 1771, 1772, 1773.**

Macpherson's knowledge of Scandinavia and customs of Scandinavian people is greatly influenced by Mallet's observations, which he had the chance to benefit from, from the beginning, even before the publication of his *Ossian*, as Mallet's *Introduction a l'histoire de Dannemarc* was published in 1755 (later translated to English by Percy as *Northern Antiquities* in 1770). Authentic Gaelic material, too, certainly provided him with valuable information on the Northern civilizations for it seems that Vikings and their incursions into the Gaelic world

(Scottish and Irish) constitute an important feature of Macpherson's authentic sources which include Gaelic ballads and sagas. Thomson points out:

In Irish saga literature the two main cycles of heroic tales centre on the champions Cù Chulainn and Finn, the former hero being traditionally assigned to the first century A.D., and the latter to the third. These cycles are known respectively as the Cù Chulainn or Ulster cycle, and the Fenian or Ossianic cycle. (Thomson 1952, 10)

He goes on to state that the Ossianic (Fenian) cycle includes elements of the semi-historical traditions of the Viking times and that it "gathered to it a great deal of alien material, mythical, magical and historical" (Thomson 1952, 11). Furthermore, Christiansen remarks in *The Vikings and the Viking wars in Irish and Gaelic Tradition* that the Finn (Fenian) Cycle is:

The widest in extent, and it is within this framework one must seek for the traditions concerning to Vikings and their times. In these stories the Northerners became the constant enemy, the frays with them the most popular theme, and their home, the mysterious country of Lochlann, the place from whence all dangers and monsters might be expected to come." (Christiansen 1931, 8)

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the *Eddas* provides the most extensive and detailed information about Norse poetry, traditions, customs and beliefs. The first translation of the *Prose Edda* was published by Bishop Peder Hans Resen in Copenhagen (1665). Resen's edition, *Edda Islandorum*<sup>80</sup> made Old Norse poetry and mythology available to the world through a medium they could understand—Latin (Quinn and Clunies Ross 1994, 193). *Edda Islandorum* became popular in both Sweden and Denmark, where it became the basis for Bartholin's *Antiquitatum Danicarum de causis contemptae a Danis adhuc gentilibus mortis libri tres* (1689). Bartholin's work, dealing with Danes' (referring to Scandinavians in general) contempt for death and his proposition that they possessed a particular heroism celebrated

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<sup>80</sup> Facsimile of Resen's 1665 edition of *Snorra Edda* is published in Faulkes 1977, vol. 2.

by their skalds when they were still pagan, is significant as it had a strong influence on Mallet and on the Romantic Movement of the late eighteenth century in general (Clunies Ross and Lönnroth 2011, 12). In 1720, the German scholar Keyssler published his exposition of Norse mythology, *Antiquitates Selectae Septentrionales et Celtae* which also contributed to the introduction of Norse material to Europe. Göransson's volume of the *Edda* based on the Codex Upsaliensis appeared in 1746 (Latin and Swedish) while Mallet's *Monumens de la Mythologie et de la Poésie des Celtes et Particulièrement des Anciens Scandinaves* published in 1756 comprised a general introduction on ancient Scandinavian civilization along with a translation of *Gylffaginning* and a synopsis of *Skáldskaparmál* and *Háttatal* (French).

Clunies Ross and Lönnroth suggest that in Britain, Mallet and Resen were the chief sources of Norse poetry and myth in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth century and that Macpherson's 'translations' of ancient Gaelic poetry were "another spur to the productions of poetry inspired by Norse themes" (Clunies Ross and Lönnroth 2011, 16). "The influence of Mallet and other writers, like Bartholin, can be detected in literary texts of the preromantic period very early on" (Clunies Ross and Lönnroth 2011, 16) while Macpherson's *Introduction to the History of Great Britain and Ireland* (1771) is the first text to use the *Edda* referring most likely to Resen's edition (Larrington 2007, 23). Although this is an accurate assumption considering Resen's edition first introduced Norse poetry to Britain, investigating Macpherson's sources allows us to see that his major source was Keyssler's book (1720) as Macpherson's Latin footnotes in his *Introduction* (1771) virtually always match Keyssler's *Antiquitates Selectae Septentrionales et Celtae* whereas they do not match Resen's edition. In addition to Keyssler, it seems that Macpherson was using Bartholin's *Antiquitatum Danicarum* (1689). Macpherson's references to the *Edda* in his *Introduction* (1771) and his sources are demonstrated in detail in Appendix A. The expanded edition of 1773 of the



*Introduction* is focused on in this regard as it is the final version where we find the most references to the *Edda*.

Besides the *Edda* and Keyssler and Bartholin's antiquities, medieval accounts of Viking customs, such as those of Adam of Bremen, must have also proved to be good sources for Macpherson frequently refers to him too in his *Introduction* (1771). For instance, quoting from Adam of Bremen (in Latin) as a footnote he describes a common representative of Odin among Saxons and their Scandinavian ancestors:

A great log of unfashioned wood, perpendicularly raised in the open air, was the common representative of Odin. This symbol they distinguished by the name of IRMUNSUL, a word which, in their language, signified the universal pillar which sustains the world. (Macpherson 1773, 340-41)<sup>81</sup>

Interestingly, he insists on pointing out that this 'log of wood' is a representative of Odin even though there is no mention of Odin in the original text of Adam of Bremen:

They worshipped, too, a stock of wood, of no small size, set up in the open. In native language, it was called Irminsul, which in Latin means universal column, as if it sustained everything. (Adam of Bremen 2002, 11)

Macpherson must have come to the conclusion that the wood represents Odin himself, as he adds that this was one of the ways of worshipping Odin, since the eastern Sarmatae "worshipped him under the figure of a sword" (Macpherson 1773, 341). The relation of Irminsul to the World Tree—Yggdrasil, which is described as the holiest place in *Gylfaginning* and marked the meeting point of gods, might have caused the connection Macpherson makes to Odin, for 'Ygg' is another name for Odin, whereas Yggdrasil is thought to mean 'Horse of Ygg':

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<sup>81</sup> Truncum ligni non parvæ magnitudinis, in altum erectum sub dio colebant, patriâ eorum linguâ IRMUNSUL appellant, quod latiné universalis columna quasi sustinens omnia (Macpherson 1773, 341 [Adam. Brem.]).

Then said Gangleri: "Where is the chief abode or holy place of the gods?" Hárr answered: "That is at the Ash of Yggdrasill; there the gods must give judgment everyday." Then Gangleri asked: "What is to be said concerning that place?" Then said Jafnhárr: "The Ash is greatest of all trees and best: its limbs spread out over all the world and stand above heaven. ("Gylfaginning ch. XV")

Davidson endorses that "if this is the correct interpretation it may refer to Odin hanging on the tree, as described in *Hávamál*" (Davidson 1993, 68).

Macpherson refers to Mallet once in his notes to the *Poems* directly, when speaking of Odin and the Circle of Loda, which he declares to represent the standing stones located in the islands of Orkney, drawing greatly from Mallet. It can also be presumed that Blair, who also expressed his opinion of Scandinavia in his *Critical Dissertation*, had mediated essential information to Macpherson. In a note to *Temora: Book V*, Macpherson states what his anticipation regarding the ancient poet's source of information on Scandinavia is:

By the stone of Loda, as I have remarked in my notes on some other poems of Ossian, is meant a place of worship among the Scandinavians. Ossian, in his many expeditions to Orkney and Scandinavia, became acquainted with some of the rites of the religion which prevailed in those countries, and frequently alludes to them in his poems. There are some ruins, and circular pales of stone, remaining still in Orkney and the islands of Shetland, which retain, to this day, the name of *Loda* or *Loden*. They seem to have differed materially, in their construction, from those Druidical monuments which remain in Britain, and the western isles. The places of worship among the Scandinavians were originally rude and unadorned. In after ages, when they opened a communication with other nations, they adopted their manners, and built temples. That at Upsal, in Sweden, was amazingly rich and magnificent. Haquin, of Norway, built one, near Drontheim, little inferior to the former; and it went always under the name of *Loden*. Mallet, *Introduction a l'histoire de Dannemarc*. (*Temora: Book Fifth* [1763], PO 504 n.18 [M])

Blair's views on the subject as expressed in his *Critical Dissertation*, confirm Macpherson's statement and description of the island although he could not have known *Temora* at the time he wrote this:

The scene of this encounter of Fingal with the spirit of Loda is laid in Inistore, or the islands of Orkney; and in the description of Fingal's landing there, it is said, p. [160]. "A rock bends along the coast with [all] its echoing wood. On the top is the circle of Loda, with [and] the mossy stone of power." In confirmation of Ossian's topography, it is proper to acquaint the reader that in these islands, as I have been well informed, there are many pillars, and circles of stones, still remaining, known by the name of the stones and circles of Loda, or Loden; to which some degree of superstitious regard is annexed to this day. These islands, until the year 1468, made a part of the Danish dominions. Their ancient language, of which there are yet some remains among the natives, is called the Norse; and is a dialect, not of the Celtic, but of the Scandinavian tongue. The manners and the superstitions of the inhabitants, are quite distinct from those of the Highlands and western isles of Scotland. Their ancient songs too, are of a different strain and character, turning upon magical incantations and evocations from the dead, which were the favourite subjects of the old Runic poetry. They have many traditions among them of wars in former times with the inhabitants of the western islands. (*A Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian* [1763], PO 549 n.24 [B])

Malcolm Laing, on the other hand, made disparaging comments suggesting Macpherson misinterpreted what had actually been said by Mallet and therefore, misinformed the reader:

I know not whether Blair's information was derived from Macpherson, or Macpherson's from Blair; but the name of *Loda* or *Loden* was never heard in these islands, nor ever applied to the circle of stones: and the passage from Mallet is an absolute misquotation. Mallet's words, from Olaus Wormius, are precisely these, 'that Hacon, earl of Norway, (anno 979) had built a temple at *Laden*, near Drontheim, nothing inferior to that at Upsal.' *Laden*, the name of the district where the temple stood, has been evidently converted into *Loden* and *Loda*, from its supposed affinity to the name of Odin. (Laing 1805, 152 n.11)

Laing accurately specifies that a temple similar to the one at Uppsala had been built by the earl of Norway and that Mallet particularly states it was located at a place called 'Laden' in his original publication of 1755, written in French:

Mallet (1755)	Percy's Translation
Haquin Comte de Norvège en avoit bati un	Hacon, the earl of Norway, had built one

près de Drontheim (à Laden) <sup>82</sup> qui ne cédoit guère à celui d'Upsal. Lorsque le Roi Olaus introduisit dans le pays la foi Chretienne, il sit raser ce temple, & briser les idoles qui y étoient; [...]. (Mallet 1755, 79)	near Drotheim, which was not inferior to that of Upsal. When Olaus, the king of Norway, introduced the Christian faith into the country, he caused this temple to be razed to the ground, and broke to pieces the idols it contained: [...]. (Mallet 1809 [1770], 108)
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Yet, this does not change the fact that Mallet did, in fact, approve of the relation between Odin and Loda. Gaskill also points out that it was not legitimate for Laing to attack Macpherson using Mallet as a weapon in order to show his disapproval of Macpherson and Blair's views regarding Loda, emphasizing that Ossianism and Scandinavianism were closely related to each other especially until 1800s as Mallet and Macpherson reinforced each other:

The Copenhagen-based Paul Henri Mallet's Introduction à l'histoire de Dannemarc (1755), and his Monumens de la mythologie et de la poésie des Celtes, et particulièrement des anciens Scandinaves (1756) provided extremely important documents for 18th century primitivist thought, and especially for Northern Europeans suffering from a sense of cultural deficit. It should be noted that Ossianism and Scandinavianism tend to go together, at least until after 1800, with Mallet and Macpherson mutually reinforcing one another. For what Laing does not mention is that, when he reissues his works in 1787 and 1790, Mallet welcomes Ossian, observes the identity between Odin and the Spirit of Loda, generally approves of Macpherson's revelations and finds in the Ossianic poetry an interesting confirmation of Scandinavian mythology. (*Temora: Book Fifth, PO* 503-04 n.18 [G])<sup>83</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Today, "Lade" near Trondheim.

<sup>83</sup> "J'ajouterai en faveur des amateurs poésies Erses qu'*Odin* est sans doute le même dieu dont il y est souvent fait mention sous le nom de *Loda*, comme du dieu de *Lochlin*, c'est-à-dire de la Scandinavie. L'auteur de ces poésies qu'on croit avoir vécu dans le troisième siècle parle des cercles de pierre de *Loda* autour desquels se rangoient les guerriers de *Lochlin* pour invoquer ce dieu avant les combats, &c suivant M. *Macpherson* éditeur de ces poésies on trouve dans les Orcades de ces cercles auxquels les habitans donnent encore aujourd'hui le nom de cercles de *Loda* ou de [p. 64] *Loden*. La Norvège y est nommée le *rivage de Loda*. Ce dieu y est peint comme un génie redoutable, qui *ne respire que les tempêtes*

Scandinavianism, also known as 'Pan-Scandinavianism', was a nineteenth-century movement for Scandinavian unity, receiving its main impetus from archaeological and philological discoveries in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which pointed to an earlier unity ("Pan-Scandinavianism"). The movement had political significance as it involved the ambition of nation-building based on a common Scandinavian language, heritage and history (Tunander 2011, par. 4). In this context, *Ossian* can be considered as setting a practical example—it promotes the realization of the distinction between Scottishness and Englishness within the newly formed unity. Even though the movement was unsuccessful since Sweden and Norway refused to join Denmark in 1864 when the hostilities over the duchies, re-erupted,<sup>84</sup> not surprisingly, it continued to have strong influences among Swedish minorities in Finland ("Pan-Scandinavianism"); perhaps also inspiring the creation of the *Kalevala*. The relation of Ossianism with such a movement, which is closely affiliated with nation-building, is interesting since it might reflect *Ossian's* impact on national awakening movements in Scandinavia: *Ossian* seems to have alerted many Scandinavian countries to their own literary traditions and the role played by

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*& les combats , qui est assis au haut des airs sur les mers de la Scandinavie, avec une épée dans sa main puissante, & ses cheveux enflammés & épars au gré des vents [...] ses yeux brillent comme des flammes sur son visage ténébreux. Sa voix est le bruit d'un tonnerre éloigné [...] Fingal alla au devant de lui & lui cria: fils de la nuit, retire-toi, appelle à toi les vents & fuis avec eux, &c. Les Ecoissois ayant d'autres idées sur la religion, il étoit naturel & conforme à l'usage de toutes les nations, qu'ils peignissent le dieu de leurs ennemis comme un mauvais génie, & un fantôme effrayant (Mallet 1787, 63-64).*

<sup>84</sup> That is the Schleswig-Holstein question which is a nineteenth-century (c. 1838-66) controversy between Denmark, Prussia and Austria. At this time, the northern population of Schleswig was Danish while it was almost entirely German in the south as well as in Holstein. When the rising German nationalism resulted in an attempt to form a single state within the German confederation combining the two regions, a countermovement formed among the Danish population in the north, claiming Schleswig had belonged to Denmark for centuries. Hoping to incorporate Schleswig into Denmark, Danish nationalists caused the area's detachment from Holstein whereas the German population, supporting Schleswig-Holstein's independence from Denmark, sought to confirm the association of the two areas ("Schleswig-Holstein question").

Norsemen in the poetry promotes the work to the status of a historical document of great national significance.<sup>85</sup> As Gaskill explains:

Montesquieu had proclaimed Scandinavia as the fount of European liberty and democratic institutions, and following him Mallet stresses Nordic chivalry and refinement, and above all the congeniality of the mythology (as compared with the classical). If the literary monuments, such as they were known, tended to breathe a rather too ferocious spirit, the gentler Ossian offered a valuable corrective; and the latter's frustrating lack of information about the religion of our ancestors could be complemented by what had been picked up from Caesar or Tacitus, and of course the Edda. (Gaskill 1994, 662)

It can be speculated that Laing wanted to suppress Mallet's approval of Macpherson and of the relation between Ossianism and Scandinavianism or he simply—and probably, more likely—was not aware of Mallet and Macpherson's shared opinion on this subject since he may not have read the re-edited versions of Mallet's works (1787 and 1790). Looking from another perspective, this may be a problem posed by translation and interpretation. Perhaps, both Percy and Macpherson assumed 'Laden' was another derivation of the names, 'Loda' or 'Loden', which mean 'Odin'. This connection is explained in the index section of the *Poems* provided by Gaskill (where he refers to the *Temora* note above) as well:

There are some ruins and circular pales of stone, remaining still in Orkney, and the islands of Shetland, which retain, to this day, the name of *Loda* or *Loden*"; "by the *spirit of Loda* the poet probably means Odin"; "Loda's hall" is equivalent to Valhalla. (*Index* [1996] "Loda" PO 565)

It is interesting to notice that Percy did not even specify the place as 'Laden' in his translation (see his translation of the text above), which may indicate that he regarded it as an insignificant detail or chose not to give the name (Laden) on purpose for reasons that are

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<sup>85</sup> A similar effect is true of Germany from Klopstock, Gerstenberg, Herder, Denis and the Bards to Gräter and Kosegarten (Gaskill 1994, 661).

unknown to us. Macpherson, on the other hand, changes 'Laden' to 'Loden' when quoting Mallet—maybe, in an attempt to support his own agenda or due to a misunderstanding that resulted in a misreading or vice versa. If this is the case, then, Blair either goes along with it, or perhaps, he is the source himself. It is also possible that in the particular edition consulted the vowel was defectively printed.

Translators have not always been entirely faithful to the original text and this can be observed extensively in *Northern Antiquities* (1770) too. Gauri Kristmannsson suggests that Percy's work is "much more what might be termed a critical translation, in which the translator decisively intervenes and reconstructs not only the text, but also its substantial axioms and conclusions" (Kristmannsson 2005, 156). It is demonstrated that in translating Mallet, Percy aimed to achieve a decisive distinction between Celts and Goths (which will be dealt with later in the chapter), and to verify the 'Gothic' origins of the English (Kristmannsson 2005, 157). In fact, Groom claims that in publishing his *Five Pieces of Runic Poetry* (1763), Percy attempted to counter Macpherson's *Fragments*:

Like the *Fragments* it [*Pieces*] was a slim octavo containing short pieces of apparently ancient foreign verse translated into distinctive English prose. [...] It was not designed to be bound sympathetically with the *Fragments*, but to replace it. ("Celts" Groom 1996, 284)

Moreover, although the publication of *Pieces* seems to have been prompted by Macpherson's *Fragments*, Percy manages to skilfully distance himself from the ongoing debate about the authenticity of Macpherson's work, also acknowledging its literary appeal in his 'Preface' (Clunies Ross 2001, 35).<sup>86</sup> Considering Macpherson was, to say the least, an interventionist translator, himself, it becomes easier to see how he could have drawn his own conclusions

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<sup>86</sup> In *The Old Norse Poetic Translations of Thomas Percy*, Clunies Ross provides a facsimile of Percy's *Pieces*, along with her annotations, 19-204.

from what Mallet proposed in his *Introduction a l'histoire de Dannemarc*. Nevertheless, whether or not Macpherson converted the name of the area the temple at Drontheim (today Trondheim) was built in, makes little or no difference to the original point he tries to make in his note—the existence of standing stones in the shape of a circle in the islands of Orkney and the difference in their construction from others in Britain, as well as the dissimilarity in places of worship among Scandinavians and Celts. Perhaps the *Introduction* (1771), which proves to be a valuable source of the author's insights and observations about Scandinavia, can shed more light on this subject, as here Macpherson extensively describes the manner of worship among Scandinavians:

The Scandinavians, together with the three Divinities<sup>87</sup> who were worshipped publicly under human forms, venerated inferior intelligences, who were thought to reside in natural objects. These topical deities were little better than the fallen angels, which the superstition of more enlightened times has dispersed over the world. They were placed in storms and tempests, in hills, in fountains, in great bodies of water. (Macpherson 1773, 346)

According to Macpherson's insights in the *Introduction* (1771), the Scandinavians are brought up in battle and so used to blood and violence, they made their Gods as fierce as possible (Macpherson 1773, 340)—the depiction of Loda in the *Poems* fits this definition—and he has taken great pains to draw a distinct line between Celts and Scandinavians.

Marking the distinction between Celts and Goths (ancient ancestors of the English according to Percy) had been a matter of great significance to Percy too, and he was persistent in comparing the classical qualities of the latter to the barbaric elements of the first. Percy's critical translation of Mallet can be interpreted as an attempt to display his 'superior' knowledge of the subject and achieve a decisive separation between Celtic and

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<sup>87</sup> The "three Divinities" refer to the three major Norse gods—Odin, Thor and Frey. "These were the only powers dignified with temples and statues" (Macpherson 1773, 343).



