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James Macpherson's "Ossian": Genesis and response

Kahn, Lora, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1989

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JAMES MACPHERSON'S OSSIAN: GENESIS AND RESPONSE

by

LORA KAHN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in
English in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City
University of New York.

1989

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Robert F. Day
Chair of Examining Committee

April 27, 1989
Date

Martin Steiner
Executive Officer

J. Pidonous
John Matthews
Supervisory Committee

Abstract

JAMES MACPHERSON'S OSSIAN: GENESIS AND RESPONSE

by

Lora Kahn

Adviser: Professor Robert A. Day

This study takes a reader-reponse approach to James Macpherson's Ossianic "translations" of the 1760s. One aim of the study is to treat Macpherson's work as an "ideal case" in which to understand how a text acquires meaning in the collaborative interaction between work and interpreter because modern readers find so little to appreciate in this poetry, while it was so popular and influential in its own period. Therefore, some explanation for this popularity must be sought in the special circumstances existing in the middle years of the eighteenth century when Ossian was written.

Utilizing the reception theories of Hans Robert Jauss who is concerned with the larger societal forces which

contribute to the creation of a text, and how a text may perform a socially formative function, the study examines the special circumstances of the Ossianic "horizon of expectations." Aspects of the "horizon" which contributed to Ossianic genesis are sentimentalism, recent political developments in Scotland, and the primitivistic and "conjectural" historical theories of the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers. In the realm of reader response, Wolfgang Iser's ideas of how the individual reader participates in meaning creation are employed to explain how individual, yet representative, readers with benevolistic, sentimental, primitivistic, antiquarian, political, propagandistic as well as literary interests and biases made meaning from the Ossianic text.

Since Ossian was at the forefront of the new reactive literature which helped to break down traditional generic distinctions, a further aim of the study is to identify the true genre of Macpherson's poetry, along with those particular elements which were associated with the sublime. Associated with the concept of sublimity, which took on increasingly psychological overtones as the eighteenth century progressed, is Macpherson's obsession with a bardic persona. This obsession is related to modern psychoanalytic theories of the psychogenesis of imposture.

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Without the "kindness and devotion" of a loving family, my husband Ed and my daughter Gabi, the way would have been a good deal harder.

My final debt of gratitude is to the memory of my mother.

KAHN

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The first thing we instinctively strive to conceive is simply the experience of being alive. Life is a network of needs and fulfillments and further needs, with temporary frustrations here and there. If its basic needs are long unsatisfied, it ends. Our first consciousness is the sense of need i. e. desire. Therefore our most elementary conceptions are of objects for desire.

Susanne K. Langer
Philosophy in a New Key

KAHN

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Introduction

This dissertation is a study of the relationship between an audience and a text, in particular, between the readership of the mid 1760's and the Ossianic "translations" James Macpherson published between 1760 and 1763. It represents an attempt to retrieve "the spirit of an age" as it manifested itself in reactions to a specific text, and investigates how a text acquires meaning in the complex, collaborative interaction between work and interpreter.

Obviously, this kind of investigation is dependent on the insights of modern reader-response criticism, here particularly the critics Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser. Jauss and Iser attack the problem of the reader's connection to the text in different though related ways. Jauss is primarily concerned with reception, the larger forces in society that influence how a text is perceived. He speaks in his crucial article, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," of literature as a socially formative force. Jauss is instructive on the "horizon of expectations": all the elements of the contemporary scene which contribute to the expectations which an audience brings to a text, including the historical, political, and socio-cultural situation, as well as specific literary

influences. Iser, on the other hand, as his titles, The Implied Reader and The Act of Reading indicate, is more concerned with the ways in which the individual reader participates in the process of meaning creation.

This study attempts to demonstrate how Ossianic poetry is an "ideal case" from either perspective. Jauss conceives of the "ideal case" text as a parody which exposes the abuses and injustices of its culture; Macpherson's poetry does this, not through parody, but through an implied contrast between his culture and an ideal society. And because this idealized culture was identified as "Scotland" of an earlier period, the Scots were given a history and a heritage that they otherwise would not have had. In other words, an acceptance on the part of contemporary Scots of the false history and heritage which the Ossianic poems presented suggests disillusionment or dissatisfaction with the reality of both a recent and a remote historical situation. The contemporary awareness of an eclipsed nationhood is very much a part of the Ossianic background.

As an example in Iserian terms of how reading a text can become a collaboration, and how the reader helps to create a text, Ossian is also an "ideal case." This insight emerges from the enormous difficulties a modern reader has in finding anything to value in this poetry, in

contrast with the tremendous enthusiasm many eighteenth-century readers exhibited for Ossian. This "appreciation gap" indicates either that contemporary readers of Ossian had access to information which has now been lost, or that they were reading meaning into the text for their own reasons. Since these poems consist mainly of exclamatory outbursts with little narrative structure or specificity of description, the second possibility seems more plausible. In the course of this study the responses of different readers will be discussed: those approaching the text from a conjectural-historical viewpoint, who used the text to buttress their own theories; those with sentimental affinities, like Anna Seward, who used the poetry to stabilize certain free-floating emotions; readers like William Stukeley, who utilized Macpherson's poetry to stimulate his own elaborate antiquarian fantasies; those like Gray and Walpole who had a genuine interest in the literature of early cultures; and the Scottish patriots who found that Macpherson's epic fragments and epics underscored their own version of Scottish history and early Scottish life. The diversity of response will be discussed in relation to the work of a modern critic, Peter Rabinowitz, whose system categorizes four different kinds of audiences. Rabinowitz's four audiences: the actual, authorial, narrative, and ideal audiences, will help us to

decide how an audience creates its own text. Also, Rabinowitz's very useful concept of the "silences" in a text will help us to reach back to a real audience and determine what appeared realistic in that eighteenth-century moment.

While the text in reader-response criticism represents a kind of collaborative synthesis, the story of Ossianic creation is the story of another kind of collaboration, a collaboration which involves the examination of that particular mid-eighteenth-century Scottish "horizon of expectations" discussed earlier. Traditional versions of Ossianic genesis portray a calculating young man who deludes an unsuspecting group of intellectuals into taking his "translations" for actual ancient Gaelic relics. The truth, as it often is, is more complicated, implicating the "cabal" which encouraged and promoted Ossian far more than has earlier been recognized.

In conjunction with the Jaussian "horizon of expectations," eighteenth century concepts of "origin and progress" have relevance here. Ossianic poetry was generated and promoted by men sharing certain theories of the historical origins of human societies, and a primitivistic attitude towards those early societies which often was generalized into sentimental benevolism in other contexts.

Any discussion of the Ossianic background must take into account the sentimental behavior of the Ossianic protagonists, but sentimentality can be understood within the larger context of Enlightenment concerns. Sentimentality represents the popularization of the philosophy of benevolism, belief in man's essential goodness; and there is a line of intellectual descent from the benevolist philosopher Shaftesbury to his disciple Hutcheson, to the primitivist and early conjectural historian Thomas Blackwell, to Macpherson.

From another angle, belief in the goodness of man translates into the Enlightenment confidence in the possibility for human betterment and the search for ways to improve the human condition. In the eighteenth century scientific methods were applied to a number of new areas of study, all with human behavior as their object. The "Science of Man," a phrase coined by David Hume, evolved into such modern studies as sociology, economics, and political science; the impulses which led to these "social" studies stimulated an interest in origins of human institutions. Men associated with what Adam Smith's biographer called "conjectural history" are also associated with the development of the disciplines of sociology (Adam Ferguson) and economics (Adam Smith). Both Adams were part of that community of scholars and friends who contributed

in theoretical and practical ways to the Ossianic scene.

Another aspect of the "horizon of expectations" is the literary tradition to which Ossian belongs. The poems, as authentic third-century writings of an inspired bard, were promoted as "fragments" of epics, or, with Fingal and Temora, full-blown epics. However, these poems have more in common with the melancholy productions of the Wartons, Thomas Gray and William Collins than they do with any epic. This connection and the very important relationships between Ossian and the eighteenth-century concept of the sublime: what made Ossian sublime, and how, in turn, Ossian altered the horizon and changed the definition of sublimity is an important part of the Ossianic story.

The final chapter of this study discusses that aspect of Macpherson's history which has up to now proved most fascinating to the twentieth century: the psychopathology of the impostor. Here we have the "origin and progress" theme from an entirely different point of view. But as we shall see, Macpherson was not a classic impostor (as psychoanalysis understands the term), nor were his audiences completely duped.

Finally, I hope that my readers will come away from this study with an increased awareness of the complex circumstances under which this historically crucial and influential text was "created," meaning both what forces

led to its being created, and what it became in the minds of some representative readers. I hope not only to have dispelled the traditional stereotype of Macpherson as an inspired hack who deluded a naive audience, but also, through this one example, to suggest that a host of circumstances contributed to the meaning of this text within its own period, with the obvious implication that similar complexity attends any text in any period.

An Approach to Ossian: Two Reader-Response Critics

Reader-response criticism, founded on the phenomenological understanding that a text exists only as it is read, provides a useful orientation to Macpherson's Ossianic poetry. We shall see how the nature of this poetry, as well as the claims made for it, appealed to a variety of readers, and inspired a kind of collaborative reading which resulted in a very personalized text.

This chapter examines the nature of this participation, or collaboration, from the point of view of two of the major reader-response (reception) critics, Hans Jauss, who studies the historical and sociological implications of reception theory, and Wolfgang Iser, who is more concerned with the individual reader's assimilation of a specific text. In other words, Jauss has been more interested in the macrocosm of reception, while Iser is occupied with the microcosm of response (Holub 83).

Jauss and Iser hold basic assumptions in common, however, and their similarities are more significant than their differences. These similarities have been highlighted in a recent article by Leopold Damrosch which contrasts Samuel Johnson's critical approach with that of the reader-response theorists. Damrosch's article is a plea for a return to Johnson's "twin demands of mimetic

realism and didactic truth," in substitute for the indeterminacies and ambiguities of the modern response critics.

...Johnson encourages and broadens our own imaginative activity...his epistemology and metaphysics may be no longer acceptable, but his criticism is not directly dependent on them for its liveliest insights. And it may be that our unreflective, day-to-day assumptions are not so very different from Johnson's after all, so that his criticism is invigorating precisely because it releases us from the relativist, indeterminist, intensely intellectualized diagnoses of the reading experience that modern theorists urge upon us (99).

Damrosch goes on to say:

In sum, the author-text-reader relationship is secure in Johnson's criticism because he assumes a universe of knowledge that underlies and guarantees the universe of discourse. We are confident in our sense of the author as a man speaking to men, in the contexts that govern a particular text and give it meaning, and in our own apprehension of reality (101).

Damrosch contrasts Johnson's securely mimetic world, (in Damrosch's opinion, at least), with the "interpretive communities" (the term is Stanley Fish's) of modern reader-response critics. Johnson, Damrosch contends, "would never concede that literature, instead of imitating reality, only acts out the conceptual structures of an interpretive community," nor would he make the text the critic's primary concern. "Johnson...never lets us forget that the source of every text in a specific human

imagination, which is why his best criticism occurs in the context of literary biography" (96-97).

The reader-response critics are, however, as concerned with literary biography as Johnson was. They approach the problems created by an attempt to reconstruct a historical period, or the assessment of individual achievement within that period differently because they have lost the assumptions under which Johnson operated. Jauss's "horizon of expectations," for example, (although there are problems with this term which are discussed below), is an attempt to provide a conceptual basis for reception theory.

Although the term "horizon of expectations" has itself had a history ranging in application from German Phenomenology to Art History (Holub 59), it seems ultimately to have derived from Husserl's phenomenology of perception. Husserl used the term to refer to the experiencing of consciousness which is never available in and of itself, but only possible when attention is called to it upon a background or "horizon" of distraction (Paul de Man, intro. Towards an Aesthetics of Reception, xii). In de Man's words, this horizon "can never be retrieved in objective form--by its author, its contemporaries, nor those following in time."

De Man values Jauss's handling of the "horizon of expectations" because it confronts the "epistemological

complexity of the historian's task" which de Man sees to be "a dialectic of understanding as a complex interplay between knowing and not knowing" (xii).

De Man finds the "horizon" available to the historian analogous to the content of a psychoanalytic session.

Neither of the two [the analyst nor his interlocutor] knows the experience being discussed; they may indeed not even know whether such an experience ever existed. The subject is separated from it by mechanisms of repression, defense, displacement and the like, whereas, to the analyst, it is available only as a dubiously evasive symptom. But this difficulty does not prevent a dialogical discourse of at least some interpretative value from taking place (xii).

And it is within this dialogical discourse that the horizons of individual experience and methodological understanding are able to "engage each other...undergo[ing] modifications in the process, though none of the experiences may ever become fully explicit" (xii).

Holub explains Jauss's "horizon" as an intersubjectivity which has been internalized. "Horizon of expectations" would appear to refer to an intersubjective system or structure of expectations, a system of references or a mind set that a hypothetical individual might bring to any text (Holub 59).

But de Man defines the horizon in a different way. He shows how Jauss differentiates the newly produced text from

its collective horizon, which in turn becomes part of a future horizon as newer works are produced.