Gothic. Mallet's 'Celts' stand for the Scandinavians, Germans, Saxons and Celts, while Percy, Macpherson and Blair separate the Celts from the mix—of course, with different aspirations. That is, Percy emphasizes the superior features of Goths (his catch-all word for Scandinavians, Germans and Saxons) whereas Macpherson and Blair defend the primacy of Celtic heritage (that of Caledonian Celts<sup>88</sup>): "Just as the verbal clamour of Macpherson's Ossianic fragments underlined the oral culture of the Celts, so the prodigious textuality of *Five Pieces of Runic Poetry* underlined the rampant literacy of the Goths" (Groom 1999, 87). It should be noted that the admiration towards the Goths increased in the sixteenth century as it was believed that they represented the purest form of the love of liberty by overcoming the oppression of the Roman Empire and later asserting the rights of Magna Carta. This interest in Goths continued in the eighteenth century and Groom suggests Percy's *Reliques* (1765), possibly inspired by Macpherson's *Fragments* as mentioned above, turned out to be a "pivotal text, marking the precise point at which early eighteenth-century Augustan Neo-Classicism became late eighteenth-century Gothic Romanticism. It inspired folklore revivals across the whole of Europe" ("Reliques" Groom 1996, 2).

With his *Reliques*, Percy achieved a "translation—or rather transformation—of one 'great narrative' into another by systematically applying these features<sup>89</sup> to construct a new history of the Gothic or Teutonic tribes, which differentiated them from the Celts. His method consisted of constantly comparing the classical qualities of the Goths to the barbaric elements of the Celts, even while occasionally admitting, perhaps in the rhetorical tradition of *concessio*, that the Goths themselves were 'barbarians'" (Kristmannsson 2005, 123). Similar

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<sup>88</sup> 'Celtic' is essentially same as 'Caledonian' for Macpherson, Blair and Percy, while 'Gothic' is same as 'Teutonic'.

<sup>89</sup> Essential features for the construction of national literature: "the aesthetic, the formal, the historical, the genealogical, the religious and the moral, all contributing to the effect of giving the national the status of the classical" (Kristmannsson 2005, 123).

comparisons and conclusions can be observed in Macpherson's poetry as well and Macpherson, too, points to this in a note to the poem, *Cath-loda: Duan First* by saying that the distinction between the two cultures can be seen throughout all the poems of Ossian, which leaves no doubt that the bard (as presented by Macpherson) was informed about the traditions of both cultures in his time (*Cath-loda: Duan First*, PO 536, n.40 [M]) and was able to draw a clear distinction between the two.<sup>90</sup>

According to Macpherson one of the main differences in the religious beliefs of Celts and Scandinavians is that the latter have placed a "bad principle, as well as a good in their mythology" (Macpherson 1773, 348). That is to say:

The Druids were of opinion, that bad actions brought along with them their own punishment in this life. The Scandinavians placed an eternity of misery for the wicked beyond the Ragna Rockur, or twilight of the Gods. (Macpherson 1773, 348)

Still, as Kristmannsson has established, the isolation of the 'Germanic' (or Gothic) and the 'Celtic' is a minor issue for Macpherson, although he makes a clear differentiation between the two. This is because "his real concern was to disprove another kind of kinship, namely that of the Irish and the Scottish, or rather the Irish origins of the 'Caledonians', which was one of the main bones of contention between the Irish and Scottish antiquarians in the Ossianic wars" (Kristmannsson 2005, 162). Blair comments on this matter of distinction between the Celts and Goths (as he calls, "Teutons") in his *Critical Dissertation* also referring to Regner (or, Ragnar) Lodbrog, the scalded King of Denmark, and his funeral song (Epicidium) in order to show that the literature of the Scandinavians themselves reflected their tradition similarly:

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<sup>90</sup> Since the poem, *Cath-loda*, first appears in the 'Temora volume' (1763) Macpherson's comments postdate Blair's *Dissertation* (1763) and are presumably influenced, or at least, reinforced by it.

Those countries were inhabited by nations of the Teutonic descent, who in their manners and religious rites differed widely from the Celtæ; and it is curious and remarkable, to find this difference clearly pointed out in the poems of Ossian. His descriptions bear the native marks of one who was present in the expeditions which he relates, and who describes what he had seen with his own eyes. No sooner are we carried to Lochlin, or the islands of Inistore, than we perceive that we are in a foreign region. New objects begin to appear. We meet everywhere with the stones and circles of Loda, that is, Odin, the great Scandinavian deity. We meet with the divinations and enchantments, for which it is well known those northern nations were early famous. (Blair, *PO* [1763] 377)

<b>Regner (Translated by Blair)</b>	<b>Ossian</b>
There resounded the hard steel upon the lofty helmets of men. The whole ocean was one wound. The crow waded in the blood of the slain. [...] and plentifully we feasted the eagle in that slaughter. (Blair, <i>PO</i> [1763] 348)	We [Scandinavians] rejoiced, three days, above the dead, and called the hawks of heaven. They came, from all their winds, to feast on Annir's foes. Swaran! Fingal is alone, on his hill of night. Let thy spear pierce the king in secret; like Annir, my soul shall rejoice. ( <i>Cath-loda: Duan Second, PO</i> 320)

Lodbrog, who lived in the eighth century, was famous for his heroic battles and victories. Blair became familiar with Lodbrog 'Death Song' (an Epicedium, funeral song), which he regards as true gothic poetry, through Olaus Wormius's Book *de Literatura Runica*. In the funeral song he tells the exploits of his life giving extensive information about Norse wars, their lifestyle and customs. Admitting such poetry is "strong and animated" Blair finds it a product of a "barbarous", "wild" and "harsh" nation:

But when we open the works of Ossian, a very different scene presents itself. There we find the fire and the enthusiasm of the most early times, combined with an amazing degree of regularity and art. We find tenderness, and even delicacy of sentiment, greatly predominant over fierceness and barbarity. Our hearts are melted with the softest feelings, and at the same time elevated with the highest ideas of magnanimity, generosity, and true heroism. When we turn from the poetry of Lodbrog to that of

Ossian, it is like passing from a savage desert, into a fertile and cultivated country. (Blair, *PO* [1763] 348)

The difference in style and view of life and death can be seen through the works of the poets.

For instance:

Regner (Translated by Blair)	Ossian
<p>The goddesses of death will now soon call me; I must not mourn my death. Now I end my song. The goddesses invite me away; they whom Odin has sent to me from his hall. I will sit upon a lofty seat, and drink ale joyfully with the goddesses of death. The hours of my life are run out. I will smile when I die. (Blair, <i>PO</i> [1763] 348)</p>	<p>Age is dark and unlovely; it is like the glimmering light of the moon, when it shines through broken clouds, and the mist is on the hills; the blast of the north is on the plain, the traveller shrinks in the midst of his journey. (<i>Carthon: A Poem</i>, <i>PO</i> 133-34)</p>

In *Introduction*, Macpherson quotes from Regner too, in an attempt to portray the love of death among the Scandinavians:

The goddesses invite me, [...] the Valkyrian goddesses, whom Odin has sent from his hall. The last hours of my life are passing away; with a smile I give up my soul. [...]

The battle is as pleasing to me as to ascend the bed of a virgin in the glow of her charms; or to kiss a youthful widow in her most secret apartment. (Macpherson 1772, 309-10)<sup>91</sup>

It is interesting to see that both Blair and Macpherson are careful to distinguish Celts and Teutons unlike Mallet who lumps them together: Mallet's 'Celts' refer to all Northern nations which include Scandinavian, Germanic, Saxons and Caledonian. Even at the end of the century woolly conceptions were still widespread—la Tour d'Auvergne writes in his *Origines Gauloises* (1796) that the *Edda* contains Gaelic Erse hymns enlightening the reader

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<sup>91</sup> "Invitant me deæ Valkyriæ/ Quas ex aula sua/ Odinus mihi misit./ Vitæ elaphæ horæ,/ Ridens moriar" [...]. "Erat sicut splendid virginis/ Lectum ascendere;/ Aut juvenem viduam/ In secreta sede osculari" Epiced. Regn. Lodbrog, Stroph. Xxix-xiv (Macpherson 1772, 310).

about the Celts.<sup>92</sup> Charlotte Brooke, on the other hand, also makes the same kind of remark about Irish bards later in her *Reliques of Irish Poetry* (1789) pointing to the differences between nations (Goths and Celts) once again:

The productions of our Irish bards exhibit a glow of cultivated genius, a spirit of elevated heroism, sentiments of true honour, instances of disinterested patriotism, and manners of a degree of refinement, totally astonishing when the rest of Europe was nearly sunk in barbarism. (Brooke 1789, vii)

The above quote could have been from Blair or Macpherson commenting on their Caledonian ancestors, whose superiority against Goths they constantly underline, both in their poetry and historical texts. Blair further clarifies the distinction:

That the ancient Scots were of Celtic original, is past all doubt. Their conformity with the Celtic nations in language, manners and religion, proves it to a full demonstration. The Celtæ, a great and mighty people, altogether distinct from the Goths and Teutones, once extended their dominion over all the west of Europe; but seem to have had their most full and compleat establishment in Gaul. Wherever the Celtæ or Gauls are mentioned by ancient writers, we seldom fail to hear of their Druids and their Bards; the institution of which two orders, was the capital distinction of their manners and policy. The Druids were their philosophers and priests; the Bards, their poets and recorders of heroic actions: And both these orders of men, seem to have subsisted among them, as chief members of the state, from time immemorial. We must not therefore imagine the Celtæ to have been altogether a gross and rude nation. They possessed from very remote ages a formed system of discipline and manners, which appears to have had a deep and lasting influence. (Blair *PO* [1763] 349-50)

To sum up, in *Northern Antiquities* Percy tries to highlight the difference of origin between Celts and Goths (Anglo-Saxons, Teutons, Scandinavians) unlike Mallet, who in the original text, combines all identities under one title: Celtes. Macpherson and Blair, on the other hand,

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<sup>92</sup> "Plusieurs des hymnes gauloises sont renfermées dans un poème erse, nommé l'Edda. Ce monument runique serait propre à nous éclairer sur les Celtes" ([la Tour d'Auvergne] Tieghem 1924, 189).

creates a definite split between Gothic and Celtic with great emphasis on the supremacy of the latter. They, however, refute another kinship division, namely between Irish and Scottish, suggesting they are both from the same Celtic (Caledonian) origin:

Of all the nations descended from the antient *Celtæ*, the Scots and Irish are the most similar in language, customs, and manners. This argues a more intimate connection between them, than a remote descent from the great Celtic stock.  
(*A Dissertation PO* 216 [M])

In this framework *Ossian* was not only a cultural product, but was also given the status of ‘national identity’, since when a literary text becomes a portrayal of a society’s past—even in the form of fictional history (perhaps, the category *Ossian* falls in due to Macpherson’s embellishments)—that particular text may become a significant symbol of identity.

## Conclusions

Macpherson’s earliest history, *Introduction to the History of Great Britain and Ireland*, was first published in 1771 and even ten years after the publication of the *Poems* his views on Scandinavia match those he reflects in his poetic texts as well as the ones he states in his notes to the *Poems* in an attempt to be informative and comprehensive. Therefore besides giving a history of Celtic antiquity and it can be seen as a companion text to his *Ossian*. Two more editions of the *Introduction* were published simultaneously: although the text became longer with each publication, second and third editions of his *Introduction* do not demonstrate any change in perspective regarding northern nations. However, it is possible to observe major additions to the matter—perhaps resulting from the publication of Percy’s *Northern Antiquities* (1770), which might have prompted Macpherson to highlight the

differences of his nation (Caledonian Celts) in an era when categories such as Germanic (or Gothic, Teutonic) and Celtic were vague in the English-speaking world.

In *Introduction* Macpherson emphasizes that the work seeks to provide a non-fiction history and wishes to prove it is a well-researched and carefully prepared historical text:

[The author (Macpherson)] has studied to be 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 (Macpherson 1771, ii).

It seems that fed up with the heavy criticism *Ossian* had received, Macpherson feels the need to assure his audience that he also believes in the importance of sources, truth and above all, the authenticity of a written work. To achieve this, he aims to provide detailed references to his claims and observations throughout the text in all three editions: as discussed earlier, beside Mallet's *Monumens de la Mythologie et de la Poésie des Celtes et Particulièrement des Anciens Scandinaves* (1756), the *Eddas* seem to be his major source on Scandinavia and Norse beliefs. Macpherson is the first scholar to make references to *Edda* in a historical text (Larrington 2007, 23) and an investigation of his references shows that apart from the four instances he refers to Bartholin's *Antiquitatum Danicarum de causis contemptae a Danis adhuc gentilibus mortis libri tres* (1689), he uses Keyssler's *Antiquitates Selectae Septentrionales et Celtae* (1720) both quoting from the actual text of the *Edda* or referring to explanations provided by these authors: for example, he describes Odin as "the ruler of the tempests, the director of thunder, the lord of the weather" (Macpherson 1773, 343) and Valhalla as "a mansion of joy for the warlike" (Macpherson 1773, 355); he explains the ritual of burying/burning soldiers with their weapons (Macpherson 1773, 358) while he also quotes from *Voluspa* when making

reference to the Norse Hela—describing her as an evil and terrible, and to whom even “Odin himself was carried on his horse Sleipnir (Macpherson 1773, 365-66).<sup>93</sup>

Needless to say, Macpherson’s Ossianic poetry is a product of his imagination to a certain extent; yet, it remains as a reflection of his opinions, world view and of the eighteenth-century Scottish Highlands. Macpherson had a special talent of transforming past into fiction and his Ossianic fabrications, which are also a product of this ability, came to achieve extraordinary usefulness as Gaskill highlights:

As both a work of literature (the poetic embodiment of an unimpeachable moral ideal) and a historical document of the first importance, it could respond to widely shared inferiority complexes and resentments, serving to boost the self-confidence of Highlands against Lowlands, Scotland against England, the barbarous North (Germany, Scandinavia, Russia) against the classical South (France, Italy, Greece). And of course, equally it could be used to support the claims of the original against the derivative, the natural against the artificial, the ancient against the modern, the vigorous against the effete, and therefore the young against the old, anarchy against order, freedom against enslavement, spontaneity against reflection, inspiration against rules, heart against head, feeling against reason; also chastity against perversion, martial virtue against commercial vice, self-sacrifice against egotism; tenderness and delicacy of sentiment against fierceness and barbarity, or alternatively, the (noble) savage against the (corrupt) civilized. (Gaskill 1994, 663-64)

In this context, the representation of Scandinavia plays a pivotal role in the text: by not only providing a historical framework for the poems (since dealings with Scandinavia are recorded in ancient chronicles) but also enabling Macpherson to compare two cultures in an attempt to highlight the better qualities of his own. It also shows that Macpherson no longer felt the need to portray England as the enemy since he already knew there was no hope for an independent Gaelic Scotland after the Union and he only wished for peace. He ventured

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<sup>93</sup> See Appendix A for details.



to create an ancient Scottish cultural tradition which would bring with itself a sense of ancient Scottish history and a celebration of Scottishness within the broader British identity.

## Chapter 6: The Supernatural World of the *Kalevala*

### Introduction

Having investigated the land of the dead in *Ossian* and Macpherson's sources for the supernatural elements in his writings, this chapter will concentrate on the *Kalevala*. Particularly, its main themes and epic nature will be the centre of attention in an attempt to pick out the possible areas of commonality with *Ossian* and the universality of human nature. As Dan Ben-Amos puts it in his 'Foreword' to Pentikäinen's *Kalevala Mythology*:

The transformation of the *Kalevala* from "national epic" to shamanic poetry enriches its symbolism and establishes for the poem a new position in world literature. Its significance would no longer depend on the romantic national aspirations that propelled it into the attention of literary circles, but would draw upon the cultural symbols and images that are local and universal at one and the same time. (Ben-Amos 1989, xi)

I have chosen to use Magoun's English translation for the purposes of this study because of its scholarly status and because, by being in prose, it is more likely to accurately reflect the content of the original—as the translator is not restricted by the *Kalevala* metre,<sup>94</sup> not attempting to strictly follow the original rhythm of the poems.<sup>95</sup>

The chapter begins with an investigation of the main characters and their heroic exploits allowing us to have insights into the themes and nature of the poems. It will then be possible to observe how supernatural world of the *Kalevala* may become a reflection of

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<sup>94</sup> The *Kalevala* meter is trochaic tetrameter; a line formed of four successive stresses and falls.

<sup>95</sup> The caesuras are provided in this thesis as they are given in Magoun's translation.

Finnish folk belief, shamanism and ritual, whose examinations can provide us with a more complete understanding of the *Kalevala* and its place in Finnish tradition.

Heroes interact with the Otherworld, *Tuonela*, four times and once with *Päivölä*, the realm of the Sun, throughout the *Kalevala*, which consists of fifty poems or runes in total: the first is when Lemminkäinen is killed by a cowherd, who throws his dead body into the river of Tuonela. Later, his mother pulls his pieces out of the water and brings him back to life using magic charms and prayers, in poems thirteen to fifteen. Second is Väinämöinen's journey to Tuonela in the sixteenth and seventeenth poem, in an attempt to acquire the magic spells needed to finish building his boat. Third comes Ilmarinen's hunting of the bear of Tuonela and the wolf of Manala, while the final contact with the land of the dead is Ilmarinen's fishing the Great Pike of Tuonela (*Poem 19*). These are two of the three impossible challenges set before him by Louhi, in order to impress and win over the maid of Pohjola, whom he wants to marry. His first task is to plough a snake-infested field, which he successfully accomplishes.

Although among these episodes, the only instance where the story of a hero entering the Kingdom of Tuoni (Death) is told is that of Väinämöinen—which gives a mythological portrayal of Tuonela by providing the most detailed description of a shaman's journey to the land of the dead—all of them shed light on how the ancient Finns envisioned the realm of the dead and how they experienced the supernatural.

### **Heroes and Heroic Exploits in the *Kalevala***

The *Kalevala* revolves around shamanistic competitions, magical skills and superhuman deeds. Central to the theme are the forging and stealing of the Sampo in addition to the wooing attempts of its main heroes—in a fairy-tale like manner for the same bride—which

eventually, bring them together against a common enemy. Therefore, the main characters of the *Kalevala* are heroes, but not warriors, as the storyline does not benefit from actual warfare. It is fundamental to investigate the characteristics of these heroes and the roles they have in the Finnish epic, since this would enable us to understand the epic nature of the poems and its cultural message in a better way. Such an analysis would also demonstrate how the heroes of the *Kalevala* contributed greatly to the Finnish national awakening by being perceived as 'culture heroes'.