...the passage from the individual to the collective or the social aspects of the work is implicit in the model of the "horizon": just as the anonymous background of a perception is general and nondifferentiated with regard to the individual perception that stands foregrounded and silhouetted against it, the particular work, at the moment of its production, stands out in its singularity from the collective grayness of received ideas and ideologies (xiii).

From these two differing interpretations of the horizon of expectations--one focused on the receiver of the text, the other on the text as it is received,--it appears that Jauss has never completely clarified this concept. He has, however, with this "methodological centerpiece" of his most important theoretical essay, achieved an integration of Marxism and Formalism, history and aesthetics. Because an aesthetics of reception focuses not only on the producer, but also on the receiver of the literary work, Jauss satisfies "the Marxist demand for historical mediations by situating literature in the larger process of events," while retaining Formalist biases "by placing the perceiving subject at the center of his concerns" (Holub 58). In Jauss's words, "literature and art only obtain a history that has the character of a process when the succession of works is mediated not only through the producing subject, but also through the consuming subject--through the

interaction of author and public" (Jauss, Aesthetics of Reception 15).

The problem suggested earlier reasserts itself here: how can an identifiable historical situation be retrieved; or, more specifically, how can the "horizon of expectations" of an earlier era be reconstituted and objectified?

Jauss's first solution focuses on the ideal case, a work that turns back, or parodies the literary tradition. Jauss places Don Quixote, Jacques le Fataliste, and Chimères in this category, although Tristram Shandy is obviously another candidate. (Macpherson's Ossianic poetry is in another kind of oblique relation with the tradition which will be discussed in a later chapter.) These works are considered to be ideal cases because they "evoke the reader's horizon of expectations, formed by a convention of genre, style or form only to destroy it step by step" (24).

Three other ways of reconstructing the horizon, all of which are relevant to this study, are:

first, through familiar norms of the immanent poetics of the genre; second, through the implicit relationships to familiar works of the literary-historical surroundings; and third, through the opposition of fiction and reality, between the poetic and practical function of language, which is always available to the reflective reader during the readings as a possibility of comparison (24).

A further refinement of the "horizon of expectations" concept has important implications for the present study. One of Jauss's most fundamental objectives, which he explicates in the influential "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Studies" essay, is his reassessment of the relationship between history and literary history. Rather than considering literary history as a subcategory of general history, Jauss proposes a "socially formative" function for literature.

The experience of reading can liberate one from adaptations, prejudices of a lived praxis in that it can compel one to a new perception of things. The horizon of expectations of literature distinguishes itself before the horizon of expectations of historical lived praxis in that it not only preserves actual experiences, but also anticipates unrealized possibility, broadens the limited space of social behavior for new desires, aims, and goals, and thereby opens paths of future experience (41).

Jauss's example of the literary text which proved socially formative in both style and content is Madame Bovary. At Flaubert's trial in 1857 the prosecuting attorney raised the issues of public opinion and religious feeling, claiming an immorality revealed by the lack of explicit authorial judgment on Emma's behavior. But as Jauss shows, Flaubert's style (style indirect libre) was as much on trial as his content. The prosecuting attorney's open and explicit questions were not an indication of

aesthetic lack of understanding and moral philistinism. "Rather, it is much more that in them the unsuspected influence of a new art form comes to be expressed, which through a new manière de voir les choses was able to jolt the reader of Madame Bovary out of the self-evident character of his moral judgment, and turned a predecided question of public morals into an open problem" (43).

While Jauss traces the relations between general history and literary history, Iser concentrates on "the act of reading," what happens when an individual reader confronts a specific text. In Iser's work this text-reader interaction is examined from three different perspectives: a functional perspective, a phenomenology of the reading process, and that of the communicatory situation.

It is in his functional approach to the reading process that Iser comes closest to Jauss. Here the horizon of expectations reappears as the repertoire. Iser defines the repertoire as "the conventions necessary for the establishment of a situation," "all the familiar territory within the text." This territory encompasses "references to earlier works, or to social and historical norms, or to the whole culture from which the text has emerged--in brief, to what the Prague structuralists have called the 'extratextual' reality" (Act of Reading 69). As with Jauss's horizon, the repertoire carries meaning in its

negation.

Although in structure basically identical to the overall system, the literary text differs from it in its intention. Instead of reproducing the system to which it refers, it almost invariably tends to take as its dominant 'meaning' those possibilities that have been neutralized or negated by that system. If the basic reference of the text is to the penumbra of excluded possibilities, one might say that the borderlines of existing systems are the starting point for the literary text. It begins to activate that which the system has left inactive.
(72).

If the repertoire is understood as containing the prevailing system of thought of any historical period, then the literature of that period comes into being as an alternative or complement to that thought system by "[endeavoring] to counter the problems produced by the system." The text sets up a "reaction to the thought systems which it has chosen and incorporated into its own repertoire," permitting the reader to envision excluded possibilities and reassess the norms and traditions (including literary traditions) which he accepts in the course of everyday living. Iser's example, directly relevant to this study, is the preoccupation, in the literature of the eighteenth century, with moral issues. He attributes this preoccupation to the absence of morality in the prevailing philosophy of the period, Lockean empiricism (72-73).

Other concepts take cognizance of the reader's role in meaning production. Iser's strategies are not the rhetorical devices of the Formalists but rather underlying structures which "organize both the material of the text and the conditions under which that material is to be communicated" (86). The major strategies are foreground and background, theme and horizon. The foreground-background contrast, familiar from Gestalt psychology, "is a basic structure by means of which the strategies of the text produce a tension that sets off a series of different actions and interactions, and that is ultimately resolved by the emergence of the aesthetic object" (95).

The theme and horizon strategy also recognizes the reader as a maker of his text who creates meaning in the process of synthesizing an assembly of constantly shifting viewpoints. Out of four perspectives which organize the repertoire: that of the narrator, that of the characters, that of the plot, and that marked out for the reader, the one view with which the reader at any moment is involved, "theme," stands before the "horizon," all the other perspectives in which he has previously been "situated." This "theme and horizon" strategy gives us a new approach to the historical reader. For, as different norms are assigned to various perspectives, the perspectives take on disparate relationships with one another in historically

recognized periods. Iser names these perspective arrangements: counterbalance, opposition, echelon, and serial. The two earlier ones he assigns to periods with demonstrable norms, the echelon and serial types he finds more characteristic of periods closer to our own, in which all norms are under scrutiny.

It is in Iser's discussion of the phenomenology of reading that the reader's collaboration in the creation of the text is most evident. His view of reading as a collaborative act is in contrast with modern linguistic and Marxist theories "which give the impression that texts automatically imprint themselves on the reader's mind of their own accord" (107). For Iser, the experience of reading is a dynamically interactive one for "although the text may well incorporate the social norms and values of its possible readers, its function is not merely to present such data, but, in fact, to use them to secure its uptake." Or, in an alternative formulation, "[the text] offers guidance as to what is to be produced, and therefore cannot itself be the product" (107).

Countering the static observer-object relationship of the aforementioned linguistic and Marxist critics, Iser locates the reader within the text as a wandering viewpoint "which travels along inside that which it has to apprehend." This being on the inside, so to speak, helps

to explain the participatory nature of the reading process. In the time flow of reading, memories and expectations are evoked which are not present in the text but are stimulated in the reader.

...throughout the reading process there is a continual interplay between modified expectations and transformed memories. However, the text itself does not formulate expectations or their modification; nor does it specify how the connectability of memories is to be implemented. This is the province of the reader himself, and so here we have a first insight into how the synthesizing activity of the reader enables the text ...to be transferred to his own mind. This process of translation also shows up the basic hermeneutic structure of reading. Each sentence correlate contains what one might call a hollow section, which looks forward to the next correlate, and a retrospective section, which answers the expectations of the preceding sentence (now part of the remembered background). Thus every moment of reading is a dialectic of protension, and retension, conveying a future horizon yet to be occupied, along with a past (and continually fading) horizon already filled; the wandering viewpoint carves its passage through both at the same time and leaves them to merge together in its wake. (111-12).

If the act of reading is to be treated as a communication, it must be recognized as a peculiarly atypical type of communication, for the text is unable to confirm a reader's responses, or answer any question that the reader might have. Iser can treat the reader-text interaction as a kind of communication because he believes that the text does exert some degree of control over reader response, a control he attributes to the agency of textual

indeterminacies or blanks. The simplest kind of blank, a break in the narrative line, for example, forces the reader to seek relationships between seemingly unrelated fragments. On this level the blank "as an empty space between fragments enables them to be joined together, thus constituting a field of vision for the wandering viewpoint" (197).

As the minimal organizational level of all the processes of comprehension as well as the basic organizational unit of the wandering viewpoint, the blank establishes connectability between segments of reciprocal influence, enabling the reader to grasp a pattern underlying these connections. This framework is also a blank which requires an act of ideation on the part of the reader to fill it. The function of the blank on this level deepens. Beyond simply connecting segments, it enables the reader to produce a determinate relationship between them (198).

On a third level of functioning the blanks, which here Iser finds more appropriate to call "vacancies," operate within the theme and horizon strategy. A vacancy occurs when a previous theme recedes into the horizon as a new theme emerges. Vacancies, the marginal or horizontal positions of previous themes, are vital devices for building up the aesthetic object because they condition the

reader's view of the new theme, which in turn conditions his view of previous themes. Like blanks, they are not present in the text but are to be implemented by the reader's ideational activity (198).

Iser distinguishes between the blanks and vacancies which organize ideations on a structural (syntagmatic) basis and the negations (really another kind of blank), which operate on the paradigmatic axis of the reading. Negations return us to the repertoire, the extratextual norms and experiences the reader brings to the text. The negations, as they relate to content rather than structure, help the reader to determine the author's ultimate intentions.

In the repertoire of the literary text, there is no blanket rejection of the encapsulated norms, but instead there are carefully directed, partial negations which bring to the fore the problematical aspects and so point the way to the reassessment of the norms. The partial negation is aimed at the sensitive spot of the norm, but retains it as background against which the meaning of the reassessment may be stabilized. Negation is therefore an active force which stimulates the reader into building up its implicit but unformulated cause as an imaginary object. The blanks arising out of the negation prestructure the contours of this object and also the reader's attitude toward it, in a sense described by Sartre: "...the object as a mental image is a defined deficiency; it denotes itself as a hollow form" (213).

The reader's images fill in this hollow form, but not arbitrarily. In some way, the reader's ideations must be

controlled by the intentions of the text. Iser labels one of the ways the reader makes the text his own "negations," speculating that there are both primary and secondary negations.

Primary negations look outward to the repertoire of norms. They relate to a virtual theme "which arises out of the act of negation" and are therefore thematic. Secondary negations are functional. They are not marked in the text but "arise from the interaction between textual signals and the gestalten produced by the reader" (220-21). In the course of literary history Iser discovers an increase of secondary over primary negations, culminating in the work of Samuel Beckett. By employing negation to turn language against itself, Beckett, Iser believes, teaches us to examine what fiction is.

Iser's final aspect of the reading process, negativity, is the principle which organizes all the previously discussed aspects of the text: blanks, vacancies, and negations, into a unifying structure which represents an unformulated "double" of the formulated text. This "double," Iser explains, is not an anti-text but an unwritten base which "enables the written words to transcend their literal meaning, to assume a multiple referentiality, and so to undergo the expansion necessary to transplant them as a new experience into the mind of the

reader" (226). As a basic force, a kind of "deep structure of reading" (Holub 95), for explaining an effect, translating it into discourse "renders obsolescent the experience it provides" (Iser 226).

Nevertheless, there are three aspects of negativity which can be analyzed. In its formal aspect negativity permits the reader to build up the meaning of the text through the constitutive acts of the reading process. This is done by links, the blanks and partial negations, which bring to the fore elements of the text which were previously concealed. The blanks and negations are the abstract manifestations of this aspect of negativity; it is the "nothing" between the positions which enables them to be related and comprehended. In relation to these textual elements, negativity "traces out what is not given and enables it to be communicated." However much freedom the reader has within the experience of meaning production, he cannot, Iser reiterates, make up his own text. He is controlled by the contents of the positions, the theme and horizon structure which is regulated by the blanks, and the hidden motivations of the primary negations (227).

A second feature of negativity concerns the content of the text. Iser points out that literary texts from Homer on abound with multiple examples of negativity, "misfortunes and failures, wrecked aspirations, ruined

hopes, the negativity of man's efforts and the deformation of his being." As with the repertoire and strategies, these deformations stimulate the reader to seek a hidden cause, a cause which ultimately points to a potential remedy.

As the conditioning cause of these deformations, negativity mediates between representation and reception, initiating the constitutive acts which actualize those conditions which give rise to the deformations. Meaning-and-remedy emerges with the ideation of an unwritten text, a dialectic mutation of the written one. Negativity is defined as the "infrastructure of the literary text; in its twofold manifestation as the cause of deformation and also a potential remedy it is the structural basis for communication" (228-29).