### **Väinämöinen's Journey: Tuonela, Wisdom and Transition**

Väinämöinen is a wise man and a great shaman, also portrayed as a minstrel or a bard, whose supernatural gift for singing enables him to accomplish his magic. Often, he is thought to be the ideal wizard as he is endowed with the wisdom of an old man and the heart and energy of a young one. The root of the name, *väinä-* is a near-synonym of the word *svanto*, meaning 'slack water' and with the suffix '-mö', used to form the name of living beings and the diminutive ending *-inen*, his name comes to mean "man of slack water farm" (*Kalevala/Glossary of Proper Names: Väinämöinen*, 405). Another possible derivation of the name is given by Turunen, who proposes that it originates from the root *väinä*, which means "wide, slow-moving river, or a channel in the sea" (Turunen 1981, 395). The latter seems to be more probable since in the mythical sense, channels or tunnels as well as rivers, are considered to signify transition between the land of the living and that of the dead. For instance, in Greek mythology the river Styx and in Norse myths the river, Gjall serve this purpose. Therefore, as Väinämöinen is the hero who actually crosses the river of Tuonela, which is the Finnish equivalent of mythological rivers separating the two worlds; it is much more logical to assume his name has references to this transition. Perhaps, also as a result of

the implications of his name, Väinämöinen's role in Finnish mythology has been controversial—even though in the poems and recent ballads he is displayed as a human hero with great magic power, John Abercromby suggests it is also possible that he is “the spirit of some natural phenomenon that in course of time became anthropomorphized like Ilmarinen” (Abercromby 1898, 281):

The sky-god was also the Thunderer; thunder is the voice of god speaking; but speaking can easily be turned, if the god is thought of as in a joyous mood, into singing. In fact one Čuvaš expression for thundering is *Asl' adi acdat* 'the great father (or old man) singing'; more common, however, are such phrases as 'the cock is crowing,' 'the cuckoo on the top of a golden post is cuckooing'. (Abercromby 1898, 281)

The fact that Finnish gods are usually portrayed as endowed with human characteristics and that they do not stand for abstract ideas justifies the opinion suggesting that the main characters of the *Kalevala* could be Finnish gods in human form. Honko remarks that many scholars have found the question of Väinämöinen's status as 'god or man' appealing but the reader should be made aware of “the impossibility of the unadorned either/or” (Honko 1987, 285):

The poems recognise at least two Väinämöinens, the shaman and the cultural hero, whose characters include stratified motifs from archaic belief systems and international myths and legends. It is no longer possible to discern from the poems any real historical core, such as some shaman or sage of centuries past, but it is possible to see in them a fairly complete picture of the mythical world view of a specific cultural era. (Honko 1987, 285)

Perhaps one of the main reasons such a debate was prompted lies simply in the manner Väinämöinen is born: he is presented as being born of the mother of the water; he is then carried to a shore by the waves where he sows the trees with Sampsä (Spirit of the Arable),

fells the giant oak tree so that the moon and the sun reappears, sows the barley, plants a birch tree and discovers fire; he is basically introduced as creating the world:

[...] in loneliness Väinämöinen was born, the eternal singer  
emerged  
From the maiden who bore him, from his Air Spirit mother.  
(*Kalevala/Poem 1, 4: 119-20*)

When the oak had been brought down, the dreadful tree felled,  
the sun got free to shine, the moon to gleam palely,  
the clouds to race along, the rainbow to arch over  
the tip of the misty headland, the end of the foggy island.  
The wilderness began to get beautiful, wood to grow as one  
would  
desire,  
with foliage on the trees, grass on the ground; the birds began  
to  
sing in a tree,  
thrushes to rejoice, the cuckoo to call on high.  
Berrystalks grew on the ground, lovely flowers in the field;  
all sorts of herbs grew, many kinds were brought forth.  
(*Kalevala/Poem 2, 11: 207-17*).

In his *Preface to the Old Kalevala*,<sup>96</sup> Lönnrot discusses the subject quite extensively, coming to the conclusion that neither of these heroes is meant to be portrayed as a god in the runes. He acknowledges the fact that Väinämöinen might have been initially given god status by the society; yet, the poet believes he is merely a 'man' of greatness and a historical hero whereas Ukko is the supreme deity. Lönnrot writes:

If in these songs Väinämöinen has here and there been reduced from his former reputation as a god, I can of course do nothing about it. I had to deal with these matters as I myself got them without considering whether Väinämöinen was viewed as a god or not. From time immemorial we have been accustomed to viewing him as a god of our ancestors, a reputation in which they do not seem to have held him, regarding him rather as mighty, as very clever, as a champion. He himself often prays for the help of the supreme god Ukko, and thus with his own lips admits who was a god. Väinämöinen indeed has both fame and honour even without divinity, and it is probably better for anyone to be high-

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<sup>96</sup> The 1835 version.

minded peasant than a bad master, better to be a very wise human being than a wooden idol. Even now if we ask the peasantry of those districts where Väinämöinen's memory is most alive who Väinämöinen was, they answer at once as follows: "He was a memorable champion of our earliest ancestors and famous singer." But if you ask them whom they hold as their god, then in many cases they will answer that they pray to Ukko, who created the heavens and the earth. Nor do I in the least doubt that already before the coming of Christianity our ancestors had knowledge of one single god whom they sometimes served by the present name [*jumala* 'god'], sometimes by the name Ukko or "creator" [*luoja*], nor do I charge them with great stupidity if they were not so clever as to get for themselves a pantheon like many other people of antiquity. In these songs Väinämöinen is usually referred to as steadfast, wise, prophetic, as providing what was to the advantage of ongoing generations, as a man of great knowledge, very effective in singing and playing, and as the hero of Finland. Beside that he is all but invariably called "old"; perhaps his mere age did not bother him greatly in his courtings. (*Kalevala/Preface to the Old Kalevala*, 371-72 [1835])

One can understand why there could be confusion whether to see the characters as gods or heroes, especially, considering Väinämöinen is born of the mother of water right after the genesis of the earth. Not everyone was ready to accept Väinämöinen was a hero and not a deity. In addition, according to the beliefs exhibited in the poems, like a god, men can become invisible while gods can be punished or made to meet the wishes of worshippers. After all, the mythology of the Finns is more an expression of nature worship that has shamanism at its core, ascribing superhuman powers to its heroes, which can be mistaken for those of a god.

Sometimes, nature is pictured as helping humankind while at others it is seen as creating obstacles that have to be overcome by the heroes in order for them to achieve their goals. For example, in the sixteenth poem, Väinämöinen has Sampsa Pellervoinen<sup>97</sup> (the Spirit of Arable) look for timbers for the boat he is building. The hero cannot start building his boat unless he finds the right tree that will allow him to use its timber:

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<sup>97</sup> It is Sampsa, whom Väinämöinen gets to sow forest trees in the origin runes.

The Spirit of Arable, son of the field the little fellow Sampsa,  
 he indeed is the one to look for a tree, to try and get an oak  
 for a boat for Väinämöinen, a keel for the singer.

[...]

He comes upon an aspen three fathoms high.

He wanted to touch the aspen, to chop down the tree with his  
 ax.

Speaking the aspen says, chatters with its tongue:

“What, man, do you want of me? Whatever do you desire?”

The led Sampsa, Spirit of the Arable, he, indeed, uttered these  
 words:

“That indeed I want of you, that I am looking for and desire:  
 a boat for Väinämöinen, ship’s timber for the singer.”

The aspen spoke rather oddly, the hundred-branched tree was  
 able to say:

“A leaky boat will come of me and a sinking sort of vessel.

I am hollow in the lower part of my trunk; three times this  
 summer

a grub ate my heart, a maggot ravished my root.”

(*Kalevala/Poem 16, 96: 7-23*)

*Poem 16* opens with the episode quoted above, where Sampsa tries to find the suitable type of tree from which the hero will make his ship. He, eventually gains the permission of an oak (after talking to an aspen and an evergreen)<sup>98</sup> to use its wood for Väinämöinen’s boat. However once the boat is shaped by the singing of charms Väinämöinen realizes he lacks the three magic charms that he needs in order to finish building his boat, which is the third task assigned to him by the maiden of the Northland<sup>99</sup> (daughter of the mistress of Northland):

The girl answered warily, uttered a word, spoke thus:

“I would call you a man, would esteem you as something of a  
 person

if indeed you should cleave a swan with a knife without a  
 point,

knot an egg with an invisible knot.”

Steadfast old Väinämöinen cleaves a swan

with a knife without a point, quite without a point at all;

he knots an egg with an invisible knot.

<sup>98</sup> ‘Evergreen’ refers to a pine tree.

<sup>99</sup> Magoun prefers to translate *Pohjola* as the ‘North Farm’ whereas in Bosley’s translation it is referred to as the ‘Northland’. In this study, I will prefer to use the latter translation of the word, as *Pohjola* seems to refer to an area rather than only a farm.



He ordered the maiden into his sleigh, the girl into his sled.  
 The maiden answered warily: "Perhaps indeed I will come to  
 you  
 if you pull birchbark off a stone, break off poles from a piece of  
 ice  
 without a bit splitting off, without a chip flying off."  
 Steadfast old Väinämöinen does not make any great business of  
 that:  
 he pulled birchbark off a stone, broke off poles from a piece of  
 ice  
 without a bit splitting off, without a chip flying off.  
 He invited the maiden into the sleigh, the girl into his sled.

The maiden answers warily, speaks these words:  
 "I would go to that person who would fashion a boat  
 from bits of my distaff, from pieces of my flax scraper,  
 who would push the boat into the water, the new ship onto the  
 billows  
 without a knee pushing it, without a hand touching it,  
 an arm turning it, a shoulder directing it."  
 (*Kalevala/Poem 8, 44: 113-33*)

While he is building the boat he accidentally wounds his knee badly—he cannot stop the  
 blood flowing even with the help of his magic and sets off to find someone who can heal  
 him. This incident leads to the story of the origin of iron, as this is what hurt the hero:

Steadfast old Väinämöinen struck the spirited steed with the  
 whip,  
 whizzes along. He drove a bit of a way  
 along the uppermost road the uppermost house.  
 Over the threshold he asks, said from behind an upright in the  
 entryway:  
 "Would there be in this house a healer of a wound inflicted by  
 iron,  
 a plug for this blood, a stopper for this dark blood?"  
 An old man was by the stove, a grey-bearded under the  
 ridgepole.  
 The old man growled from the stove, the grey-bearded  
 shouted:  
 "Even bigger things have been closed, larger ones vanquished  
 by three words of the Creator, by the decree of the Profound  
 Birth:  
 rivers at their mouths, lakes at their heads, fierce streams at  
 their waterfalls,  
 bays at the tips of their headlands, isthmuses at their narrowest

parts." (*Kalevala/Poem 8, 46: 271-82*)

It is after he is healed that the oak suitable for the boat is found and the hero fashions a vessel with his magic charms. However, he realizes that he lacks three magic words to complete building his boat:

After he had finished the boat with ribs,   joined the side planks,  
Three charms were lacking   for placing the gunwales,  
for mounting the bow and stern posts,   for finishing off the end  
          of the stern.  
Steadfast old Väinämöinen,   eternal sage,  
uttered a word, spoke thus:   "Woe is my day, poor me!  
The boat has not got into the water,   the new ship not onto the  
          billows." (*Kalevala/Poem 16, 97: 123-28*)

He decides to search for these magic words in the land of the dead, as according to the belief the spirits of dead shamans were stronger than the living ones, making Tuonela a land of shamanic wisdom (Bonser 1924, 62). Greeted by the daughter of Death, he asks for a boat that will take him to the depths of Tuonela. At first, she does not want to take him across the river noticing he is not dead but the hero finally persuades her saying he needs to visit the Kingdom of the Dead in search of wisdom; and gets on her boat, where she later puts him to sleep:

Old Väinämöinen said:   "Even if I did lie a little,  
spoke false the second time,   I will, however, really speak the  
          truth.  
I was making a boat skillfully,   fashioning a vessel by magic  
          singing.  
I sang one day, I sang a second,   then on the third  
the course of my song was broken off,   the flow of my magic  
          utterance was interrupted.  
I set out for an awl from Death's Domain,   for an auger from the  
          Abode of the Dead,  
in order to construct the sled,   to fashion the magically created  
          sleigh.  
Bring now indeed a boat here,   prepare your raft for me,  
for me to get over the sound,   for me to get off across the river."  
(*Kalevala/Poem 16, 99-100: 249-59*)

When Väinämöinen wakes up from the sleep on the boat to Tuonela he senses the danger Death's son, the one with "gnarled fingers, with gnarled fingers, with iron fingertips" (*Kalevala/Poem 16, 101: 380*) has set for him by laying iron nets to prevent him ever getting back to the land of the living. He quickly changes himself into an otter and escapes the trap, swimming out of the realm the same way he went in. Therefore, his first attempt to acquire the magic words remains fruitless. Once he leaves the Death Stream, he heads to get the charms from Antero Vipunen, an ancient shaman who has been dead for a long time and is asleep under the ground. He swallows Väinämöinen who begins to torture him badly in the belly until he reveals the information Väinämöinen is looking for. Vipunen starts to sing several charms, enchantments, imprecations and menaces in order to get rid of the pain he is going through but nothing stops the hero. He threatens not to get out of there unless he gives him the magic words necessary to finish building his boat. Then, he sings all his knowledge to Väinämöinen, including the charms he was looking for:

"I will set my anvil deeper in the flesh of your heart,  
 press my sledge hammer more firmly on the more painful  
 spots, too,  
 so that you will never get free, never, never at all  
 unless I get to hear charms, take along propitious spells,  
 hear enough charms, thousands of magic formulas.  
 The charms will not get into a hiding place nor the spells  
 into a cranny;  
 the mighty power will not get buried though the mighty  
 ones depart."

Then Vipunen rich in songs, that old man of great resources,  
 in whose mouth was great knowledge, unlimited magic power  
 in his bosom  
 opened his chest of words, exposed his box of lays  
 for him to sing good things, sing the best things,  
 those profound origin charms, age-old sacrificial spells  
 which all children do not sing, some men not understand  
 in this dreadful time, in this fleeting final age.  
 He sang the origin charms in the proper way, the spells  
 correctly,  
 [...]

He sang of the forming of the moon, the establishing of the sun  
of the erecting of the pillars of heaven, the studding of the  
heavens with stars. (*Kalevala/Poem 17, 111: 513-34*)

The ancient Finns believed that the land of the dead was located in the north, where it is cold and dark—Pentikäinen suggests that runes from the Middle Ages include depictions of heaven and hell, also indicating the eternal darkness reigning in Tuonela (Pentikäinen 1989, 204). Besides, it is imagined to be under the ground as in Norse and Greek myths, even though this might not be expected given the description of how Väinämöinen gets there—he travels for three weeks through marshes and meadows. Perhaps, it is even more unexpected for one not to find the land of the dead underground; therefore it is more feasible to presume that this journey undertaken by the hero is a symbolic one—the kind, which only a shaman like Väinämöinen can accomplish:

He ponders, he reflects: “There might be a hundred charms  
under the tongue of a reindeer in its summer vigor, in the  
mouth of a white squirrel.”  
He sets out to get charms, to get magic words.  
He cut open a whole pastureful of reindeer, a big branchful of  
squirrels;  
from this he got a lot of charms, all of no help.

He ponders, he reflects: “I will get a hundred charms yonder,  
yonder from a home in Death’s Domain, from an age-old  
cottage in the Abode of the Dead.”  
He set out for charms from Death’s Domain, magic wisdom  
from the Abode of the Dead.  
He steps along quietly; he walked a week through a stand of  
saplings,  
a second week through a stand of chokecherries, a third  
through a stand of junipers.  
Now the island of the Abode of the Dead appeared, Death’s  
knoll looms up. (*Kalevala/Poem 16, 98: 136-50*)

In his *Mythologia Fennica*, Ganander emphasizes that ‘going to Tuonela or wandering in Tuonela’ means falling into ecstasy or taking a shaman’s journey to the land of the dead (Ganander 1960, 94). Since according to the mythical geography of the ancient Finns, the

realm of the dead is situated in the far north, it has often been taken allegorically as signifying Pohjola, the Northland, which is also referred to as being a dangerous place for the people of Kaleva, as we can see in the words of Lemminkäinen's mother:

“Just do not go there at all to the cold settlement,  
to gloomy North Farm. Ruin will surely come,  
the ruin of a splendid youth, disaster for reckless  
Lemminkäinen.  
Even if you say it a hundred times over, I just do not believe it  
at all.  
You are no singer compared to the lads of North Farm  
Nor do you understand the speech of Finnmark, not know how  
to sing magic in Lappish.” (*Kalevala/Poem 12, 70: 196-202*)

This possible association of Pohjola and Tuonela can also be seen in *Poem 49* quite clearly, where Väinämöinen has to cross a river to reach Northland similar to the manner Tuonela is reached:

First he shouted long and loud by that river of North Farm:  
“Bring a boat here so that I may get across the river.”  
When no one heard the shout or brought a boat,  
he [Väinämöinen] gathered a pile of wood, the needed  
branches of a dry fir.  
[...]  
Then old Väinämöinen now shouted a second time:  
“Bring a boat, lad of North Farm, a boat for Väinämöinen.”  
Then the lad of North Farm says, spoke, answered:  
“No boat is to be got from here. Come with your fingers as  
oars,  
your palms as steering oars across North Farm's river.”  
(*Kalevala/Poem 49, 326: 121-40*)

Another such implication is observed in *Poem 43*, where Louhi threatens to conjure up the bear at the gates of Pohjola after the theft of the Sampo (which she does later in *Poem 46*). Lauri Honko suggests that in this passage too, Pohjola and otherworld are used synonymously “as can be seen by comparison with certain other variants in which the bear is asked to run off to the Manala forests, and the ‘king of the otherworld’ is asked to help by

building a bridge over the mythical Pohjola River (probably a reference to the place where bears were banished in the cattle breeder's mythology)" (Honko, Timonen & Branch 1994, 136). The poem goes:

Louhi, mistress of North Farm, uttered a word, spoke thus:  
[...]  
I will raise up a bear from the heath, one with sparse teeth from  
the evergreens  
to mangle your geldings, o kill your mares,  
to lay low your cattle, to scatter your cows.  
(*Kalevala/Poem 43*, 292: 330-33)

Honko goes on to state that the birth of the bear at the foot of the spruce might also be an otherworld motif: "the tree close to the hunter's home where the bear's skull will be placed functions as a 'close otherworld' symbol and may well have its counterpart in the 'distant otherworld'" (Honko, Timonen & Branch 1994, 136). This seems likely as the poem also suggests there is a tree nearby – an evergreen tree:

Raise up a bear from heath, an angry wildcat from a thicket,  
a bear with curved claws from the backwoods, a sparse-toothed  
one from under an evergreen  
for the lane of North Farm, the trails of North Farm's cattle.  
(*Kalevala/Poem 43*, 293: 352-55)

Even though this does not mean Pohjola and Tuonela are the same place, certain similarities in description strike the eye. Domenico Comparetti, one of the earliest scholars of the *Kalevala*, writes "mythic conceptions whose diverse origin is patent are in the magic runes easily interchangeable, and converge in related ideas" (Comparetti 1898, 200). In the case of Tuonela or Manala, and Pohjola, we see that both of these lands have a female leader, representing sickness, evil and darkness. The mistress of the Northland is said to be malignant, old and toothless, while her name Louhi is equivalent to that of Loviatar, daughter of Tuoni, mother of sicknesses (Comparetti 1898, 200).

Louhi, mistress of North Farm,    gat-toothed dame of North  
Farm (*Kalevala/Poem 7, 39: 183*)

These combined with the location of Pohjola, its darkness and cold and its bad relations with the Kaleva District make it possible for us to make an association between the two lands. Tarkka finds a connection between the graveyard and Pohjola based on the theory that according to the Finnish tradition graveyard (*Kalmisto*) was located across the water too. Considering that the land of the dead is explicitly situated in the village graveyard, the connection between Pohjola and Tuonela becomes obvious (Tarkka 1994, 267).

It should be noted that in the *Kalevala* the conditions and the dwellings of the dead are not mentioned in as detailed a fashion as in the *Odyssey*:

When I had finished my prayers and invocations to the communities of the dead, I took the sheep and cut their throats over the trench so that the dark blood poured in. And now the souls of the dead came swarming up from Erebus—brides, unmarried youths, old men who had suffered greatly, once-happy girls with grief still fresh in their hearts, and a great throng of warriors killed in battle, their spear-wounds gaping and all their armour stained with blood. (*Odyssey/Book 11, 141: 34-42*)

Yet, the passage after Väinämöinen returns from Tuonela to his people includes a brief description of the torments and tortures the wicked face in Tuonela, while he warns and advises everyone not ever to go there after he comes out:

He further uttered these words,    made this utterance, spoke  
          thus  
to the rising generation,    to the people growing up:  
“Do not, children of me,    ever, ever at all  
do wrong to an innocent person,    harm to a guiltless one.  
They pay bad wages    there in the home of Death’s Domain;  
there there is place for the guilty,    beds for sinners,  
a bedstead of hot stones,    of burning boulders,  
a coverlet of adders, of snakes,    woven out of Death’s reptiles.”

(*Kalevala/Poem 16, 102: 405-12*)<sup>100</sup>

Although, interestingly, there is no description of Väinämöinen's shamanic performance, it is logical to assume he enters the Underworld using such means, especially considering his transition into animal form (an otter) when trying to escape from Death's son. Commenting on an ancient Indian myth, Oinas states that "the visit to Tuonela vividly recounts the difficulties the shaman's soul encounters during its search for knowledge in the underworld and its narrow escape in the shape of the serpent" (Oinas 1985, 17)—which of course emphasizes the ubiquity of such myths. According to Joseph Campbell:

The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation-initiation-return: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth<sup>101</sup>. *A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.* (Campbell 1993, 30)

Resembling Campbell's theory, in 'Shamanism as Reflected in the Folktale', Alsace Yen focuses on the certain stages that the hero goes through in completing a successful unusual journey (Yen 1980, 107):

Loss: Journey: Sleep: Helper: Knowledge Acquired: Otherworld:  
Deliverance: Return (: Reunion)

We can easily apply this to Väinämöinen's exploit, which can be regarded as an evidence for his shamanistic journey; although some minor changes should be made in order to

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<sup>100</sup> Tuonela seems to have acquired features of hell as pictured in the Christian religion in this passage: "beds for sinners," "a bedstead of hot stones," etc. Magoun has translated the original Finnish *sylliset*—"the guilty ones" as 'sinners' which gives it a more obvious Christian connotation.