A third feature of negativity clarifies the complex interrelations between the reader, the text, and the world. It is a given that the text turns the familiar world into an unfamiliar otherness, drains it of its reality, dislocates its accepted norms. Negativity is also Iser's name for the structure which invalidates the manifested reality of the text. Not to be understood as providing a Utopian complement to the imperfect world of the text, Iser believes negativity to be rather "the nonformulation of the not-yet-comprehended" which "does no

more than mark out a relationship to which it disputes," and is therefore a major connection between reader and text. Negativity opens the way for a transcending of the world, offering, therefore, a means of formulating "a cause [which underlies] the question of the world" (229-30).

Iser's most important insight, which represents a major contribution to reader-response criticism, concerns the relationship between reading and consciousness. In this aspect of his work, the demarcations between function, phenomenology, and communication fall away as Iser describes what it is to read oneself into a work and change oneself in the process. Reading involves, for Iser, an incorporation of the alien thoughts of another into our own consciousness, which causes us as perceiving subjects to feel separated from ourselves. This separation or split causes a tension which stimulates "spontaneity," the desire to gain coherence (156-57).

Iser's description of the developing of consciousness in the act of reading can serve as a brief restatement of the response critics' most basic convictions: that object does not exist apart from perceiving subject, that a text's meaning does not exist a priori but must be determined by each reader in the course of his reading and discovered anew each time that he reads, and that reading sponsors the growth of consciousness--for Jauss, even social awareness.

Ossian in the Age of Sensibility

Erskine came in, and he and Sheridan talked very well upon the poems of Ossian, whom Sheridan said he preferred to all poets in the world and thought he excelled Homer in the Sublime and Virgil in the Pathetic. He said Mrs. Sheridan and he fixed it as the standard of feeling, made it like a thermometer by which they could judge the warmth of everybody's heart; and that they calculated beforehand in what degrees all their acquaintances would feel them, which answered exactly (Boswell, London Journal 182).

A study of reader-response to Ossianic poetry must come to some terms with the cult of sentiment which has been identified with the middle and later years of the eighteenth century. Ossian is not only one of the major products of this movement but also a major contributor to the kind of literature which prompts a reaction; indeed, a basic premise of this investigation is that reader participation played such a great part in meaning-creation that Ossianic poetry helped forge this new, reactive literature. And while there are political, cultural, and psychological dimensions to Ossianic response, the sentimental element is also crucial: sentimentalism encouraged an optimistic view of the human condition and provided a new basis for the expression of feeling.

From the outset, we must acknowledge that the term "sentimental" involves us in problems, and assigning any

label to a period or a text produces additional problems. Labels are, by their very nature, limiting. The terms often used to designate the middle years of the eighteenth century: "The Age of Reason," "The Enlightenment," or "The Age of Johnson" highlight some of the preoccupations of the period at the expense of others, or focus on one outstanding spokesman while perhaps neglecting others. /1/ Furthermore, "sentimental" speaks to our own age's prejudices. It is for us a pejorative term signifying shallow over-emotionalism and insincerity in human interactions, as well as in creative expression. Northrop Frye avoided the use of the term "sentimental" when he called this period "The Age of Sensibility" in his classic article on the period. "Sensibility" carries many fewer pejorative associations than does "sentimental."

"Sentimental" carries with it more than a suggestion of mawkish, excessive emotionalism. It implies a philosophical and religious attitude towards human nature, a fundamental optimism in the goodness of the human species. In Fairchild's words it is a belief that "If man's feelings are good, then the more he feels about the more things, and the more freely he externalizes the feeling, the better." (Fairchild 1: 215). While seductive, this belief can lead to disturbing consequences, particularly as it rationalizes or avoids some of the most

distressing manifestations of human behavior. This is, perhaps, why Raymond D. Havens, writing in the 1940s, attacks the sentimentalism of George Lillo's London Merchant, in particular, and the sentimentalist movement as a whole.

...sentimentalism is not limited to the eighteenth century or to literature; it is as universal as hunger--indeed it is a kind of hunger--or as sin--of which it is often a sympathetic sister--and like sin it affects every art, every intellectual and material activity, every individual, young and old, and every race. Its great enemies are realism--the clear-sighted facing of every fact--and action. Its chief friends are emotionalism and confused thinking. It flourishes, in individuals and periods, when the violent emotions give way to the tender, when feeling is developed but has no adequate outlet in action, and when thought is not clarified by experience (186).

Set against Havens's reductionism, the world view represented by the sentimentalists is much more complex. Far from turning away from action to "a rosy dream world" (the term is Havens's), the sentimentalist philosophers and writers were providing the foundations for a humanitarian, social, and political activism with the profoundest consequences. Sentimentalist liberal and revolutionary ideology, "humanist, anti-authoritarian and compassionate," is still in R. F. Brissenden's fine phrase, "working like yeast through the social structures of the world" (55).

Havens's condemnation of sentimentalism cannot be discounted; both positive and negative consequences of the sentimental paradigm are inherent in the paradigm itself. Brissenden states that the basic premise of Adam Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments, which is a popularization of part of Hume's Treatise of Human Nature, is the notion that "the spontaneous moral responses of the individual, despite their basic subjectivity, possess some special and general authority. These spontaneous moral responses, which are one's better impulses, in other words, are necessarily reasonable" (55). However, as Brissenden himself points out (55), none of the moral sense philosophers, including Hume, ever considered the possibility that right feelings may not inspire social virtues, or that the good of the individual may not coincide with the good of the majority.

The notion of a necessarily reasonable feeling at the heart of the sentimentalist creed explains its enduring appeal and its inherent ambiguities. At the height of its popularity it provided a pragmatic approach to human problems, but at the same time "in the flattering picture it offered of man both as essentially benevolent and good natured, and as potentially weak, it provided a means of evading the very problems to which it offered a solution--and of evading them in a peculiarly subtle and self-gratifying manner" (55). The modulation of

sentimentalism into sentimentality, reflecting this evasion of unpleasant truths, helps to explain its fall from popularity, as well as the changes suffered by the term "sentimental" and its derivatives. Significantly, this degeneration in meaning began almost as soon as the words themselves had currency. /2/

The ancestor of the moral sense philosophers and, indeed, of most eighteenth-century philosophy was, of course, John Locke. Locke's epistemological sensationalism is crucial to the sentimentalist's picture of human nature because Locke provided the empirical basis on which human understanding could be studied and evaluated. Locke's abandonment of innate ideas and his attribution of all knowledge to experience obtained by the senses settled this issue for the century. In Locke's system we obtain knowledge from two avenues: external nature and the inner workings of our minds. "Our observation," he says, "employed either about external sensible objects, or about the internal operations of our minds perceived and reflected on by ourselves, is that which supplies our under-standings with all the materials of thinking" (122; bk. 2, ch. 1). The focal word is "sensible," which links "the two fountains of knowledge," the external senses and the emotional, responsive, reflective processes, or, in other words, sensation and sensibility.