<sup>101</sup> Here, Campbell explains that the term "monomyth" is from James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* (New York: Viking Press, Inc., 1939: 581).



demonstrate the path the hero of the *Kalevala* takes in an attempt to achieve the information he needs, in a better way. His journey to wisdom is two-fold, his being expected to overcome an obstacle prior to success:

1	2	3	4	5	6
Loss (Lack): Journey(i): Otherworld(i): Sleep: Helper: Knowledge Acquired:					
7	8	9	10	11	
Return(ii): Journey(ii): Otherworld(ii): Deliverance: Return (: Reunion)					

1. He lacks the magic charms necessary for him to finish building his boat.
2. He decides to travel to the Underworld.
3. He reaches the river of Tuonela, ready to cross over.
4. Tuoni's daughter puts him to sleep on the boat.
5. Even though it is not intentionally, by trying to set a trap for the hero, Tuoni's son makes Väinämöinen realize that what he is looking for is not there.
6. He comes to the conclusion that he can get the charms from Antero Vipunen.
7. He goes back home to get the necessary equipment for his next journey.
8. He sets out to visit Vipunen, the dead giant.
9. He awakens Vipunen from his long sleep under the ground. The giant swallows him and the hero begins to torture him from the inside until he gets the charms.
10. Väinämöinen threatens Vipunen not to leave unless he gives him the charms and so, he gives in and sings all the enchantments in his knowledge for the hero—giving him what he needs.
11. Väinämöinen returns home, gets to his people and continues building his boat.

Seen from this angle, it is safe to say that Väinämöinen's journey to Tuonela in an attempt to find the missing charms<sup>102</sup> should not be perceived as a mistake. It was a necessary step he had to take in order to achieve his goal, for he not only lacks a 'tool' but also the very idea of that tool—he does not know what it is, what it does or how it is designed. David Bynum emphasizes that by changing his shape into an otter, worm or snake "he achieves the aquatic mobility in the place of the dead that is requisite to the ideational restoration of his terrestrial mobility in the land of the living, but seemingly he does not obtain the carpenter's tool requisite to an actual physical restoration of his sleigh" (Bynum 1990, 321). Bynum goes on to state:

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<sup>102</sup> A charm can be defined as "a formula of magic influence repeated word-for-word" (Siikala 1994, 35).

Väinämöinen returns from Tuonela bearing no mere static, lifeless metal tool, but rather the live pattern incorporated into his own being of all such implements ever after. He is indeed the perfect smith. (Bynum 1990, 322)

Vipunen, the old giant<sup>103</sup>, which is a mountain of earth, has a birch tree and bushes growing from his forehead. He is a proto-shaman who had died many years ago and lies there rotting. A description of his appearance is given in the poem:

Vipunen rich in songs, an old man of great resources,  
 he is lying stretched out with his lays, sprawled out with his  
 charms.  
 An aspen was growing on his shoulders, a birch rising from his  
 brows,  
 an elder on the tip of his jaw, a willow on the end of his beard,  
 on his forehead a fir, the haunt of squirrels, a tall evergreen on  
 his teeth. (*Kalevala/Poem 17*, 104: 51-55)

The giant also seems to be Väinämöinen's last chance for getting the charms according to the story. The hero has to pass through points of needles, edges of swords and axes to get there; so he asks Ilmarinen to craft him iron footwear, iron gauntlets and an iron byrnie:

Steadfast old Väinämöinen, however, set out, paid no attention.  
 He walked along lightly for one day on the points of women's  
 needles,  
 Lightheartedly walked a second on the points of men's swords,  
 a third with long strides on the blades of a man's battle-ax.  
 (*Kalevala/Poem 17*, 104: 47-50)

It should be noted that the preparations Väinämöinen makes prior to his journey—having Ilmarinen fashion him necessary tools to aid him in his challenge—remind one of a shaman's preparations for a hunt or a spirit journey.

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<sup>103</sup> Charles Billson points out that “the prolific nature of giants appear to have sprung from three main roots” and that Vipunen belongs to the class of “mythical giants” that stand for the inorganic world, like the sun, the earth, or like Vipunen, the underworld of the dead and the grave. The second of these roots includes giants like the Indian Rākshashas, which remind us the gigantic beasts and flying serpents while the third group is formed by giants like Cyclops, who represent magnified aboriginal tribes (Billson 1895, 334, n. 14).

Even though Väinämöinen's fall into the giant's mouth seems to be accidental, it has been suggested by Haavio that, in fact, the hero was allowed to enter the belly through the mouth and obtain the knowledge (Haavio 1952, 138). This seems probably as can also be seen in the extract giving a depiction of Vipunen above, it is as if the creature was waiting for Väinämöinen to enter through its stretched out mouth. Putting it in Haavio's words:

The mouth became a concrete thing and grew gigantic, the belly large enough to hold a man. And then he had at hand the idea of the whale [...] And the poet took from his store of knowledge the folktale with the Jonah motif. (Haavio 1952, 138-39)

It is believed that Vipunen refers to St. Andrew (*Kalevala/Glossary of Proper Names: Antero*, 387). Furthermore, the idea of falling into the stomach of monsters or animals has become a universal theme and here, the 'Jonah motif' refers to the biblical tale of 'Jonah and the Whale' where the prophet Jonah was swallowed by a whale. It is also suggested by Collinder, who thinks the poem combines the shamanistic episode of Vipunen with the story of Jonah (Collinder 1964, 99). Besides, travelling to the grave of a great sage or shaman in search for knowledge is believed to be an ancient custom in shamanistic cultures, including the Finnish *tietäjä*—which means "wise man, sage or a seer"—tradition (Pentikäinen 1989, 187). It is interesting to see that when reaching an 'otherworld'—in the case of the sage, Väinämöinen, initially Tuonela and then Vipunen's stomach—there is a transition which is represented by water as also pointed out earlier in the section. Tarkka mentions the fact that the otherworld landscape crossed by Väinämöinen is both abstract and concrete as the main topographical elements in the epic world are the river, the sea, the mountain, the island and the shore (Tarkka 1994, 267). She goes on to state that Vipunen's stomach, where Väinämöinen finds himself, could also be the River of Tuonela since in poetic language,

journey, drowning and death can be seen as symbolic equivalents for the otherworldly destination (Tarkka 1994, 267).

Even though the story of Jonah can be seen as an inspiration for the episode with Vipunen, the closest correspondences are observed in Saami folk legends. The Saami sorcerers, called, *Akmeeli* or *Torajainen*, sleep in their graves just like Antero Vipunen and are awakened by a helping shaman according to the Saami legend:

Rise up from the oval of the pike's gut, from the third labyrinth.  
(Itkonen 1963, 559-60)

Pentikäinen's opinion is that both the ancient Finnish poem and Saami folk legend give extensive descriptions regarding the wanderings of shamans' souls in the realm of the dead in an attempt to encounter a long-dead primordial shaman of a society (Pentikäinen 1989, 188). He says:

In the Saami legend, both the reason for the journey, which is to construct a boat, and the fact that the hero travelled in the form of a fish to the realm of the dead beneath or beyond the water, allude to the fact that the goal of the journey was "jabmeaivo," the Saami realm of the dead which lay beneath the water.  
(Pentikäinen 1989, 188)

Väinämöinen's transition to and from Tuonela through water fits the tradition even though some of the obstacles he faces, such as the needles and battle axes, might have been added later under the influence of the visionary texts of the Catholic Middle Ages (Pentikäinen 1989, 187). The close affiliation of the name, Väinämöinen—root *Väinä-* meaning 'slow moving water', also explained at the beginning of the section—further supports the argument that water stands as a symbol for change, since beside his own transformations into animal form and his journey to Tuonela, it is Väinämöinen's death what brings permanent change to Finland at the end of the epic.

Väinämöinen's departure finalizes a series of events, the most important of which is the belief in shamanism. *Poem 50* of the *Kalevala* telling of Väinämöinen's departure is based on Lönnrot's work with the rune 'Luojan Virsi' (The Messiah) and seems to point to the defeat of Shamanism against Christianity (Pentikäinen 1998, 148). The first lines of the rune go like this:

A berry called from the hill  
a cranberry from the heath:  
"Come, maid, and pick me  
Cooper-belted one, choose me  
Before the slug endeavours me  
and the black worm gobbles me."

The Virgin lady Mary  
the dear merciful mother  
dressed herself and decked herself  
prettily adorned her head  
with a fair white cloth:  
she went to pick the berry  
to look for the cranberry.  
So she went to the hills – tell! –  
found the berry on the hill  
the cranberry on the heath:  
it was plainly a berry  
a natural cranberry:  
she was too low to eat it  
from the ground, and too high  
from a tree.

She dragged a pole from the heath  
and stood upon it  
threw the berry in her lap  
from her lap up to her belt  
from her belt up to her breasts  
from her breasts up to her lip  
from her lip on to her tongue:  
thence it slipped to her belly.

(*The Messiah I*, Kuusi, Bosley and Branch 1977, 283)

Marjanen mäeltä huuti  
punapoula kankahalta:  
"Tule neiti poimomahan  
vyövaski valitsemahan  
ennen kun etona syöpi  
Mato musta muikkoali."

Neitsy Maaria emonen  
rakas äiti armoillinen  
viitisekse vaatikekse  
pääsomille suorieli  
vaattehilla valkehilla.  
Läksimarjan poimintaan  
punapuolan katsontaan.  
Niin meni mäille sano! –  
keksi marjasen meältä  
punapuolan kankahalta:  
on marja näkemiehen  
puola ilman luomeehen,  
alahahko ois maasta syöä  
Ylähähko puuhun nosta.

Tempo kartun kankahalt  
senni päällä seisataksen:  
heitti marjan helmohinsa  
helmoiltansa vyönsä päälle  
vyönsä päältä rinnoillensa  
rinnoiltansa huulellensa  
huuleltansa kielellensä  
Siitä vatsahan valahti.

The victory of Christianity over paganism is displayed by Lönnrot at the end of the *Kalevala* when Väinämöinen leaves and plants the seeds of a new era. In this episode, virgin

Marjatta's son is born and Väinämöinen condemns him to death as he is fatherless, after an investigation held regarding the boy's situation. However, the boy speaks up, saying he has come to a wrong verdict:

Who is to be his examiner, his examiner, his judge?  
 Steadfast old Väinämöinen, eternal sage,  
 He is the one to be his examiner, his examiner, his judge.  
 Steadfast old Väinämöinen judges him there:  
 "If the boy was got from a fen, begotten of a berry from the  
 ground,  
 let the boy be put on the ground beside a berry-grown tussock  
 or taken by a fen, hit on the head with a club."  
 The half-month-old boy spoke, the two-week-old child cried  
 out:  
 "O you, wretched old man, wretched old man, stupid man,  
 how foolishly you have judged, how wrongly you have laid  
 down the law.  
 For greater reasons, for even worse deeds,  
 you yourself were not taken to a fen or hit on the head with a  
 club  
 when as a rather young you gave away your mother's child  
 to free your own head, to ransom yourself.  
 Neither then nor since has anyone taken you to a fen,  
 when as a rather young man you drowned young girls  
 under deep waves, in the dark ooze."  
 (*Kalevala/Poem 50, 336: 431-47*)

Following his defence the boy is christened by the old man as the King of Karelia and, angered by this, Väinämöinen departs forever with a prophecy that he will one day be needed again to make a new Sampo. It is presumed that he is still in a place between heaven and earth and has left his harp and his great songs as a heritage for his people:

The old man christened him quickly, speedily baptized the  
 child  
 King of Karelia, guardian of the whole realm.  
 Then Väinämöinen got angry, indeed got angry and was put to  
 shame.  
 He set out to walk to the shore of the sea.  
 The he began to sing. He sang magically for his last time,  
 sang up a copper boat, a copper-decked vessel.  
 He sits down in the stern, set out for the clear expanse of the  
 sea.

He was still speaking as he was going, remarking as he went along:

“Let time pass, one day go, another come;  
 they will need me again, be looking, waiting for me  
 to fetch a new Sampo, to prepare a new instrument,  
 fetch a new moon, free a new sun  
 when there is no moon, no sun nor any worldly joy,”  
 Then old Väinämöinen sets out quickly  
 in the copper boat, in the flat-bottomed copper craft  
 toward the upper reaches of the world, to the lower reaches of  
 the heavens.

There he stopped with his vessel, out of weariness stopped  
 with his boat.

He left the harp behind, the fine instrument for Finland,  
 the eternal source of joyous music for the people, the great  
 songs for his children. (*Kalevala/Poem 50, 336-37: 448- 67*)

As the community decides that the boy should stay, old Väinämöinen has no choice but to leave his place to him, construct a boat for himself and depart. It brings to mind that perhaps the previous shamanic journey to acquire necessary charms for boat-building could have also been a preparation for this last scene. Väinämöinen accepts that his time has come and although bitterly, heads off of his own free will. Pentikäinen suggests that such an act “corresponds to an archaic natural manner of dealing with one’s right to die” (Pentikäinen 1989, 216); yet the possibility of Väinämöinen’s return still remains here.

Väinämöinen’s death (or departure) symbolizes a cultural change or transition from paganism to Christianity since in the rune, as the hero loses his status, the child—virgin Marjatta’s son—gains his. The fact that the boy reminds Väinämöinen of his mistakes makes it obvious he is no longer a suitable leader for the Finns, also lowering his status from a ‘god’ to a mere mortal being who is dispensable. It also becomes clear that the *Kalevala* portrays three distinct eras for the ancient Finns—defined by the presence and absence of Väinämöinen. In Pentikäinen’s words:

The first of these [epochs] is the true period of no culture which reigned before the birth of Väinämöinen. At this time, the

elements of the cosmos were formed. Väinämöinen's birth is followed by the period in which culture is founded and established. Marjatta's son initiated the third epoch which alters Väinämöinen's world. The rune "Väinämöinen's Judgement" in itself telescopes the existence of these three worlds, particularly if we take equal note of those oral variants which were not included in Lönnrot's *Kalevala*. The transition into the final epoch results from a single sign, the power of the boy's act of speech. (Pentikäinen 1989, 217)

It is interesting to see that Väinämöinen is the reason the two-week-old child gained the power of speech in an attempt to save himself from death—the threat of death becomes an encouragement to live; in a way, similar to Väinämöinen's search of wisdom and knowledge in the Realm of the Dead.

### **Lemminkäinen's Re-birth: Finnish Gods and Nature**

Whilst being a brave hero, who is courageous in his exploits, Lemminkäinen is pictured as a reckless young man. He frequently causes trouble both for himself and for others. His mother plays a very important role in his life, including resurrecting him after his unfortunate experience with the son of Tuoni (Death), Tuonen-poika, who cuts him into pieces. In the beginning of the eleventh poem, Lemminkäinen and his features are described:

Ahti, lad of the island, that reckless son of Lempi,  
 Grew up in a grand home at his dear mother's  
 at the head of a very large bay, in a cove in Faraway Headland.  
 There the man with a far-roving mind grew up on fish, Ahti  
 grew tall on perch.  
 He got to be the very finest man, the ruddy-cheeked fellow  
 flourished;  
 he has a good head on him, for his part he is competent.  
 But he went a little astray, got into trouble because of his ways:  
 he was always around the women, visiting all night  
 to the delight of those virgins, dancing with girls with luxuriant  
 hair. (*Kalevala/Poem 11, 62: 2-11*)



'Ahti' is an alternative name for Lemminkäinen, which is an uninflected title before *Saarelainen*, meaning 'a man of the island', in reference to his escapades on the island (Saari) told in *Poem 11 (Kalevala/Glossary of Proper Names: Ahti, 386)*. The etymology of the name, Lemminkäinen, on the other hand, is a reflection of the hero's personality. In Finnish, *lempi* (genitive form, *lemmen*) means 'erotic, passionate love' and according to Magoun:

This [...] with the secondary denominative suffix *-(i)nkäinen*—so "*pörrinkäinen*" tousle-head, Slovenly Peter, based on *pörrö* "bushy, tousled hair"—would thus mean "lover, lover boy," a name altogether appropriate to Lemminkäinen's character. (*Kalevala/Glossary of Names: Lemminkäinen, 395*)

Throughout the poems, he is often referred to as the handsome one, whose farm is located far from the rest of the Kaleva District:

Then Ahti Lemminkäinen, that handsome man from Faraway  
Farm,  
spent all his time with the young maiden;  
he himself did not go to the wars nor did Kyllikki gad about.  
(*Kalevala/Poem 12, 68: 1-3*)

In the twelfth poem, he declares that his magic powers are learnt from his father and that his mother washed him several times in order to improve his powers. It can be assumed that here, he is speaking of the baptism people have to go through in order to reach the rank of a shaman:

"My mother used to wash me, wash me as a slip of a lad  
three times of a summer night, nine times of an autumn night  
to make me a seer for every place, make me competent for  
every land,  
a magic singer in my home, an expert abroad."  
(*Kalevala/Poem 12, 74: 429-32*)

Lemminkäinen's relationship with his mother is unique and noteworthy since no other hero in the *Kalevala* is depicted as living with his mother—in fact, none of the heroes of other epics

in world literature live with their mothers, except Beowulf. Nevertheless, as Timonen remarks “comparative research has, as we have seen, produced numerous parallels for this Lemminkäinen’s mother. Take, for example, the goddess Ishtar, Demeter, Artemis, Aphrodite; Frigga; the mothers who warn the heroes of Russian bylina or the female relatives who rescue the heroes of Altaic and Mongolian epic; the Virgin Mary of Christian tradition” (Timonen 2002, 355-56). In the *Kalevala*, the mother uses shamanistic knowledge to help her son and she shows her feelings through warnings, forecasts and attempts to rescue as any mother would do. For instance, she does not want her son to set out to entice the beautiful maid of the island, Kyllikki, whose beauty is famed and who has suitors coming for her from various places in the eleventh poem, for she thinks he might not be welcome in the maid’s great clan. The self-centred nature of Lemminkäinen is further emphasized by Lönnrot through the mother figure that lives for her son regardless of his actions and whether he lived for her. It is clear that in Lönnrot’s eyes the mother was a strong character who would not show signs of weakness, sometimes waiting for her son to get home and sometimes taking a more active role.

Lemminkäinen’s adventurous story, ending in the River of Tuonela, begins when the hero decides to go to the Island despite the warnings of his mother; and as his mother suspects, the women of the Island laugh at him even though soon they get to know him better. Kyllikki rejects him at first, but Lemminkäinen abducts her. Despite her cries and complaints, he does not let her go and finally gets her to agree to be with him by promising he will never go to war. She also promises not to “gad about” (*Kalevala/Poem 11*, 66: 300). Lemminkäinen’s mother is delighted to have such a pretty and pure daughter-in-law. However, upon finding out that Kyllikki did not keep her promise and went out dancing with the women of the neighbourhood, Lemminkäinen gets really angry and swears to go to

Pohjola, the Northland, which possesses the most beautiful maidens besides being the land of dark enchantments. Again, he does not listen to the warnings either of his mother or his wife, who insist that he stay and that he will face death if he does not:

Reckless Lemminkäinen set out for gloomy North Farm  
 In the face of his mother's no, his parent's warning.  
 He girds himself, he dirds himself, puts on his iron shirts,  
 wraps himself in steel belts. He uttered these words:  
 "A man is more secure in a byrnie, better in an iron shirt,  
 more powerful in a steel belt among those wizards,  
 so that he does not worry about poorer ones, not bother about  
 the really good ones." (*Kalevala/Poem 12, 71: 210-17*)

Soon before he arrives in Pohjola, he prays to various spirits to protect him from wizards' arrows, sorcerers' blades and the weapons of magic marksmen. He prays to Ukko, the supreme god, in particular, to provide him with the power to "undo destructive magic" with his flaming sword (*Kalevala/Poem 12, 72: 281*). He also sings a charm for dogs in order to prevent them from barking and sneaks into the Northland and listens to the words of the mistress and the magic songs of their singers. Lemminkäinen, then, puts everyone under his spell, leaving only one person, the blind old cattle herdsman, who gets offended by his words and waits for the hero to leave the farm, at the river of Death's Domain, planning to kill Lemminkäinen:

Thither reckless Lemminkäinen bewitched the men with their  
 swords,  
 the people with their weapons; he bewitched the young,  
 bewitched the old, in turn bewitched the middle-aged.

One he left unbewitched,  
 an evil cattle herder, a blind old man.  
 Cattle herder Sippy Hat uttered these words:  
 "Oh you reckless son of Lempi! You bewitched the young,  
 bewitched the old,  
 in turn bewitched the middle-aged, so why do you not bewitch  
 me?"  
 Reckless Lemminkäinen said: "This is why I am not touching  
 you,

because you are wretched to look at, miserable without my  
touching you.

When still a rather young man, when an evil cattle herder,  
you seduced your mother's child, slept with your sister;  
you used to violate all the horses, abuse fillies,  
on the expanses of the fen, on the farthest parts of the world, on  
places washed by silty water." (*Kalevala/Poem 12, 74: 479-94*)

In the next poem, Lemminkäinen asks Louhi, the mistress of the Northland, for her beautiful daughter. She assigns the hero tasks to complete before she agrees to give him her daughter; first of which is to ski down the Demon's elk. Lemminkäinen is unsuccessful at his first attempt, but after getting a hold of huntsmen's charms and prayers he finally manages to get the elk and takes it to Pohjola (This hunt will be dealt in more detail later in the section).

His second task is to "bridle the big gelding, the Demon's brown horse, the Demon's foamy-jawed colt beyond the Demon's meadows" (*Kalevala/Poem 14, 84: 274-75*), which he performs successfully. As his third assignment, the mistress asks him to shoot a swan in the river of Death's Domain, where the cattle herdsman is awaiting to kill him:

Now on a certain day he saw the reckless Lemminkäinen  
coming, approaching the river of Death's Domain over there,  
the margin of the green rapids, the whirlpool of the sacred  
stream.

From the water he conjured up a water dragon, a cowbane  
poisoned tube from the billows,  
hurled it through the man's heart, through Lemminkäinen's  
liver,  
through his left armpit, into his right shoulder.

Now indeed reckless Lemminkäinen felt himself sorely hurt.  
(*Kalevala/Poem 14, 85: 410-16*)

Then, he throws his body into the Death stream, the most terrible whirlpool. Meanwhile, the hero's mother is feeling distress and when she sees that blood is coming from his brush she is sure that death has found her son—before he set out to the Northland, Lemminkäinen cast a spell on his brush which would let his mother know of his bad fate:

“It will be the disaster of Lemminkäinen,      the ruin of the  
splendid youth,  
when the brush is streaming with blood,      the brush flowing  
with gore.” (*Kalevala/Poem 12, 71: 208-09*)

She rushes to the Northland where she finds the dame and asks her what happened to her son. The mistress finally tells her the challenges she set before the hero when the mother threatens her saying she would break the Sampo, the magical object. After a long search, she finds out that her son is in the Death stream; and with the long iron rake that Ilmarinen has forged for her, she starts to collect the fragments of her son from the river. Then, she begins saying charms and praying in order to resurrect Lemminkäinen. She eventually succeeds and gets her beloved son back.

In the opening lines of the poem the mother emphasizes Lemminkäinen is her flesh and blood which also stresses the strong bond they have with each other:

The poor mother does not know,      not the wretched woman who  
bore him,  
where her flesh and blood is moving about,      her own flesh and  
blood floating about,  
does not know whether he was walking on a hill grown with  
evergreens,      on a heather-grown heath,  
or whether he took to the open sea,      to the foam-capped  
billows or to a big war,      to some dreadful feud  
where blood will be over his shins,      red blood up to his knees.  
(*Kalevala/Poem 15, 87: 5-12*)

The theme of flesh and blood is further reinforced when feelings overcome distance through the mother's realization of her son's situation by the spelled brush which gives a concrete image of blood:

It is the ruin of the splendid boy,      the destruction of reckless  
Lemminkäinen;  
Now the brush is running with blood,      gore trickling from the  
brush.” (*Kalevala/Poem 15, 88: 43-44*)

Even though Tuonela and what lies in the Realm of Death is not described in detail in the story, creatures the hero fights, dangers that befall him and where his journey ends (Death Stream) are closely related to the land of the dead. More importantly, the poems mentioned (*Poems 11-15*) contribute greatly to the representation of shamanistic rites and the power of magic in the *Kalevala*, as well as providing extensive information on Finnish gods and the role of nature in the ancient Finnish way of living. In *Poem 14*, for instance, Lemminkäinen prays to the daughter of the god of the forests, Tuulikki:

“Girl of the forest, lovely maid,    Wind Spirit, Tapio’s daughter!  
Drive the game to the sides of the way,    to the most extensive  
clearings.  
Should it be stubborn in running    or sluggish in galloping,  
take a switch from a thicket,    a birch switch from a dell in the  
wilderness  
with which you will smack its flank    and poke it between the  
legs. (*Kalevala/Poem 14*, 82: 85-89)

It is not unusual to see gods as married or having families in ancient Finnish belief; as it is commonly seen in other myths of the world. Sons and daughters are helpers of their fathers, as seen in the above example. Ukko, Ahto and Tuoni (whose acts have been discussed in the section on Väinämöinen) can be regarded as the three main deities that correspond to the Zeus, Poseidon and Hades of Greek mythology. However, since forests carry just as much importance as the sea for the Finns, the forest god, Tapio, is considered as one of the major deities. Bonser classifies Finnish deities under four headings—air, sea, forest and the dead (Bonser 1928, 345).

Besides being the sky god, Ukko, was believed to be a god of air and the agricultural deity as farmers depended on him for rain necessary for their crops; just as he was also the protector of the cattle and the god of snow and thunder. In *Poem 2*, we see Väinämöinen pray to Ukko for rain:

"O Ukko, god on high or heavenly father,  
 holder of power in the clouds, ruler of the cloud patches!  
 Hold folk assemblies in the clouds, open meetings in the upper  
 stories of the sky.  
 Make a cloud spring up in the east, raise up a cloudbank in the  
 northwest,  
 send others from the west, drive others from the south.  
 Shed rain gently from the heavens, sprinkle honey from the  
 clouds  
 on the sprouting shoots, on the murmuring crops."  
 (*Kalevala/Poem 2, 12: 319-26*)

The sky god is very significant to farmers since frost is seen as a big disaster—it cannot be fought or controlled by anyone and when it comes it has the power to destroy all the crops. This is the reason why frost is personified in the poems too. A good example of this can be observed when, in *Poem 30*, Lemminkäinen's journey to the Northland is affected by frost. He is on his way there to wage war against Louhi to take his revenge on her burning down his house. The hero describes the frost in these words:

Jack Frost of bad lineage and an ill-mannered boy  
 set out to freeze the sea, to tame the waves.  
 Now while he was going there, while travelling over the land,  
 he bit the trees leafless, the grass sheathless.  
 Then after he got there beside the sea of North Farm,  
 to the boundless shore, straight off the first night  
 he froze the coves, froze the ponds. He iced up the shores of the  
 sea,  
 he did not yet freeze the sea over, not tame the waves.  
 There is a little chaffinch on the surface of the water, a wagtail  
 on the billows;  
 its claws are not frozen, its little head not freezing cold.  
 Not until the next night after that did he get violent,  
 fling himself about shamelessly, grow very dreadful.  
 Then he froze in full measure; Jack Frost's power froze hard.  
 It froze ice a forearm thick, it dropped snow a ski pole deep,  
 it froze the rascal's boat, Ahti's ship to the billows.  
 He meant to freeze Ahti, too, to turn the fine man to ice.  
 Already he was asking for his fingernails, from down there  
 requesting his toes. (*Kalevala/Poem 30, 218: 143-61*)

There are other sky deities, which can be associated with Ukko, like the Sun and Moon gods. We see the characters of the poems pray to these gods in many instances. Like the frost, they are humanized and deified—they can be hidden, removed or replaced and controlled. In *Poem 15*, we see Lemminkäinen's mother speak to the moon and the sun, asking the whereabouts of her son, while in the forty-ninth poem Louhi is forced to restore the sun and the moon, which she has formerly hidden:

She set the moon free from the stone,    let the sun loose from the rock.  
(*Kalevala/Poem 49*, 329: 355)

It should be noted, however, that even though Ukko is the all-father of the ancient Finns he makes no contribution to make to the creation story told at the beginning of *Kalevala*. Even so, many poetical epithets are attached to him; such as “the shepherd of the lamb-clouds”, “the father of the heavens”, and the “Navel of the heaven” (Bonser 1928, 346). He is, on the other hand, the god who is capable of resurrecting Lemminkäinen, as according to the poem he resides high in the sky where ointments are being prepared for the hero:

It [the bee] flew into the Creator's cellars,    then up to the  
Almighty's upper chambers.  
There salves were being made,    ointments being prepared  
in silver pots,    in golden kettles; [...]  
(*Kalevala/Poem 15*, 94: 512-14)

In addition, Bonser suggests that the names compounded with *ilma* (meaning ‘air’) might have initially been air deities. These include, Ilmarinen and Ilmatar, Väinämöinen's mother. The idea that Ilmarinen could originally be the air-god of the Finns has been put forward by Abercromby as well (Abercromby 1898, 278).

The god of sea, who is said to be living in a castle at the bottom of the sea in *Poem 41*, is called, Ahto. He is pictured as an old man having a long beard, made of seaweed, and travelling in a boat of water lilies:



Ahto, king of the waves,     old man of the water with a sedgy  
 beard,  
 hauls himself onto the surface of the water,     slips onto a water  
 lily; (*Kalevala/Poem 41, 277-78: 134-35*)

He is in charge of lakes, rivers and of course, the sea; as well as being the lord of all living things living in water, such as fish, water-nymphs, mermaids and monsters of water. The giant pike Väinämöinen's boat gets stranded on is one these monsters (the other is called Iku-Turso). Pentikäinen summarizes the gods of the Finnish pantheon, also shedding light on Lönnrot's insights into the subject:

Ukko was described as the deity of the celestial sphere, the god of thunder (ukkonen), the god of air and the one who supported the bright dome of the world. Because Lönnrot was well aware that there was more than one deity referred to in Finnish mythology, it was necessary for him to expand this monotheistic system into a hierarchy of deities and cultural heroes. Because the Supreme deity had not had the time to create everything himself, concepts of lesser deities had developed. Thus Lönnrot, like Agricola, envisaged a Finnish Olympus, which included a great number of deities: Tapio (forest spirit), Ahti (water spirit), Lempi (erotic love), and Hiisi (demon), Tuoni and Kalma (concepts for death), Mielliki (female forest ruler), the Ogresses, Otava (the Big Dipper, the Great Bear in Finnish Mythology), and goddesses of Nature, the Moon, the Sun, the Wind, Summer, the South, and the Netherworld. (Pentikäinen 1989, 160)

Although all gods are as significant as any other in ancient Finnish belief, nevertheless, being a farmer himself, Lemminkäinen is in interaction with the forest god, Tapio more than the others. He is portrayed as a grey-bearded old man:

"Master of Tapio's house,     mistress of Tapio's house,  
 grey-bearded old man of the forest,     fair king of the forest!"  
 (*Kalevala/Poem 14, 83: 205-06*)

The son of Tapio and Mielikki (his wife), is called Nyyrikki; and it is he, who guides hunters when they are in need. Lemminkäinen prays for his help in *Poem 14*:

Nyyrikki, son of Tapio, fair man with a red high-peaked hat!  
 Cut blazes through the countryside, make guide signs leading  
 to the hills,  
 so that I, simple fellow, will see how to go, I, quite ignorant,  
 will know the way  
 while I am searching for the quarry, seeking out the game.  
 (*Kalevala/Poem 14, 80: 226-30*)

In this poem (*Poem 14*) we learn most about the forest—the stories of Lemminkäinen’s hunting the elk and his praying to various forest deities are told here. All trees of the forest are said to have their own guardian deity, but what is more interesting is to see *Hiisi*, the ‘devil’ of the *Kalevala*, as one of the forest deities. Perhaps, this relation was made by the Finns since the devil has existed for as long as the forests: ‘Hiisi’s land’ is another name given to the forests; and moreover, the devil’s connection to the forest is also represented by his creating the elk:

The demons got to hear of this, the evil creatures to looking  
 into this.  
 The demons constructed an elk, the evil creatures made a  
 reindeer.  
 They make the head from a rotten stump, the horns from a  
 forked willow,  
 the legs from shore saplings, the shanks from fence poles in  
 a fen,  
 the back from a fence rail, the sinews from last year’s dry grass,  
 the eyes from yellow water lilies, the ears from white pond  
 lilies,  
 the skin from fir bark, the rest of the flesh from a rotten tree.  
 The Demon counselled his elk, spoke to his reindeer:  
 “Now, you, elk of the demons, race your legs, you noble  
 reindeer,  
 to the reindeers’ calving grounds, to the fields of the children of  
 Lapland.  
 Ski a man into a sweat, especially Lemminkäinen!”  
 (*Kalevala/Poem 13, 77: 123-33*)

The hunt of the elk is particularly interesting and significant as it is a shamanic hunt, taking the hero to the mythical Päivölä (Realm of the Sun) instead of Tuonela. Lemminkäinen’s prey is not an ordinary elk, but one created by the demon; its supernatural speed and the

hero's chase, which take him to reindeer's swamps, to the fields of Lapland, to Pohjola's fences, over the regions beyond the sea and over the God's hill, provide the clues of a shamanistic wandering. He eventually comes across "golden doors" which can be interpreted as the doors of heaven:

Then reckless Lemminkäinen, the whole time without prey,  
 Skied the fens, skied the countryside, skied the rugged  
 backwoods,  
 over God's hill with charred trees, over the Demon's charred  
 heaths.  
 He skied one day, skied the second, Now on the third day  
 he went to a big hill, got up on a big rock,  
 cast his eyes to the northwest, to the north across the fens.  
 Tapio's dwellings appeared, the golden doors loomed up  
 From across the fen, from the north, from the foot of a hill, from  
 a scrub growth. (*Kalevala/Poem 14, 81: 62-70*)

The elk is described using the morbid features of nature, with dry and dark words, except for its eyes and ears which are of water lilies. These seem to stand out on the horrifying creature and it seems likely that the poet wants to refer to the two of the most important senses of an elk—sight and hearing—when it is escaping from a hunter. Besides, the illustration is very specific and detailed as if the poet actually saw what he was describing, which gives the episode the look of a ritual. In fact, together with bear the elk was a highly prized animal and almost all activity associated with it seems to have been in the form of ritual in Finland (as elsewhere in the Arctic region).

Pentikäinen emphasizes that "the shaman's pursuit of the mythical elk refers to a shaman's celestial journey" (Pentikäinen 1989, 199). The making of the enchanted skis and the time it takes for Lemminkäinen is reflective of a shaman's preparations for the hunt, while the strength of the elk serves as a symbol of the harnessed steed of the shaman in the spirit world. Moreover, Lemminkäinen's final battle with the creature is a demonstration of shamanic spirit battle present in many traditions:

They made it run, drove the Demon's elk from its hiding place  
 behind Tapio's fell, from the side of the Demon's fort  
 to in front of the man in search of it, to where the magic singer  
 will get it.

Reckless Lemminkäinen now indeed sent his lasso  
 onto the shoulders of the Demon's elk, onto the neck of the  
 camel's colt,  
 so that it did not kick viciously while he was stroking its back.  
 (*Kalevala/Poem 14, 83: 248-52*)<sup>104</sup>

Once he captures the elk with his lasso he rides it back to the Northland to ask the mistress for her daughter once again.

It should be emphasized that the choice of elk was not randomly made by Louhi, the mistress of the Northland, for it had totemic function in Finnish folklore; the bear served the same purpose. Pentikäinen points out that “it has in fact been hypothesized that the elk and the bear were the totem animals of two different Stone Age clans in ancient Finland” (Pentikäinen 1989, 198). Moreover, it was believed that a shaman had the ability to assume the body of a bear, reindeer, bird or wolf, gaining all its characteristics during this process. The Selkup shamans, for instance, had two different kinds of dress—one of a reindeer for travelling to the upper realms, what the Finnish call *Päivölä*, and one of a bear for journeying to the lower abode, *Tuonela*. It is also common to see two shamans fight one another in the form of an animal in traditional Finnish legends. This would be a spiritual fight in an attempt to prove who owned the more powerful spirit; during this quarrel it was believed that their spirits fought one another in the guise of a reindeer. In this episode, however, the hero's spirit fights with that of the Demon. It should be noted that “the material and spiritual interdependence between man and animal is one of the most important themes of primitive epic” and the story of the elk is illustrative of this in the Finnish tradition:

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<sup>104</sup> In Kirby's English translation the elk is likened to a bull instead of a camel in this final fight episode: “Round the bull's broad neck he threw it” (Kirby 1985, 159: 248 [1907]).

Some living objects—and among some peoples even plants and features of the landscape—were believed to possess spirits, on the reincarnation of which the continuation of a species was thought to depend. The spirit of a large and dangerous animal had to be treated with special respect for fear that it might seek revenge. In some parts of the north, rituals even included attempts to convince the dead animal's spirit that someone other than the hunter killed it. In more developed forms of the bear and elk cult all the animals of the species were credited with a non-specific tutelary spirit which was worshipped instead of an individual animal's spirit; *The Elk* is an example of this development, the tutelary spirit in the Finnish versions being the demonic Hiisi. (Kuusi, Bosley and Branch 1977, 548).

It can be observed that Lemminkäinen's skiing down the Hiisi elk and his journey to Pohjola are two of the most shamanistic poems, speaking of supernatural phenomena and the netherworld; yet they emphasize the significance of nature for the ancient Finns, as well as showing what they thought to be sacred in life. The dualistic world view of the *Kalevala* becomes apparent once again, as opposition between the supernatural and natural is emphasized. This results in the reflection of the Finnish environment and atmosphere in an impressive way throughout the poems, for Finnish folklore feeds on the influences of nature.

### **The Adventures of Ilmarinen: Magic of the Sampo and Nature's Joy**

The Sampo is believed to be a magical object which brings luck and success to whoever has it in possession—a Finnish 'Holy Grail' one might say. It is pictured as having three sides, one of which grinds grain, one salt, and the other, money. This three-sided mill is said to produce these in unlimited amounts and stands as a symbol of prosperity. According to the poems, there is no possibility of ever creating a duplicate and the story of this mystical object is one of the central themes of *Kalevala* for it becomes the main reason of dispute between the people of the Kaleva District and the Northland. Ilmarinen is the one and only craftsman who could forge the Sampo:

Then craftsman Ilmarinen, eternal smith,  
 taps away fast, pounds away spiritedly.  
 He forged the Sampo skillfully: on one side a grain mill,  
 on the second side a salt mill, on the third a money mill.  
 Then the new Sampo ground away, the lid of many colors went  
 round and round;  
 it ground a binful in the dawn, one binful of things to eat;  
 it ground a second of things to sell, a third of household  
 supplies.  
 (*Kalevala/Poem 10*, 60: 420-27)

Ilmarinen, who is talented and hard-working, is referred to as the ‘eternal smith’ or the ‘craftsman’ since he is a competent worker in metals. Beside the Sampo, he has also crafted a gold and silver bride for himself to replace his dead wife, as well as, an inefficient gold moon and silver sun for the Kaleva District. He was also given the role of ‘maker of the sky’ based on his name, which derived from the word *ilma* meaning ‘sky’ (also mentioned earlier). It should be noted, however, that even though there has been controversy regarding him formerly being a divinity, Magoun points out that all traces of this have disappeared in the *Kalevala*, as Ilmarinen is not depicted as a sky god or god of elements (in connection with the root of his name, ‘ilma-’) (*Kalevala/Glossary of Proper Names*, 392). Yet, in *Poem 49*, for instance, he claims to have forged the vault of heaven:

Craftsman Ilmarinen said, uttered a word, spoke thus:  
 “It is probably not in the least remarkable if I am an able smith  
 since I forged the heavens, pounded out the vault of sky.”  
 (*Kalevala/Poem 49*, 328: 343-45)

Ilmarinen is the only one of the three shaman heroes who does not go through transformation of shape, unlike Väinämöinen and Lemminkäinen who do so several times. It is interesting to see that his powers of transformation lie in his extraordinary talent as a blacksmith—using fire to change the shape of metals is shown as a respected profession in the *Kalevala*, even though it seems that Ilmarinen does not need to be in a state of ecstasy to

do this despite his shamanic knowledge. Beside the implications of the meaning of his name, Ilmarinen's association with the celestial sphere lies in his shaping a new sun and moon.