In the sentimentalist versions of Lockean epistemology the experiential activity stressed is the formation of moral judgments; the conduit for the formation of moral judgments is the feelings. Sentimental theorists were not ignoring the rational faculty or denying that opinion and rational judgment contributed to moral development. Their point was that "feeling was necessarily the primary element in the process which led to a moral judgment, or in the language of the period, a moral sentiment" (Brissenden 24). However, even more fundamentally, feeling (or thought, as it is impossible to distinguish one from the other here), provides the only means for determining personal identity. The Lockean subject is as dependent on information from his senses for his awareness of self as for his knowledge about the outside world, and ultimately can be certain neither of his own existence nor of that of external reality. Moreover, as identity is dependent upon processes which are necessarily discontinuous, constantly subject to changes in time and circumstance, his experiencing of his identity must be persistently renewed.

When we see, hear, smell, taste, feel, meditate, or will anything, we know that we do so. Thus it is always as to our present sensations and perceptions: and by this every one is to himself that which he calls self.... For, since consciousness always accompanies thinking, and it is that which makes every one to be what he calls self, and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things, in this alone consists

personal identity, i.e. the sameness of a rational being: and as far as this consciousness can be extended backward to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person; it is the same self now as it was then; and it is by the same self with this present one that now reflects on it, that that action was done.
(449; bk. 2, ch. 27).

Locke's identification of the self with momentary consciousness had far-reaching theological and psychological consequences. While Locke's system involved abandoning such Judeo-Christian commonplaces as the immortal soul, free will and the Resurrection, it also raised very uncomfortable possibilities. A discontinuous self suggests that the notion of identity is itself theoretical, that there may be multiple personalities associated with the self, and therefore the possibility of unconscious forces beyond the control of the conscious mind (Dussinger 33).

Sentimentalism partakes of the dualism implicit in Locke's legacy. On the one hand, his system promoted enormous confidence in the possibilities of a human spirit which has been liberated from the subservience to innate ideas and hierarchical commitments. Lockean man is free to develop his own moral judgments and trusts in the rightness of his private authority, in the sanctity of his individual feelings. He is free to acknowledge, depend upon, and glory in himself in a way that must have felt enormously

exhilarating. Georges Poulet speaks of the eighteenth century as that human moment when man feels for the first time in the Christian era, "that the instant of his existence is an instant free of all dependence, liberated from all duration, equal to all its potentialities." Poulet sees this as a new beginning, likening it to the "divine moment in which the Father begets the Son; [the] moment in which the soul suffices itself, since it finds itself in the fullness it experiences. It loves itself. It knows itself to be faultless." In this period, for Poulet, "the lived sensation is the consciousness of being" (21).

On the other hand, this eighteenth-century moment is equally attended by anxiety, melancholy, fear, and feelings of deprivation. Deprived of the reassurance of a place of honor in the eternal scheme of things, a caring paternalistic deity, and the reliability of his own sensory equipment, eighteenth-century man is thrown back on a self which had been shown to be unreliable. Dussinger believes that the fear of the unconscious life is a motivating force behind philosophy and literature throughout the century. If this is so, this fear goes some way towards explaining sentimental excess. An overly optimistic picture of human nature, and excessive attention given to the notion that the feelings are necessarily

reasonable, defends against, or even denies, more realistic assessments of human behavior.

Time consciousness in this period: the new awareness of the self in time, the self dependent upon the "consciousness which accompanies thinking," is crucial to the sentimentalist purpose and the sentimental text.

Rene Wellek in his History of Modern Criticism shows how the development of the idea of history during the late eighteenth century is directly related to the shift in critical concern away from neoclassicism to the emotionalism and sentimentalism of audience reaction theories. This shift in attention to the emotional effect of art, and the identifying of artistic expression with "persuasion, rhetoric, even raw emotion" involves, for the Formalist Wellek, the loss of an essential feature of art: its appeal to contemplation. However, according to Wellek, "this flying asunder of the neoclassical positions and theories toward naturalism, emotionalism, and highly imaginative art was closely involved with a process of very great importance in history and the history of criticism: the awakening of the modern historical sense" (27).

Later in this study I will discuss this new historical sense in connection with Hans R. Jauss's treatment of the "horizon of expectations" (see pages 124-25), but for the moment it is important to note how closely this historical

sense is connected to the concept of identity. "The historical sense should be defined as a combination of the recognition of individuality with a sense of change and development in history. These two ideas are complementary, since there is no proper understanding of historical individuality without a knowledge of its development; while on the other hand, there is no true historical development beyond a series of individualities" (27).

A further refinement of the study of the specific characteristics of historical periods is the idea that each period can be associated with identifiable literary traditions and literary kinds. Wellek notes that the term which was coined in this period to refer to the individual characteristics of each successive period was "the spirit of the age" (27).

It was suggested that the concept of identity as Locke understood it is linked with awareness in and of time, "the consciousness that accompanies thinking." It was also suggested that this linkage between time consciousness and identity created a source of great anxiety, because even a momentary loss of consciousness threatens the self. With these insights, the connection between the Lockean view of the self and the sentimental tradition is also more apparent. The consequences of Locke's system: a heightened awareness of existing in a particular time and place, the

intensified sense of the precariousness of one's individual identity, the vigilant minute-by-minute monitoring of experience, are strong influences on the structure of the sentimental text. They are evident in Richardson's "writing to the moment," Boswell's introspections, Sterne's journeys through the labyrinths of the personality, and Macpherson's Ossianic ravings. It is this sentimental text that Northrop Frye refers to in his "Age of Sensibility" article as "the literature of process." "The literature of product" is supremely exemplified by the work of Pope and Swift. Frye finds exemplary process literature, in contrast, in the works of Ossian (314).

Where the emphasis is on the communicated product the qualities of consciousness take the lead: a regular metre, clarity of syntax, epigram and wit, repetition of sense in antithesis and balance rather than of sound.

Where the emphasis is on the original process, the qualities of subconscious association take the lead and the poetry becomes hypnotically repetitive, oracular, incantatory, dreamlike, and in the original sense of the word charming.

Frye astutely handles the problem of genre. For him, "the Ossian and Rowley poems are not merely hoaxes; they are pseudoepigraphia, like the book of Enoch, and like it they take what is psychologically primitive and project it into something historically primitive" (316).