The mythical rune of 'Forger of the heavens' is related to the universally known Tree of Life (or Tree of the World), the Great Oak, which was felled in order for the sun to shine and the moon to gleam again. Pentikäinen stresses the importance of the World Tree to the northern Eurasian myths, stating that these myths predate Christian influences and that this concept is one of the most essential elements in northern Eurasian shamanistic rituals— "Like the image of the sun, the Saami 'päivve,' the Tree of the World, is often pictured at the centre of shamanic drums" (Pentikäinen 1989, 165). Therefore, the concept of Giant Oak ties in with the origin of the world and the forging of the Sampo, in the sense that the Sampo is a crucial element for the existence of the universe, the World Tree. Besides, according to the poems, both have Ilmarinen as their creators, two of his acts that make him a culture hero. Initially, Lönnrot seems to have considered the worship of the Sampo like that of God, but he eventually, came to the conclusion that the Sampo stands for ploughing, sowing, and working in general (Kaukonen 1990, 167). He believed that the Sampo represents culture and civilization gained by societies as he points out that the Sampo is not merely a miraculous object producing forests, water, the cattle and the field one hundredfold (Lönnrot 1862, 349), with the implication that there is an allegorical aspect to it, even if it is not God.

The creation of the Sampo is one of the three climaxes of the *Kalevala*—the other two, being the wooing contest of the maiden of Pohjola; and finally, the theft of the Sampo. Ilmarinen's role is significant in all three climaxes since he gets married to the daughter of Louhi and takes an active role in the stealing of the Sampo as well. Ilmarinen is promised the hand of Louhi's daughter only if he forges the Sampo and Väinämöinen has to convince him

to set out for the Northland according to the story, because the mistress of the Northland asks for the magical Sampo as a price for Väinämöinen's escape from her land:

Louhi, mistress of North Farm, uttered a word, spoke thus:  
 "O wise Väinämöinen, eternal sage!  
 I am not asking for your gold pieces, I do not desire your silver  
 pieces;  
 If you have the skill to forge a Sampo, to beat out a lid of many  
 colors  
 from the tip of the shaft of a swan's feather, from the milk of a  
 farrow cow,  
 from a single barleycorn, from the fleece of one sheep,  
 then I will give you my girl, will put up the maiden as your  
 reward,  
 get you home to your own lands, to the songs of your own  
 bird,  
 to where you will hear your cuckoo, right to your own field.

Steadfast old Väinämöinen uttered a word, spoke thus:  
 "I have not the skills to forge a Sampo, to decorate a lid of  
 many colors.  
 Get me to my own lands; then I will dispatch craftsman  
 Ilmarinen  
 who will forge your Sampo, beat out a lid of many colors,  
 appease your maiden, satisfy your daughter.  
 He is the kind of craftsman, an exceedingly skilled smith  
 who forged the heavens, beat out the firmament.  
 No trace of a hammer is visible nor of where his tongs gripped  
 it."

(*Kalevala/Poem 7, 41: 32-41*)

Pentikäinen points out that there are two parallel versions of this story—in one, the forging of the Sampo is a part of the 'Courtship contest', whereas in the other, it is only related to Väinämöinen's leaving the Northland—and that Lönnrot's *Kalevala* unites them both, as the hero is able to leave Pohjola promising Louhi that he will get Ilmarinen to make the Sampo (Pentikäinen 1989, 34).

In *Poem 10*, Ilmarinen arrives in the Northland and is welcomed by the mistress, Louhi. Then, he begins the forging of the Sampo; when he is done, Louhi takes it into Pohjola's hill of rock. However, the hero cannot get the daughter's hand in payment for his



work as promised since the girl says she is not ready to leave home yet. Ilmarinen sails back home alone for the time being, but he goes back to the Northland in order to prove himself by completing the three dangerous tasks set for him by Louhi, two of which get him into contact with the realm of the dead. Even though he does not get to cross the river of Tuonela to the other side, he is given the tasks of catching the great pike of the river of Tuonela, and killing Death's bear and the wolf of the Abode of the Dead. The girl helps Ilmarinen in his quests as she also wants to be with him—she advises him to fashion a golden and a silver plough for the snake-infested field, bits of steel and iron for Death's bear and wolves; and finally a flaming griffin in order to catch the pike:

“O craftsman Ilmarinen, eternal smith,  
fashion a golden plough, decorate one of silver;  
with that you will plow the adder-infested field, turn over the  
snake ridden one.” (*Kalevala/Poem 19, 124: 48-51*)

“O craftsman Ilmarinen, eternal smith,  
make the bits out of steel, make the bridles of iron  
on a certain stone in the water, in the foaming waters of three  
rapids.  
With these you will get Death's bears, bridle the wolves of the  
Abode of the Dead. (*Kalevala/Poem 19, 125: 116-20*)

“O craftsman Ilmarinen, eternal smith,  
Forge a fiery eagle, a flaming griffin.  
With that you will get the big pike, the active fat fish  
from Death's dark river, from the lower parts of the Abode of  
the Dead.” (*Kalevala/Poem 19, 126: 173-76*)

Successfully accomplishing all these tasks, Ilmarinen wins the bride and the wedding preparations begin.

Lönnrot incorporated the wedding poems into the epical runes “in such a manner that the epic became largely a wedding play and a courtship drama” (Pentikäinen 1989, 46). In search of a wife, all three of the heroes journey to the Northland with hopes to impress the maiden and her mother, the mistress of the Northland, who sets them challenging tasks

before she can agree to let her daughter get married to any of the heroes. What should be emphasized here is that the 'happy end' for the heroes is always one step too far; for Väinämöinen in particular, whose attempts to get a bride are always fruitless.

Väinämöinen's bad fate begins when, in *Poem 3*, he is promised Joukahainen's sister, Aino, in exchange for saving Joukahainen from the swamp Väinämöinen had tramped him into in a chanting competition. It should be noted that being stuck in the swamp might stand for being sent to the Realm of the Dead. However, Aino finding out about this deal drowns herself rather than marry an aged suitor. Väinämöinen's unsuccessful tries continue throughout the poems with the wooing of the maiden of the Northland. A pattern strikes the eye: 'the jilted bridegroom':

a bride is offered – the bride refuses – she either kills herself or sets a task that cannot be completed – the hero goes home empty-handed

Ilmarinen return from the Northland without a bride in his first attempt too even though he completes the task set for him as the bride demurs. Therefore, the repeated pattern, where "the girl is unwilling or the hero cannot meet the requirements set by the girl" (Lord 1987, 318) leaving the hero frustrated, applies to Ilmarinen as well; although, not entirely as he is eventually successful in completing his new assignments that win him the bride. Lemminkäinen's courtship of the maiden of Pohjola, however, ends in a much bitter tragedy as he is killed trying to complete his last task.

Runes telling the exploits and craftsmanship of Ilmarinen reflect various aspects of Finland and Finnish culture, as well as, being significant to the storyline of the *Kalevala*. The wedding runes paint a cheerful picture of nature while his heroic adventures greatly add to the epic character of the poems. Moreover, the Sampo runes, where Ilmarinen plays a big, if

not the main, role as Pentikäinen also remarks, form the “epic heart of the *Kalevala*” (Pentikäinen 1989, 32).

Firstly, for instance, looking at the bride’s description of her homeland when she says farewell before leaving for the Kaleva District, where she will be living with her husband, the beauty of the surroundings is depicted. She is happy to be married to Ilmarinen, yet she still expresses her admiration towards the attractiveness of the landscape of her homeland. Finland’s renowned forests and lakes are illustrated along with the bride’s memories in a joyful, yet nostalgic, manner:

“I bid farewell to all: the fields and the forests with their  
berries,  
the sides of lanes with their flowers, the heaths with their  
heather,  
the lakes with their hundred islands, the deep sounds with  
their whitefish,  
the fair knolls with their firs, the wilderness swales with their  
birches.”

[...]

“Farewell, lake shores, lake shores, edges of fields,  
all the pines on the hill, tall trees in the pine groves,  
the stand of chokecherries back of the house, the juniper bushes  
on the way to the well,  
all the berrystalks on the ground, berrystalks, straws of hay,  
willow bushes, roots of the fir, leafy alder twigs, bark of the  
birch.”

(*Kalevala, Poem 24, 172: 442-53*)

The detailed account of nature and village surroundings can still be seen in the twenty-fifth poem, where the newly-weds are welcomed back to Ilmarinen’s farm in the Kaleva District. Ilmarinen’s mother Lokka, praises the environment, also explaining various luxuries awaiting there for the Pohjola bride. The village setting, the everyday life of a farming community and nature descriptions are evoked; as in Pohjola, children sing songs for the bride and groom, people are busy preparing a feast, and they are surrounded by meadows

and forests in a happy atmosphere. The festive spirit and harmony are not overshadowed by issues regarding the ownership of the Sampo:

“O lovely community, my favourite place in the land!  
Meadows down there, fields up there, the settlement in  
between.  
There is a lovely shore below the settlement, lovely water on  
the shore;  
it is fit for a mallard to swim in, for a waterfowl to move about  
in.”

Then the crowd was given drink, given drink, fed,  
with plenty of pieces of meat, fine cakes with pudding filling,  
barley beer, wheat wort.  
There was indeed plenty of roasted meat to eat, plenty to eat,  
plenty to drink  
in the red trenchers, in the fine troughs,  
pasties to break up, buttered bread to slice,  
whitefish to cut up, salmon to slice up  
with a silver knife, with a gold sheath knife.  
The beer flowed for nothing, mead not paid for in marks,  
beer from the end of the lintel, mead from inside wooden kegs,  
beer as a rinse for lips, mead as a diversion for minds.  
(*Kalevala/Poem 25, 179: 363-78*)

It can be observed that white-trunked birch trees and the evergreen (pines) are the most popular and abundant of plants since besides being able to survive in Finnish weather, they are economic and useful for society; and in the poems we come across them often in nature descriptions. Perhaps, the birch is the most often evoked trees in the poems as its usefulness for society is the greatest—as fuel and as material for various utensils: “the post of curly birch trees” (*Kalevala/Poem 21, 142: 154*), “in the hard roots of a birch” (*Kalevala/Poem 23, 163: 661*), “instruct her with a birch branch” (*Kalevala/Poem 24, 169: 226*). It is respected and appreciated by the community so much that it takes on a personified form in the poems as well. Väinämöinen finds a weeping birch as he wanders the fields, looking for his lost kantele and the birch speaks to him:

“Indeed some say, certain people think

that I am living in a state of joy, rejoicing in my happiness;  
 I, slender tree, am rejoicing in my anxieties, in my distress,  
 am crying out in my days of agony, complaining in my grief.  
 I, futile one, am bewailing my stupidity, am lamenting my  
 defects,  
 for I am unlucky, poor wretch, quite defenseless, miserable me,  
 in these wretched places, vast pasture lands.  
 Lucky ones, fortunate ones are always hoping  
 that the lovely summer will come, the delightful summer get  
 warm.  
 Differently indeed with stupid me; I, anguished one, am fearful  
 lest my bark be peeled off, my leafy branches pulled off.  
 Often in the quick-passing spring children come near  
 to luckless me, often to me, luckless wretch;  
 with five knives they slash through my sap-filled belly.  
 (*Kalevala/Poem 44, 296: 79-92*)

The third climax completing the epic cycle of events in the *Kalevala*, is the theft of the Sampo. *Poems 39 to 49*, tell the story of the people of Kaleva District trying to take possession of the Sampo and the events that follow, which includes Louhi's attempts of revenge and Ilmarinen's forging of a new moon and sun. It is possible to see the killing of Ilmarinen's wife by Kullervo, the son of Kalervo, as the beginning of the enmity between Pohjola and Kalevala, which eventually leads to the stealing of the Sampo. The events commence with Ilmarinen's second wooing journey to Northland, during which he realizes that the Sampo provides the people of Pohjola well; so, he and Väinämöinen decide to steal the mystical object. Lemminkäinen joins them too and they set out for the North. On the way, they stop to make the Kantele for Väinämöinen by killing the giant pike of the North Sea.

The battle for the Sampo is explained in *Poems 42 and 43*. At the end, both sides lose but the loss of Pohjola is greater, as they end up with the lid and handle of the destroyed Sampo that cannot save them from hunger and misery. The people of the Kaleva District on the other hand, were luckily left with the fragments that contain the seed of eternal happiness and the war is considered to be won:

She thrust the Sampo into the water,   dropped the whole lid of  
     many colors,  
 from the side of the red vessel   into the middle of the blue sea.  
 Then the Sampo broke into pieces,   the lid of many colors to  
     bits.

Thus those bits,   big pieces of the Sampo went  
 under the gentle waters   onto the black ooze;  
 they remained as a possession of the water,   as treasures for the  
     people of Ahto's realm.

Thus never, never at all,   not while the moon shines gold-bright,  
 will the water lack possessions,   Ahto of the water lack  
     treasures.

Other bits remained, to be sure,   rather small pieces  
 on the surface of the blue sea,   on the billows of the wide sea,  
 for the wind to rock,   the waves to drive about.

These the winds rocked,   the billows of the sea sent billowing  
 along the surface of the blue sea,   on the waves of the wide seas  
 The wind thrust them toward land,   the waves drove them  
     ashore.

Steadfast old Väinämöinen   saw the surf thrusting them,  
 the swell casting them onto the land,   a wave driving them to  
     the shore,

those bits of the Sampo,   pieces of the lid of many colors toward  
     shore.

He rejoiced greatly at that,   uttered a word, spoke thus:  
 "From that is the germ of a seed,   the beginning of good fortune  
     for all time,  
 from that a plowing, from that a sowing,   from that all sorts of  
     crops.

From that the moon will get to gleaming palely,   the sun of  
     good fortune to shining  
 on the great farms of Finland,   in Finland's lovely districts."  
 (*Kalevala/Poem 42, 291-92: 262-85*)

Many allegorical interpretations have been suggested in relation to the Sampo runes, such as the Romantic approach of Grimm who states that it is possible to see the conflict between the people of Kaleva and Pohjola as a struggle between the gods over the possession of the 'Holy Grail', providing historical grounds for the ancient mythical battle, in the epics (Pentikäinen 1989, 23). On the other hand, Ervast points to the divine evolutionary forces which attempt to cultivate the human soul. He claims that Väinämöinen stands for will and wisdom, Ilmarinen intelligence, and Lemminkäinen feeling, while the Sampo is the "secret

wisdom which mankind's original sages brought with them from elsewhere" (Ervast 1968, 133). Kuusi argues that the Sampo might be seen as a sacred fertility object, such as a guardian of the harvest (Kuusi 1963, 223). In fact, Lönnrot, himself, also proposed an interpretation—albeit, a rather abstract one—for the Sampo, saying it can be seen as a metaphor for 'human civilization and culture'; which brings to mind the national identity battle being fought by Finland at the time and the emerging Finnish culture (Kaukonen 1983, 88-91).

### **The *Kalevala* as a Shamanic Performance**

Before the rise of monotheism Shamanism was quite wide-spread in Europe, including Finland. According to Lönnrot "mankind originally had knowledge of one god, but this knowledge had been lost by numerous peoples, including the ancient Finns" (Pentikäinen 1989, 160). Therefore, Lönnrot comes to the conclusion that the religion of ancient Finns was polytheistic; and later, acquiring their lost knowledge, they became monotheistic.

Siikala states that the roots of Finnish shamanism represent the oldest layer of religious imagery that existed in Subarctic culture in which water ways occupied a crucial role. Shamanism survived in Finland for so long due to the isolation of Finns from any possible external religious influence. According to Collinder, old genuine Scandinavian traditions are more likely to be found in Finland and Lappland, as language barriers have slowed down the flow of western European ideas and folk customs (Collinder 1964, 92).

*Shamanism and the Sublime* defines a shaman in 'primitive' societies as:

a seer, who flies to the sky and bores down through the earth, to meet all manner of gods, spirits, demons, and forces. He or she learns the fundamental realities of the world, of his or her

community, and of his or her self. He or she can try, if motivated by goodwill, to procure the best fortunes for his/her community, by negotiating with the spirits of animals and plants for successful hunts and harvests. He can discern the sources of his fellows' ills, and seek to fight off their evil forces. (Cloudsley 2000, 11)

Bonser explains that "many of the spells have been collected by Lönnrot in the *Loitsu-runoja*,<sup>105</sup> but the *Kalevala* itself, though composed in Christian times, is the greatest written monument of Shamanism" (Bonser 1917, 116). In fact, Oinas classifies the *Kalevala* as a shamanistic epic where great deeds are achieved by magical means, such as incantations and power of words, instead of battles; a custom which is a part of the arctic culture extending from Lapland to eastern Siberia and to Greenland in the West (Oinas 1985, 41). In his/her tribe, a shaman is a sage. Comparetti stresses the distinction of shamanism from other religions of the world by pointing out that according to shamanic belief "the idea of the divine being may be said to be almost subordinate to that of the shaman, who in fact more than any one else defines, develops, elaborates and forms it" (Comparetti 1898, 173).

Among shamanistic rites, one might find healing, using sorcery and being able to gain contact with the netherworld. The Finnish shaman is supposed to derive his power from the Creator, who is believed to be the oldest and the greatest of magicians:

Water is the oldest of ointments,      foam of a rapids oldest of  
magic nostrums,  
the Creator himself the oldest of magicians,      God the oldest of  
healers. (*Kalevala/Poem 3, 17: 198-99*)

In Appendix II of Magoun's edition of the *Kalevala*, a definition of 'Creator' is also provided:

Creator (Luoja), God, sometimes used of the Biblical deity and thus the equivalent of God (Jumala). (*Kalevala/Glossary of Proper Names, 387-88*)

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<sup>105</sup> *Loitsu-runoja* can be translated as 'magic songs'.



With the help of the Creator, a shaman accomplishes miracles by reciting spells as well as sending prayers to the supreme god, Ukko—the ideal shaman is accepted to initially be a priest, a medicine-man and prophet; this also characterizes one of the main heroes of the *Kalevala*, Väinämöinen (Bonser 1924, 58). As a shaman, Väinämöinen supposedly has spirits that come to his help when needed and when he gets in contact with them. The most successful shamans would be the ones having the greatest knowledge of the cultural heritage of their society.

Ancient Finns believed that every animal, flower, lake, tree, forest and any other living being had a spirit, sometimes called *haltia*, which is an early loan-word from Scandinavia, meaning “governor, ruler” (Abercromby 1898, 272). In order to get in touch with a *haltia* the shaman has to be in trance or ecstasy and thus accept one or more spirits as protectors or servants, by which he communicates with the spirit world.<sup>106</sup> It was necessary to perform a séance for such a contact with the world of the spirits to take place. This magic performance includes singing and beating his drum for many hours until completely exhausted, so that he falls asleep for several hours. During this performance the narration or the myth recited becomes part of the cure for illness, the destruction or the restoration of the world order (Kuzmina 1986, 4). While asleep, his soul was thought to be absent, travelling to different places (Collinder 1964, 100).

The best example of a shamanic healing journey is seen in the episode of Väinämöinen’s knee wound. When Väinämöinen begins building a boat in *Poem 8*, he cuts his knee badly with his axe and cannot stanch the blood flow. He goes in search of a sage who knows how to heal such a wound, eventually finding an old man who uses ointments

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<sup>106</sup> The technical word for this is ‘*olla haltioissansa*’, which can be translated as “to be in the spirit or among spirits” (Abercromby 1898, 272-73).

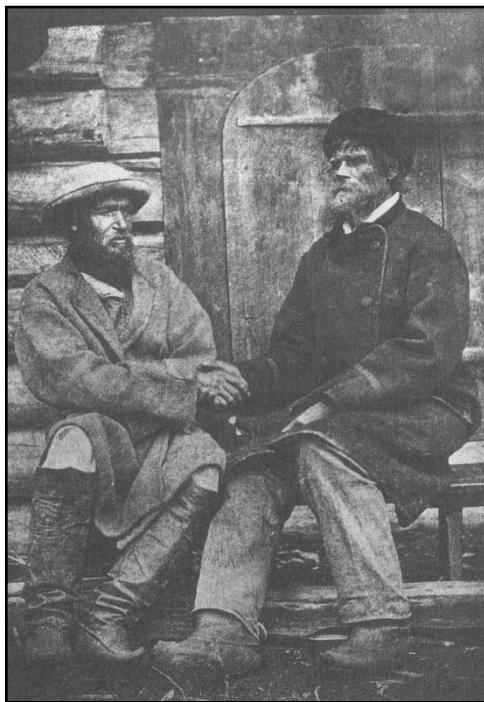
and binds the wound. His search reminds one of a shamanistic wandering, similar to his search for three magic words to complete the construction of his boat, dealt with earlier in the chapter—he goes from door to door looking for a healer with high speed:

He indeed becomes anguished, gets more distressed.  
 Steadfast old Väinämöinen burst into tears.  
 He put the colt into harness, the brown one in front of the  
 harness;  
 then he flings himself into the sled, settles down in his basket  
 sleigh.  
 He struck the spirited steed with the whip, made a ringing  
 sound with the beaded lash.  
 The spirited steed ran, the journey was coming to an end, the  
 sled went on the way grew short.  
 Now soon there comes a settlement; three roads meet.