This is sound, because the new historicism provided both writers with a workable persona, an alternative and more acceptable self. Macpherson went further than Chatterton, developing not only an alter ego for himself, but also a fantasy history (and sociology and anthropology) for his native land. He also invented a race of beings, who, with their capacity for feeling and benevolent action, disclose the possibility of such feeling and action in contemporary man, along with a historical argument for the superiority of the Scottish people, who were shown to be civilized long before other native groups. Macpherson's brand of sentimental primitivism was especially characteristic of the spirit of his age. Ossianism would not have been possible without the new historicism, and the interest in the differing literary traditions of successive historical periods.

However, Macpherson's primitivism is even more fundamentally dependent on that crucial shift from an Enlightenment ethics based on reason to the benevolist position that feelings determine moral judgments. Shaftesbury, often credited with founding the "moral sense" school, is himself inconsistent on this point, vacillating between a morality which develops as a consequence of the maturing reasoning faculty and a moral sense which preempts rationality. (Whitney, Primitivism 33).

Shaftesbury's disciple Hutcheson, even more than his mentor, based his benevolism directly on feeling. Hutcheson has no doubt that the natural state of man is "a state of Good-will, Humanity, Compassion, Mutual Aid, propagating and supporting Offspring, Love of Community or Country, Devotion or Love and Gratitude to some governing mind" (Whitney 93).

While sentimental primitivism rejects certain Enlightenment truths, it embraces others. The "Noble Savage," oxymoronically named, could not have existed without Enlightenment confidence in Uniformitarianism (the belief that man is everywhere and always the same), and Enlightenment assumptions that the general Laws of Nature continue to operate in all places at all times. The implications of these ideas are crucial to primitivism. If all men are equally capable of discerning Nature's uniform and eternal laws, and civilized man cannot live by these laws as well as his primitive counterpart, it must be because he has been corrupted by the vices of civilized society. Thus the theory of progressive degeneration, a logical consequence of uniformitarianism, posits a historical development that uniformitarianism itself denies.

Other cross-currents in mid-century primitivism derive from the school of taste, also credited to Shaftesbury and

Hutcheson. Indeed taste, the immediate apprehension of what is beautiful and harmonious in nature, is a close relation to the moral sense, which permits an innate recognition of the harmony and beauty in ethical behavior.

J. G. Cooper's Letters Concerning Taste (1755), (Cooper was a follower of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson), demonstrates how the moral sense and "taste" are interdependent.

The effect of good Taste is that instantaneous Glow of Pleasure which thrills through our whole frame, and seizes upon the Applause of the Heart before the intellectual Power, Reason, can descend from the Throne of the Mind to ratify its approbation, either when we receive into the Soul beautiful Images thro' the Organs of bodily sense or the Decorum of an amiable Character thro' the Faculties of Moral Perception; or when we recall, by the imitative Arts, both of them thro' the intermediate Power of the imagination. (qtd. in Whitney, Primitivism 93).

The crucial word in this paragraph is "Instantaneous," for it is the immediacy of apprehension, whether of ethical conduct or natural beauty, which furnishes one basis for primitivistic theories (93).

One difficulty with these theories, a difficulty which exposes the primitivist's true allegiances is: who are the real "noble savages?" Primitivism is posited upon a uniformitarianism which embraces all classes of men, but the doctrine of taste, which came to be called "sensibility," was considered a special province of that

privileged section of society who were educated and leisured enough to appreciate and afford it. Shaftesbury limited "sensibility" to those he called "virtuosi."

It is not possible to trace exactly how sensibility, natural nobility, "a delicacy of feelings and manners so extreme as to be unhealthy and morbid," and excessive sensitivity to the emotions of others, migrated from the aristocrat's drawing room to the wilds of Oceania, Africa, and America. Lois Whitney attributes sentimental primitivism to the attempts by the popular writer of mid-century to cater to two vogues at the same time (103). However, in view of her careful analysis of the background of primitivist theories, this seems simplistic. The Noble Savage had an ancient provenance. There are two noble savages, Aphra Behn's Oroonoko in the novel of the same name, and Addison's Yarico in the Spectator tale of Inkle and Yarico, (No. 11, Tues. Mar. 13, 1711), who are close enough in time to the Ossianic heroes to be considered important forerunners.

Just as Oroonoko, Yarico and their kind were cast as positive role models for the inhabitants of "civilized" nations, so, too, were the natives of Macpherson's third-century Scotland. In a similar way, Macpherson saw himself in the role of "noble savage," standing in contrast to the effeminacy and corruption of a degenerate culture.

Most obviously, as the representative of a recently absorbed and still deeply mistrusted culture (the last Stuart rebellion, 1745, was within living memory), Macpherson found a way to legitimize his patriotism, and produce acceptable reasons for his nation's superiority, as well as asserting his own. The young man who occasionally visits the pages of Boswell's London Journal is alienated, rebellious, argumentative, over-sensitive, and melancholy. Characteristically he claims to be "very susceptible of tormenting love," (74), and equally characteristically, "he [throws] out wild sallies against all established opinions" (266). Disillusioned with England after seeing "the gaiety and splendor of France and the opulence and cleanliness of Holland ...he said that to retain our high ideas of anything, we should not see it, and that few, if any, people were happy" (249).

In view of his later relations with Johnson, it is interesting that Johnson, at this time, seems to have understood him, particularly his need to defy authority. "I told Mr. Johnson," says Boswell, "what a strange mortal Macpherson was or affected to be; and how he railed at all established systems." "So would he tumble in a hog-sty," said Johnson, "as long as you look at him and cry to him to come out. But let him alone, never mind him and he'll soon give it over" (265).

As has been suggested, Macpherson's need to defy authority extended to Johnson himself. His antagonism to Johnson emerges in this period, long before the passages in Johnson's Journey to the Western Islands which debunked Ossian were published (1775). One of Boswell's anecdotes in his London Journal recounts how Macpherson deprived Johnson of a valued friend when he repeated Johnson's remarks about Thomas Sheridan's pension to Sheridan. (This is the same Mr. Sheridan who is quoted by Boswell at the beginning of this chapter, and also the man who lectured to the members of the Select Society on their pronunciation of the English language in 1761. His greatest claim to fame is that he was the father of the dramatist, Richard Brinsley Sheridan.) "What!" Boswell quotes Johnson as having said, "Has he got a pension? Then it is time for me to give up mine." Macpherson repeated this statement to Sheridan, but not the subsequent reassessment. Johnson, who often spoke hastily, collected himself and asserted, "However, I am glad that Mr. Sheridan has a pension, for he is a good man" (90).

Even in literary matters, Macpherson's assumption of unpopular opinions seems to relate more to his need to be defiant than to any recognition of the merit of his cause. His reaction to Gray's Elegy is a case in point. "We were talking of Gray's fine Elegy in a Churchyard," Boswell

reports. "Hoot! cried Fingal, "to write panegyrics upon a parcel of damned rascals that did nething but plough the land and saw corn." He considered, Boswell tells us, that fighters only should be celebrated (110). Boswell, in a particularly apposite phrase, refers to his compatriot as the "Sublime Savage."