Steadfast old Väinämöinen drives along the lowest road  
 to the lowest-lying house. Over the threshold he asks:  
 “Would there be in this house a healer of a wound inflicted by  
 iron,  
 an expert in the matter of a man’s anguish, a mitigator of  
 injuries?” (*Kalevala/Poem 8, 45-6: 209-27*)

It is interesting to see that when a shamanistic wandering is in question—whether it is a healing journey, a shamanistic hunt or a chanting competition—the heroes seem to travel with a sledge. Väinämöinen’s healing journey, Lemminkäinen’s hunt of the elk and similarly, in the episode of the singing competition between Väinämöinen and Joukahainen, both of the heroes are riding on a sledge. Siikala suggests that the expression ‘sledge driving’ denotes shamanism among many Siberian people (Siikala 1986, 225). Pentikäinen, on the other hand, claims that the road on which the two shamans meet might denote the Milky Way as their chants touch the matters of the creation of the cosmos (Pentikäinen 1989, 191). Shamanic singing contests, where the origin of the world features, are observed in Scandinavian epics too. Odin, the supreme deity, for instance, goes to Jotunheim to see the ancient giant, Vafthrúnir in an attempt to find out whether he is omniscient or not. A

shamanic performance to see a giant is also completed by Väinämöinen, when he descends into Tuonela to see Antero Vipunen (*Poem 17*).



**Fig. 6.** Rune singers Jyrki and Ohvo Malinen—Photo by A. Berner (1872); the oldest photograph showing a rune singing performance. The position of the singers is in accordance with the classic description given by Porthan in 1778. (Siikala 1994, 36)

A vital part of a shaman's performance is his dress—as also mentioned above in the section on Lemminkäinen, a bear costume was worn when a journey to Tuonela (Realm of the Dead) was undertaken whereas that of a wild reindeer was necessary for travelling to Päivölä (Realm of the Sun). This would enable the shaman to embody the shape of the animal with all its characteristics. Fish, bird and snake forms were also assumed whenever suitable for the shaman. Holmberg remarks that these animals were “soul-animals, in the shape of which the shaman's soul moved during its separation from the body. Like a reindeer-bull it hurried over the land, like a bird it flew through the air, like a fish it swam through water, and like a snake it wriggled into the earth” (Holmberg 1927, 285). An example of a shaman assuming the shape of a bird is seen when Louhi transforms herself

into a giant bird in order to attack the heroes of the Kaleva District on their way back home after stealing the Sampo. Her transformation is graphically described in *Poem 43*:

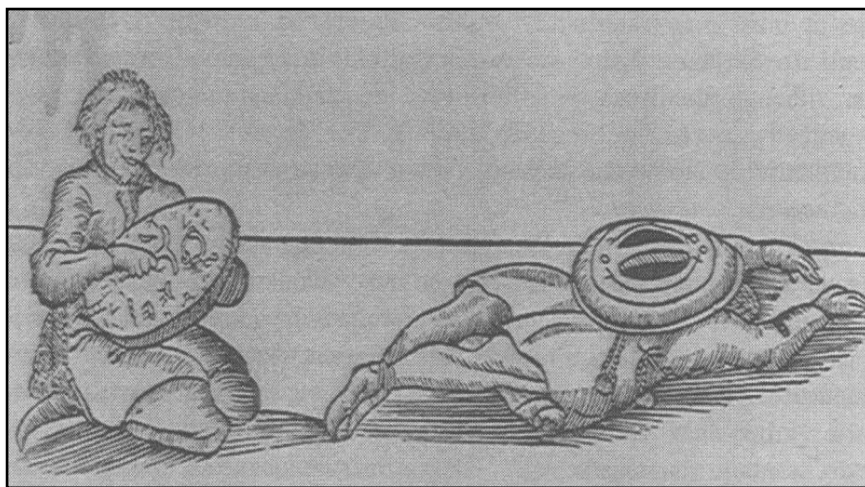
She ponders, reflects: “What comes by way of counsel?  
What does anyone propose?” Now indeed she changed herself  
into something else,  
dared to try to become something different. She took five  
scythes,  
the remains of six battered grub hoes; these indeed she made  
into talons,  
that she put beneath her; the planking she knocked into wings,  
the steering oar into a tail for herself; a hundred men are under  
her wings,  
a thousand under the tip of her tail, a hundred swordsmen, a  
thousand bowmen.  
She spreads her wings to fly, raises herself aloft like an eagle.  
(*Kalevala/Poem 43*, 290: 129-40)

The drum plays a fundamental role during a shaman’s performance; and thus, journey (or trance state) not only because it is a part of his/her musical performance but also due to the drawings on it which are believed to be effective on the shaman’s travels—it can act as a cosmogenic map. It is made of fir, pine, or beech wood with skin stretched across, that had painted red figures on it. Two runic hammers, made from the horns of reindeer, were used to strike it (Bonser 1924, 60). At the centre of the drum are the four points of the compass, with human and animal figures drawn on them. It also shows a universe of three levels, a theory central to shamanistic belief. These levels are joined together by the Tree of Life or the Cosmic River.<sup>107</sup> Celestial deities and heavenly beings are found on the top level whereas various human-like and animal-like creatures dwell in the bottom under the ground. The middle is occupied by humans and animals we encounter in everyday life. The shaman can interact with these worlds using his/her spiritual powers. During his ecstasy state, the drum sometimes becomes the animal the shaman is travelling on. Holmberg explains that “in his

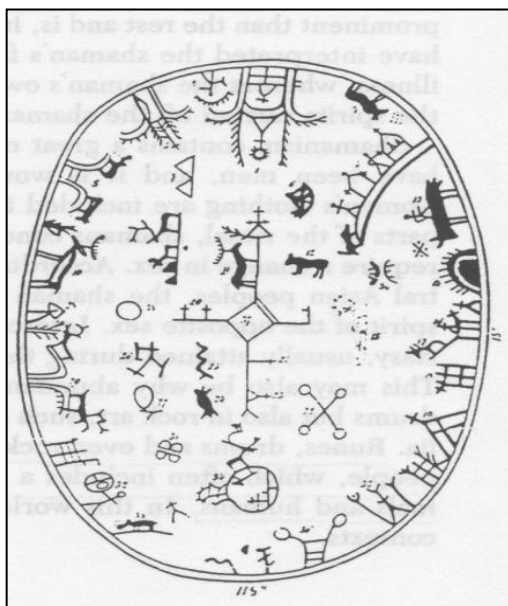
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<sup>107</sup> Similarity to the Norse ‘World Tree’ strikes the eye.

songs the shaman often calls his drum some animal, on which he says he is travelling. Some call it their 'horse' or their 'deer', some their 'loom' or their 'eagle' (Holmberg 1927, 519-20).



**Fig. 7.** Schefferus's depiction of a sage in trance (1673). On the left, the sage is drumming and singing whereas the sage on the right is already in a trance. The surface of the drum which is the cognitive map of both the shaman and the community can be seen on the left. (Pentikäinen 1989, 183)



**Fig. 8.** An example of a shaman's drum. It represents the belief in the three-level world, and the elements of which it composed. (Pentikäinen 1989, 195 [Finnish Museum of Applied Arts, 1985])

Shamanism embraces the cyclical world view and this is effectively represented by the shaman's drum. It is obvious that the drum could be read from different directions and angles, usually depending on the season of the year. Various gods, humans and animals can be focused on from different directions, which can signal distinct shamanic journeys. The elk, for instance, which takes Lemminkäinen on a shamanic celestial journey, seems to be pointing toward the heavens. An interpretation of this world view becomes obvious by looking at the shaman's tools—travelling and shape-changing (with a return to original place or form), destruction and renewal, and last but not least, the transfer of information and energy. In this framework, Väinämöinen's is said to depart with hopes of coming back one day when he is needed again. This open end, emphasizing the possibility of his return, acts as a characteristic of shamanic understanding; so does the fact that he is presented as returning from where he came from, where he was born—the sea:

Then Old Väinämöinen sets out quickly  
 in the copper boat, in the flat-bottomed copper craft  
 toward the upper reaches of the world, to the lower reaches  
 of the heavens.  
 There he stopped with his vessel, out of weariness stopped  
 with his boat.  
 He left the harp behind, the fine instrument for Finland,  
 The eternal source of joyous music for the people, the great  
 songs for his children. (*Kalevala/Poem 50, 336-37: 502-08*)

## Conclusions

In summary, the *Kalevala* recites the story of three national heroes of Finland, who live in Kaleva or Suomi in the south, and of their adventures that take them to the land of darkness and forests in the north, called Pohjola. These three heroes—Väinämöinen, Lemminkäinen and Ilmarinen—use their magical powers against the magic of Louhi, the 'mistress' of

Pohjola, beside other purposes. All three are presented as shamans, who are considered demigods that delivered great services to their society in the Finnish epic. There are two main patterns of story in the *Kalevala*: competing for a bride and the forging and stealing of the Sampo, the Finnish equivalent of the Holy Grail. These patterns are illustrated in various episodes, such as the creation of the Sampo and shamanic journeys of the heroes; which take them to the Realm of the dead (*Tuonela*) or to the Upper Realm (*Päivölä*). The examination of Väinämöinen's shamanic journey to Tuonela has made it possible to provide insights into the essence of shamanism and the depiction of Otherworld in the *Kalevala* also showing his significant role for ancient Finns. While Lemminkäinen's elk hunt is a unique representation of a shamanic wandering to the mythical realm of the sun, Ilmarinen's forging of the mythical Sampo illustrates the significance of transformation in ancient Finnish culture.

The *Kalevala* portrays the religion of the ancient Finns as a transition state between nature worship and medieval Christianity, which was introduced to the west of Finland by the Swedes and to the eastern Finland by the Russians in the twelfth century. Christianity influenced the society extensively and brought fundamental changes to the customs concerning the worship of the dead. The Swedes brought Catholicism whereas the Russians brought the Russian Orthodox religion. However, during the reformation in the sixteenth century, Catholicism was replaced by the protestant Lutheran religion in almost all of Finland, except the very east of Finland and of course in Russian Karelia, where the Russian Orthodox religion continued. This was, indeed, very significant for the survival of the ancient oral poetry as in western Finland the Lutheran clergy forbade the ancient tradition as unchristian and pagan, and the tradition was gradually lost, whereas it survived in the east

of Finland and in Russian Karelia, because the orthodox clergy were more likely to be relaxed about it and did not stamp it out.<sup>108</sup>

The examination of the supernatural world of the *Kalevala* maintains that there are various concepts of life after death embraced by the Finnish folk belief which complicates the tradition and which caused confusion even for the tradition bearers: “During her performance, a lamenter might inquire as to the location and direction of the underworld” (Pentikäinen 1989, 202). Shamanism, which is a belief in sorcery, having magic, spells and incantations as its essence, was the religion dominant in Finland preceding Christianity. One of the most impressive abilities of a shaman is doubtless his ability to ‘travel’ to the otherworld which constitutes an important part of not only the story-line of the *Kalevala* but also Finnish folk belief. This is why when dealing with the supernatural in the Kalevalaic context, one is inclined to look at shamanism and magic, as it is a shaman who holds the key to the Otherworld and performs superhuman deeds.

As the name implies, ‘Otherworld’ refers to the world of the other: the realm of supernatural beings, including spirits, gods, and not necessarily, only of the dead. The concept of Otherworld—whether it exists or not, and what lies beyond—has assumed universal appeal and this mystery has been a significant subject matter of many myths, epics and tales, most of which are still told even today. Norse, Celtic and Greek mythologies, beside others, point to the possibility of material existence after the death of the mortal body of a person. For instance, the epic world of the *Poetic Edda* tells the story of Odin who travels to Hel<sup>109</sup> on his horse, Sleipnir:

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<sup>108</sup> A chronology of Finnish History can be found in ‘Appendix B’ of Pentikäinen’s *Kalevala Mythology* (1989): 230-32.

<sup>109</sup> It should be noted that, in this chapter, the words ‘otherworld, underworld, Hel and Elysium’ refer to the same place which is postulated to be the realm of the dead. Also, it is important to realize that not all the dead go to hell.



Up rose Odin, the sacrifice for men,  
 and on Sleipnir he laid a saddle;  
 down he rode to Mist-hell,  
 there he met a dog coming from hell. (Larrington 1996, 243: 2/  
*Baldr's Dreams*)<sup>110</sup>

It is possible to see different descriptions of the otherworld;<sup>111</sup> yet, certain parallels are found between them, such as the presence of a river separating the two worlds. The dead cross a river to reach the gates of the Underworld and show themselves to the king Hades and the queen Persephone. In the *Odyssey*, Hades, where the dead are judged and the wicked sentenced for eternal torment, is said to be located at the end of the earth across the river, Okeanos:

‘So she reached the furthest parts of the deep-flowing River of Ocean where the Cimmerians live, wrapped in mist and fog. The bright Sun cannot look down on them with his rays, either when he climbs the starry heavens or when he turns back from heaven to earth again. Dreadful Night spreads her mantle over that unhappy people. (*Odyssey/Book 11*, 141: 10-19)

Similarly, *Kalevala's* Tuonela is surrounded by the death-stream and is ruled by the god of the dead, Tuoni. The word, *tuoni* simply means ‘death’; nevertheless, Collinder suggests that it might also stand for a corpse and that there might not exist a ruler of the Underworld at all like the Hades of the Greeks (Collinder 1964, 97). *Tuonela* on the other hand, is synonymous with *Tuonen tuvat* meaning the ‘log-houses of Tuoni’—it is assumed that the ancient Finns thought they would need a log-house even in the realm of the dead in order to be protected from the cold unlike the Greeks (Collinder 1964, 97). They imagined that life in the Underworld would be similar to the one on earth: one needed food and drink and would

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<sup>110</sup> Similarly, in the sixth book of *Aeneid*, Virgil discusses the destiny of the soul, when Aeneas visits the Underworld which is described as a place of rebirth for the dead whose lifetime deeds are judged and the souls are cleansed to wander happily in Elysium, the realm of blessed dead: see *The Aeneid: Book VI*, 184-85: 714-47.

<sup>111</sup> Unlike Virgil's, Hades in Homer's *Iliad* is a wretched place that lies under the earth guarded by the multi-headed hound, Cerberus.

work as one did on earth, living in similar dwellings (Turunen 1981, 346). Death was interpreted as a transfer to a new ‘residence’, for man was believed to be a part of nature, to which he returned after the journey of life. They believed that the boundary between life and death was very thin since the kin was seen as providing a unity among the dead and living members of their society (Pentikäinen 1989, 200-01). Dangerous creatures such as the Great Pike of the Death Stream, the Swan of Tuonela, The Wolf of Manala,<sup>112</sup> the Fire-breathing Gelding, the Vipers of the field, the Bear of Tuonela and the Demon’s elk dwell in the realm of the dead as well (all note-worthy creatures due to their significant roles in the challenges set by Louhi that take the heroes on shamanic hunts and journeys).

According to the *Kalevala*, the departed are taken across the river by a boat sailed by Tuoni’s daughter. No living soul is admitted to the Otherworld and if they enter Death’s Domain it is almost impossible to get back to the land of the living—only the souls of the most talented shamans had the ability to escape from the Realm of the Dead during their shamanic journeys. Tuoni’s daughter warns Väinämöinen before he gets on her boat in the sixteenth poem:

“O fool, your folly! Man, your lack of sense!  
 You come without cause to Death’s Domain, without disease to  
 the cottages of the Abode of the Dead.  
 It would be better for you to return to your own lands:  
 many have come here, not many returned.”  
 (*Kalevala/Poem 16, 100: 260-66*)

*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions* defines ‘underworld’ as a domain in which the dead are (or were) believed to have continued existence.

Whereas it was once thought that all the dead ended up in the same place somewhere beneath the earth, it was later believed that the evil were separated from the good, and that only the evil were in the underworld, which then became a place of

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<sup>112</sup> Synonymous with *Tuonela*.

punishment. In this way hell developed from the underworld."  
 ("underworld")<sup>113</sup>

Several different beliefs derived from the idea of a next life, such as burying the dead with earthly possessions or making human and animal sacrifices as in a Viking ship burial. Collinder states that ancient Finns shared the idea that a dead person still had the right to his possessions and that some clothing, tools and other necessities should be supplied in the grave as he lived a 'reduced life' there until all the body mouldered (Collinder 1964, 96). Besides, according to *A Dictionary of Celtic Mythology* "classical commentators agree that druids taught the soul's immortality as well as its transmigration or metempsychosis" ("Otherworld"). However, probably the most ancient concept common to the Finno-Ugric people is the belief suggesting that the soul stays in the graveyard near the body, which also supports the idea of graveyard as the village of the dead as well as the burial of the body with earthly possessions. Therefore, the depiction of Tuonela seems to be heavily influenced by ancient Finnish belief and folk tradition which seem to employ commonalities with representations of Otherworld in other cultures.

This is true of Kalevalaic poetry in general as "each song and incantation has its own history. In terms of content, certain Kalevalaic songs appear rooted in ancient Finnish mythology and Viking Age history": for instance, songs about the creation of the world from an egg and shamanic adventures of heroes have counterparts in both Eurasian mythology and Viking age sagas from Iceland. While the song of Väinämöinen's knee wound is a reflection of a shaman's search for healing words in folk tradition, the theft of the Sampo "preserves memories of internecine strife and raid" (DuBois and Virtanen 2000, 128). In this

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<sup>113</sup> Both 'underworld' and 'otherworld' refer to Tuonela in this study. It is worth noting that the description of the Otherworld in the *Kalevala* is not necessarily depicted as being under the ground. So, in this context, it can be argued that the term, Otherworld would be more suitable.

context, the supernatural world of the *Kalevala* reveals folkloristic images which seem to be vital to the presentation of Finland both nationally and internationally: these images became distinctive domestic symbols and contributed greatly to Finnish national awakening and the international recognition of Finland as a nation.



## Chapter 7: Conclusion

Myths are public dreams, dreams are private myths.  
Joseph Campbell

Myths are reflective of a society's world view which involves its basic values and the most fundamental aspects of cultural consciousness. They reflect that society's empirical judgments and crucially, its past modes of thinking. Therefore, mythical tradition, which can be seen as a symbolic universe, is created by the collective mentality of a society—in accordance with Berger and Luckmann's theory:

The symbolic universe also orders history. It locates all collective events in a cohesive unity that includes past, present and future. With regards to the past, it establishes a "memory" that is shared by all the individuals socialized within the collectivity. With regards to the future, it establishes a common frame of reference for the projection of individual actions. Thus, the symbolic universe links men with their predecessors and their successors in a meaningful totality, serving to transcend the finitude of individual's existence and bestowing meaning upon the individual's death. (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 103)

It can be concluded that the symbolic universe is inherently conservative and specific to a culture; thus, the symbolic universe, both stereotyped and chaotic, is the most tenacious form of mental representation. Humans, as the creators of society are themselves a social product, and by internalizing the structure created they assign personal meaning to it making this social structure a part of their consciousness. In this framework, mythical traditions, their imagery, motifs, symbols and concepts found in Ossianic and Kalevalaic epics depict the shaping and the structure of cultural and social phenomena. Therefore, *The Poems of Ossian* and the *Kalevala* can be treated as variants of myths through which the underlying messages of ancient folk material are transmitted.

It has been the aim of this research to investigate the role of mythic tradition in the establishment of mythic worlds in newly created epics. It has also attempted to illustrate the representation of mythic tradition in the symbolic universe where the legitimation of ideas and beliefs can take place. On this level of legitimation, the creation, control and distribution of ideas which define social affairs as well as the different beliefs within these affairs reach their ultimate fulfilment, thus creating a whole world. After this process of objectivation and accumulation of knowledge, the symbolic universe can acquire its shape as “symbolic universes are social products with a history. If one is to understand their meaning, one has to understand the history of their production. This is all the more important because these products of human consciousness, by their very nature, present themselves as full-blown and inevitable totalities” (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 97).

The investigation has been carried out in light of Macpherson’s *Ossian* and Lönnrot’s *Kalevala*, both of which seem to employ conceptual machineries that maintain symbolic universes.<sup>114</sup> The analysis and comparison of these two texts has proven to be a fruitful approach enabling the portrayal of the roles of mythic heritage on national awakening and revival since both texts may be closely associated with social reformation and restructuring. After the general introduction in Chapter 1, looking at Macpherson’s *Ossian* in the context of Finland in chapter 2 has made it possible to observe its highly likely influence on Lönnrot’s *Kalevala* and his personal nationalist stance. Analogies between the two texts have further reinforced this observation. Having noted the significant themes, motifs and symbols in *Ossian* and the *Kalevala*, an investigation into the connections between Macpherson’s Ossianic writings and popular beliefs and conventions of Gaelic-Scottish tradition has been

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<sup>114</sup> “It is important to stress that the conceptual machineries of universe-maintenance are themselves products of social activity, as are all forms of legitimation, and can only rarely be understood apart from the other activities of the collectivity in question” (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 108).

presented in Chapter 3. While Chapter 4 elucidated the representation of the 'otherworld' and the supernatural in *Ossian*, Chapter 5 has provided insights into the portrayal of Scandinavia and its significance in Ossianic poetry in addition to attempting to shed light on Macpherson's knowledge and sources on Scandinavian traditions. Finally, Chapter 6 has focused solely on the *Kalevala* analyzing its epic nature and its illustration of Finnish folk belief and shamanistic rituals. Examinations of tradition and cultural heritage in Gaelic-Scottish and Finnish contexts have been carried out in hopes of revealing the meaning of the synthesized symbolic universes and understanding the histories of their productions.

The study has shown that elements of belief and tradition may dominate in a mythical world and may persist despite any possible opposition through various cultural eras. Although the existence of such elements may be universal to all mythical worlds, what they are, how they are presented and what they mean is culture-specific. Moreover, the research has also demonstrated that the meanings of these elements reflective of culture, tradition and belief, may not necessarily have remained the same: the motifs and the imagery may have been looked at in a new light, re-interpreted and re-fashioned on terms of and in order to suit the purposes of new cultural frames. To put it in Siikala's words:

Mythic images, concepts and motifs derived from different epochs constitute loosely structured networks open to constant reinterpretation. [...] It would appear that the mental models guiding observations do not become "long-term prisons" until they have been established in a process of a constant re-interpretation as a subconscious cultural legacy or have acquired the status of a ritually revered tradition. ("What Myths Tell" Siikala 2002, 29)

Siikala explains that mythology can be seen as a 'long-term prison' in the sense that it can endure the most radical historical changes and continuously carry the past into present ("What Myths Tell" Siikala 2002, 16). However, it should be emphasized that the



reinterpretation of myths and their continuous transformation occur in the framework of each separate culture and social context (Vernant 1992, 279).

In this perspective, it becomes possible to see Macpherson's *Ossian* as a re-fashioning of Gaelic oral tradition and a reinterpretation of pre-existing mythological world views within the confines of the eighteenth century literary taste—which, in a nutshell, involved an increasing interest in sentiment and sensibility along with the pressure of the need for aesthetic refinement. As already established, *Ossian* is representative of a society which was in a transition period from traditional to modern and thus it displays the society's transforming mentality—it both celebrates and mourns for a passing culture and dramatizes the consequences of this transformation. *Ossian* remains haunted by the past memorializing the defeat of his heroic race against time while his poetry dramatizes the cost and outcome of the world view which animates it: "in common with all romances, the poems interrogate and qualify those things they would otherwise advocate" (Moore 2003, 163-64). The mythic world of Ossianic poems can be viewed as a response to myths of past greatness while their defeatism is symbolic of both the power of these myths and the decrease in their viability towards the end of the eighteenth century.

Depending on one's perspective the treatment of Macpherson and *Ossian* may be two-fold: Macpherson can be seen as the manipulator of Gaelic tradition who exploited his sources and misrepresented this tradition or he can be regarded as the defender of a culture on the verge of extinction who simply created another variant of a myth of the Celt. However, regardless of one's position on this, *Ossian* remains reflective of the mentality and the changing mode of thought of the society which makes it the myth of a culture: it is a representation of the eighteenth-century Scotland which was divided between a Scottish past and an Anglo-British future.

Despite its emphasis on defeat, failure, melancholy and loss *Ossian* is not entirely a portrayal of the end of a tradition, but rather a foundation for the early stages of a new historical movement. As Moore observes Macpherson writes about an ‘inherited defeat’: “a living and sustaining idiom and culture of the defeated, one which had offered an active and vibrant mode of expression for resistance to the current *status quo*, is giving way to an ossified, stultifying and generally self-destructive adherence to a world of the past” (Moore 1998, 184). In his writings—poetical and otherwise—Macpherson is constantly interested in history; he focuses more on the past than the present, thus holding light to pre-existing cultural world views, and his Ossianic texts celebrate Scotland’s ancient past. Although he champions Scottishness and stresses the value of liberty he does not aim this at undermining Britishness and the Union with England. Instead, with his preservation and rediscovery attempts of a national epic, he tries to reserve a respectable place for Scottish identity in newly-united Britain and the new British identity. He provides the image of a glorified Scottish past; but one, which should no longer be seen as a threat to British culture and thus one which should not be feared. In this perspective, the defeatism in *Ossian* can also be seen as a tool for cultural reinvention—giving Scottish culture the chance to rise from its ashes. In Crawford’s words: “Ossian helped Scotland to reinvent itself, and so functioned as an imaginative crucible, a reminder that national identity (like poetry) is dynamic and metaphoric rather than essentially unchanging” (Crawford 2001, 45).

The preoccupations and the predilection that prompted *Ossian*’s production seem to have Romantic tendencies which were to inspire Lönnrot’s *Kalevala* where they were transformed into a basis for a successful national epic. The *Kalevala*, whose status as a national epic is not questioned and widely accepted, strikes us as having a much more hopeful view of the society’s evolving mode of thinking: it openly looks forward to the

coming social and cultural changes. This is because the foundation for its production was laid out by the already emerging Finnish nationalism and the Finnish population who were seeking a basis for their feelings of national identity. In other words, it was aimed at supporting the ideas of transformation unlike *Ossian* which represented inevitable change which to Macpherson-Ossian meant the loss and/or adaptation of a culture.

Lönnrot writes at a time when a dead (or suppressed) tradition has already begun to resurface whereas Macpherson writes when a living tradition is starting to dissipate. Therefore, the *Kalevala* is not only reflective of Finnish tradition and belief but also of how the society came to treat these notions in such a way that they became a tool for reformation: it “provided the impetus for the rise of Finnish identity, the Finnish language, culture, arts, scholarship and national feelings” (Pentikäinen 1989, 221). The myths in the poems may be Lönnrot’s variants but the basic structure of mythic tradition (the symbolic universe) persists and “the messages of the archaic myths reach us through both the *Kalevala* and folk poems” (Honko 1987, 289).

Simpson acknowledges that for Macpherson traditions are not only to be deferred to; instead, they should be adapted and redeployed to meet the expressive needs of the individual mind (Simpson 2009, 117). This perspective seems to be the driving force behind Lönnrot’s achievements too: joining and adapting the folk songs and fragments he collected in hopes of giving the Finnish community what they needed—an illustration of their common origin. Lönnrot who was left in no dispute, promoted Finnish values and culture when he realized the rising Finnish national awareness. Macpherson’s writing however, is reflective of the conflict he found himself in and the confusion of the mid-eighteenth-century Britain can be felt in his Ossianic writings where past and present, Scottishness and

Britishness, Highland and Lowland, Celtic and Anglo-Saxon constantly remain in opposition.

Macpherson and Lönnrot feared cultural fragmentation and loss of cultural wholeness. They attempted to express this in their creative confections which essentially combine pieces (or fragments) of ancient tradition. In such cases, as Crawford observes “the fragment as a remnant of the earlier civilization is an emblem both of destruction and continuity. To assemble fragments may be a way of salvaging something of creative worth in the midst of fragmentation, of making a healing gesture to a snapped culture” (Crawford 2001, 67). In this framework, as adaptations of ‘folk fragments’ *Ossian* and the *Kalevala* are also significant sources of cultural history especially where written history was lacking. More importantly, as ‘fragmented collections’ *Ossian* and the *Kalevala* represent the constant possibility of cultural renewal and social building; they point towards invention and reinvention.



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## Appendix A

Below Macpherson's references to the *Edda* in the extended 1773 edition of his *Introduction to the History of Great Britain and Ireland* are given along with his sources:

<b>Macpherson 1773</b> p. 343	Odinus supremus et antiquissimus Asarum (deorum). Edda Island. Mythol. Xviii.
<b>Source:</b> Bartholin 1689, 648	

<b>Macpherson 1773</b> p. 355	<p>Credebatur antiquitus homines iterum nasci, illud vero nunc pro anili errore habetur. Edda Antiqua in <i>Oda quæ Helgaquida Hundings bana aunnur</i> inscribitur.</p> <p>Status animarum duplex; alius ante CREPUSCULUM DEORUM, alius post illud. <i>Edda Antiqua</i>.</p>
<b>Source:</b> Keyssler 1720, 117, 118	

<b>Macpherson 1773</b> p. 356	<p>Valhalla, quasi FALLHALL, aula coesorum. Edda Island.</p> <p>Sufficere illis queat lardum apri, qui Scrimner vocatur. Is quotidie elixatur, sed vespere integer remanet. Edda Island. Mythol. xxxiii.</p> <p>Solus Odinus vinum bibebat. Edda Mythol. xxxiv.</p> <p>Nihil autem comedebat duobus adstantibus lupis. Id, ibid.</p>
<b>Source:</b> Respectively, Keyssler 1720, 127; Bartholin 1689, 560; Bartholin 1689, 535; Keyssler 1720, 149	

<b>Macpherson 1773</b> p. 356	Vinum solus Odinus bibit in Valhalla
<b>Source:</b> Keyssler 1720, 579 [index]	

<b>Macpherson 1773</b> p. 357	<p>Geit, su er HEIDRUN heiter, stendr uppi a VALHOLL ok bitr barr aflimum tres thess er miog ei nafn freagt er LERADR heiter. Edda Mythol. I.</p> <p>Nomen illis erat VALKYRIARUM, quod Stragium electrices notat. Hæ virgins potum porigebant Mono-heroibus. Id. xxxi.</p> <p>Recreatio Mono-heroum hæc est [...] mutiis sternentur cædibus. Hic illorum ludus. Id. xxxv.</p> <p>Gol um asom, &amp;c. Cecinit circa Asas Aurea crista insignis; Ille viros excitat ad arma, Apud exercituum patrem, Odinum.</p>
<b>Source:</b> Respectively, Keyssler 1720, 150; Keyssler 1720, 152; Keyssler 1720, 162; Keyssler 1720, 161	

<b>Macpherson 1773</b> p. 358	<p>Instanti vero pradii tempore omnes incolumes in aulam equitant, et ad potandum consistunt. Edda Mythol. xxxv.</p> <p>Gladius vivis charissima supplex ante omnia mortuos debebat comitari. Keyssler Antiq. Selectæ.</p> <p>Hester var leiddr abalit med ollu reidi. Edda Mythol. xliv.</p> <p>Instanti prandii tempore in aulam equitant. Id. xxxv.</p>
<b>Source:</b> Respectively, Keyssler 1720, 162; Keyssler 1720, 163; Keyssler 1720, 169; Bartholin 1689, 565	

<p><b>Macpherson 1773</b> p. 359</p>	<p>Solus Deus Vidarus calceis ex corio factis superbiebat. Edda Mythol. xxi.</p> <p>Virgines Valkyriæ eligunt, invitantque in aulam. Eivind. Sealdaspiller in Carm. Hacomar.</p> <p>In Freæ aulam veniunt virgines. Id. xxii.</p>
<p><b>Source:</b> Respectively, Keyssler 1720, 170; Keyssler 1720, 178</p>	

<p><b>Macpherson 1773</b> p. 365</p>	<p>Habitaculum novi stare A sole remotum, In cadaverum littoribus, Boream versus spectant fores. Aula contexta tergis serpentum Capita introrsus spectant; Et virus evomunt. Amnes veneni manant per aulam, Quos vadere coguntur infelices. Verum in Haergumi Pessima est condition Illic Nüdhoggur, &amp;c. Edda Mythol. xlvii. Voluspa Stroph. xxxvi.</p> <p>Hela ipsa una sui parte coerulea, altera colorem retinet pellis humani. Edda Mythol. xxviii.</p> <p>Torva et truculenta Hela. Id. Ibid.</p>
<p><b>Source:</b> Respectively, Keyssler 1720, 125; Keyssler 1720, 180; Keyssler 1720, 180</p>	

<p><b>Macpherson 1773</b> p. 369</p>	<p>Proruet solutus In virorum catervam Lupus ille Fenrin. Ecvindi Epicedium Ilaconis.</p>
<p><b>Source:</b> Keyssler 1720, 120</p>	

<p><b>Macpherson 1773</b> p. 370</p>	<p>Sol tekur sortna Sygur sold, mar Huerfa aff himne Heidar stiornur, Geisar eime Vid all durnara, Leikur haar hite [...] Vid himen sialff ann. Voluspa, Stroph. xlix et lii.</p>
<p><b>Source:</b> Keyssler 1720, 120</p>	

<p><b>Macpherson 1773</b> p. 371</p>	<p>Sal sier nun standa [...] Solu fegra Gullethaktän. [...] A GIMLÉ</p>
<p><b>Source:</b> Keyssler 1720, 122</p>	

<p><b>Macpherson 1773</b> p. 372</p>	<p>Thar skulu dygguar Drotter biggia Og um all durs daga Yndes nista. Voluspa, lviii.</p> <p>A Sunnannuerdun Himens enda er sa salur er allra er fergurstur, og beartare enn. Solenn GIMLÉ heiter, han skal standa tha beade hessur farest Himen og lord og biggia thann stad goder Menno g Riettlater um alder. Suo seiger in Wolu spaa, &amp;c. Edda Mythol. xv.</p> <p>Sal weit eg standa Solu siaerre Nord ur horssa Dyr. Id. ibid.</p>
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**Source:** Keyssler 1720, 122; Keyssler 1720, 122-23; Keyssler 1720, 124-25

**Macpherson 1773**  
**p. 373**

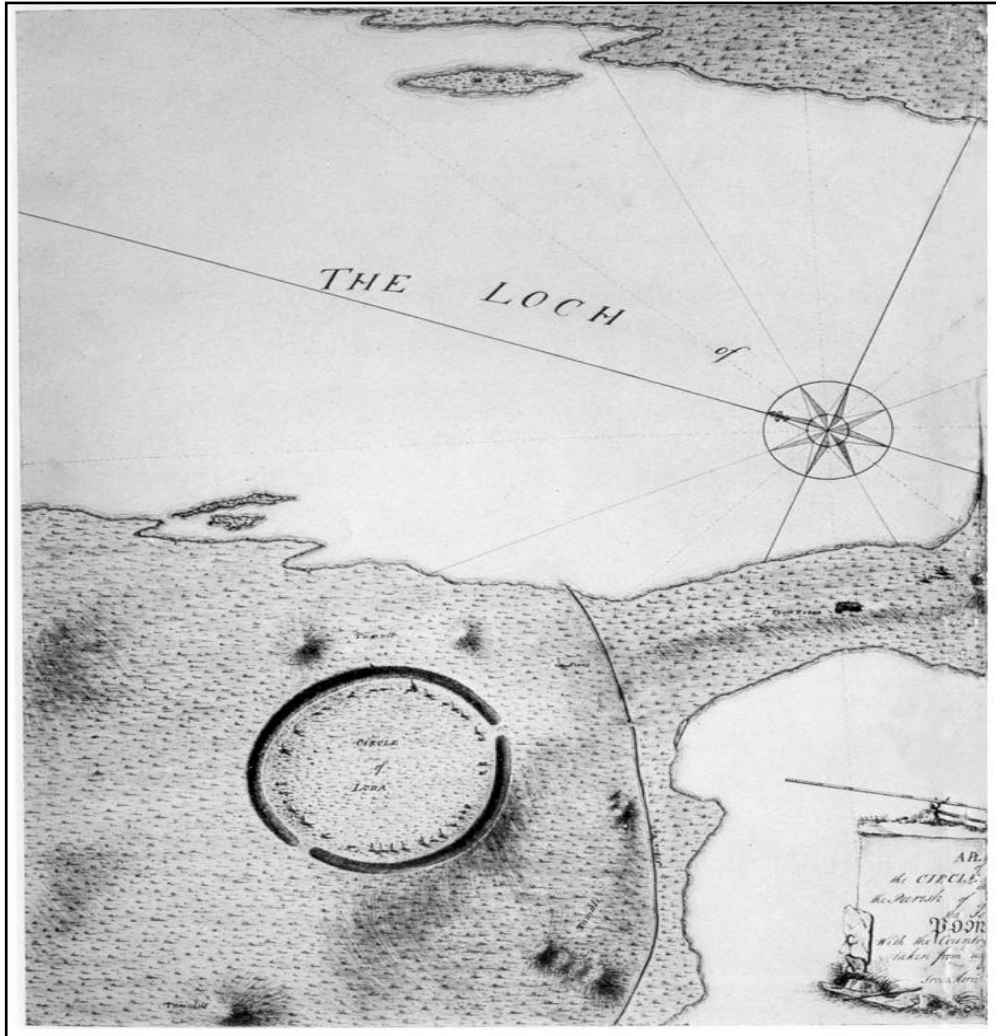
Morbo ac senior confecti ad Helam detruduntur. Edda Mythol. xxviii.

**Source:** Keyssler 1720, 180





## Appendix B



**Fig. 9.** A plan of the Circle of Loda in the Parish of Stenhouse by Joseph Banks, 1772.  
(Ruggles 1988, 343: fig. 15.3)



Fig. 10. Ring of Brodgar ("postcard")

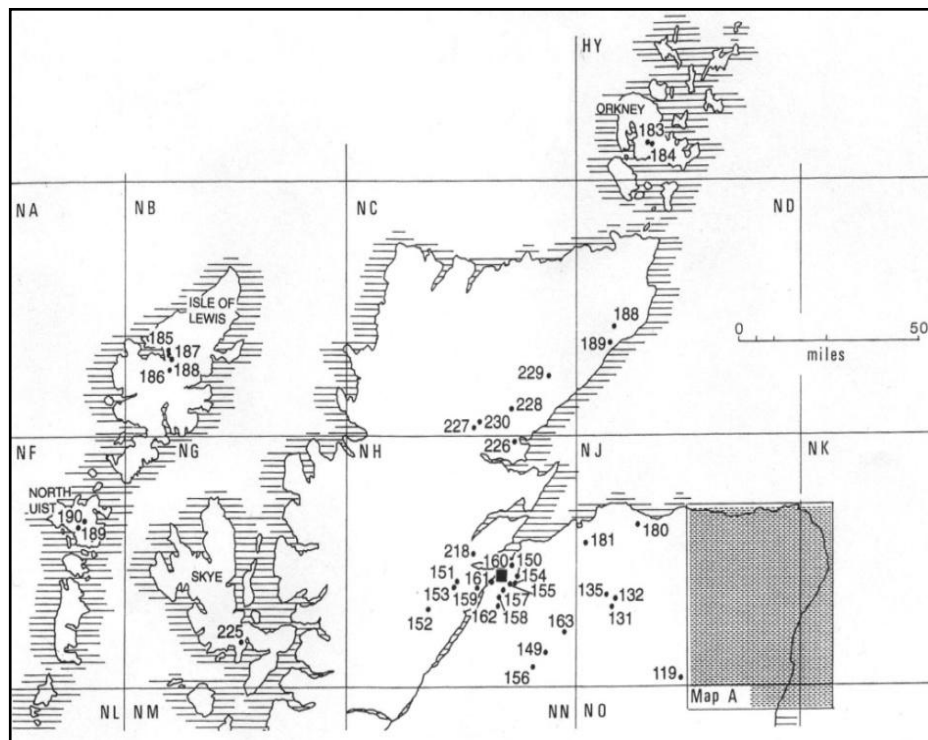


Fig. 11. Stone Circles in the Highlands (Badenoch District in particular) 149: Aviemore; 150: Balnuaran of Clava; 151: Bruiach; 152: Corrimony; 153: Culburnie; 154: Culdoich; 155:

Daviot; 156: Delfour; 157: Druidtemple; 158: Gask; 159: Kinchyle of Dores; 160: Newton of Petty; 161: Torbreck; 162: Tordarroch; 163: Tullochgorm (Burl 1995, map 1).



**Fig. 12.** Aviemore Stone Circle (“The Megalithic Portal”).