Frye's insight that the Ossianic poems are projections of the psychologically "primitive" into historical primitivism corresponds with other indications of Macpherson's ultimate purpose. For the young poet, the fantasized return to an idealized Scotland represented an attempt to reshape, not only the history of his country, but also his own personal history; his object of desire being a truer self, even if that self must be represented to the world in a false form.

That he assumed the bardic role to do this carries its own implications. The bardic persona, as Frye has shown, is of necessity anti-social.

The poetry of process is oracular, and the medium of the oracle is often in an ecstatic or trance-like state: autonomous voices seem to speak through him, and as he is concerned to utter rather than address, he is turned away from his listeners, so to speak, in a state of rapt self-communion. The free association of words, in which sound is prior to sense, is often a literary way of representing insanity. In Rimbaud's terrifyingly accurate phrase, poetry of the associative or oracular type requires a "dérèglement de tous les sens." Hence the qualities that make a man an oracular poet are often the qualities that work against, and

sometimes destroy, his social personality (317).

Frye conceives of the identification with the bardic persona in literary terms, as carrying metaphoric thinking to its most radical conclusion.

...where metaphor is conceived as part of an oracular and half ecstatic process, there is a direct identification in which the poet himself is involved....In the age of sensibility some of the identifications involving the poet seem manic, like Blake with the Druidic bards or Smart's with Hebrew prophets, or depressive like Cowper's with a scapegoat figure, a stricken deer, a castaway, or merely bizarre like Macpherson's with Ossian or Chatterton's with Rowley. But it is in this psychological self-identification that the central "primitive" quality of this age really emerges (318).

Instead of dismissing this kind of self-identification as bizarre, as Frye does, it can be viewed in a psychoanalytic context. Macpherson's history forms an important part of Phyllis Greenacre's classic psychoanalytic study, "The Impostor." Greenacre finds all the subjects she investigated to have three personality characteristics in common. These are: "a dominant and dynamically active family romance;"..."an intense and circumscribed disturbance of the sense of identity, an infarction in the sense of reality;" and..."a malformation of the superego involving both conscience and ideals" (362). All three are interdependent. A persistence of oedipal problems beyond the latency period contributes to

the disruption of social development and formation of ambition and ideals outside the limited family circle, and also contributes to the incomplete sense of the self as a separate being. "It is the extraordinary and continued pressure in the impostor to live out his fantasy that demands explanation, a living out which has the force of a delusion, ...but it is ordinarily associated with the formal awareness that the claims are false" (362-63).

Macpherson's psychology and the demonstration that he was not a typical impostor will be considered in a later chapter (Chapter 8). He was not psychotic. Nor did he live the kind of fragmentary, dissociated lives of the other impostors in Greenacre's study. Yet one cannot but be struck by the arrogance and anger he exhibited when accused of forgery, and the fact that he never admitted being more than a mere translator of the Ossianic fragments and epics. His reaction to Hume, who in investigating the allegations against Macpherson felt that he was upholding the reputation of Scotland, was typical. Hume had written to Hugh Blair, Ossian's greatest promoter, asking him to get direct testimony from Highlanders, "as particular as it is positive," on the existence of Macpherson's sources.

I am very glad you have undertaken the task which I used the freedom to recommend to you. Nothing less than what you propose will serve the purpose. You need expect no assistance from Macpherson, who flew into a passion when I told

him of the letter I had wrote to you. But you must not mind so strange and heteroclite a mortal, than whom I have ever known a man more perverse and unamiable. He will probably depart for Florida with Governor Johnstone, and I would advise him to travel among the Chickisaws or Cherokees in order to tame him and civilize him (Mossner 91).

Macpherson, as has been stated, acted even less admirably with Johnson, after he learned of Johnson's condemnation in his Journey to the Western Islands. Johnson even resorted to carrying a wooden cudgel during this period as a form of self-protection. /3/

The point, as I see it, is that Macpherson persisted in his delusional identification with Ossian long after the excitement surrounding the publication of the poems had ceased, and when the controversy over their authenticity had become something of a dead issue. He could have ascribed his claims of authorship to the follies of youth and let that aspect of his life be buried. Instead, "he maintained that he would continue to work on 'the originals' of which he had almost none, and more grotesquely, he developed the idea that he could work by substituting Greek for Gaelic characters," because of his conviction the the Scots of the third century utilized the Greek alphabet (Greenacre 365, but also see page 254). This irrational behavior contrasts markedly with the political astuteness and practicality he displayed in other

aspects of his life.

Other evidence which fits Greenacre's psychological profile of the impostor comes from the poems themselves. Their most characteristic note, widely commented on in the period, is what William Hazlitt called "privation," an all-pervasive sense of loss. From its sublime autumnal landscape to its fragmented structure, Ossianic poetry chronicles loss, as Ossian, "the last of his race," mourns a departed love, his nation's dead heroes who were also his relatives and friends, the demise of his people. And while it is true that there is this propulsive patriotism at work (both Fingal and Temora chronicle Scottish victories over Scandinavian invaders), what is evenly more strongly felt is this overwhelming sense of privation.

The river of time sweeps away all certainties, all personal connections. Lovers die young and only reunite when one of them is dying (Connal and many others); a father (Starno) kills the daughter who falls in love with the enemy king and betrays him (Agandecca); a young warrior mistakes his love for an enemy soldier and kills her (Comal and Galbina); a maiden kills herself after she is violated (Oithona). There is no suggestion that people can live long, happily married lives together, that it is possible to fall in love again after one relationship has ended, or that an attachment can be impermanent and yet

life-enhancing. Sexual love in the Ossianic poems is portrayed as irrevocable, eternal and ultimately fatal.

This sense of privation permeates one of the most sentimental of all reader responses to Ossianic poetry, Nathan Drake's essay, "On the Blindness of Homer, Ossian and Milton." Blindness renders Homer's situation pitiful, in Drake's opinion, but Ossian's infinitely more pitiful because "he is not only blind, and the greatest of the bards of his country as was Homer, but he is, also, the last of a race of unrivalled warriors, and the only surviving offspring of their most renowned chieftain...." Quoting Sir John Sinclair's defense of the poems, Drake notes that Ossian's name and epithet, Ossian the blind, Ossian dall, has become proverbial in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland to signify "a man who has had the misfortune to survive his kindred" (192). Drake invokes the familiar Homer-Ossian comparison in the service of the sentimental reaction--Ossian inspires "a deeper tinge of pathos" because the loss of his sight is compounded by the loss of his family, whose members were successors in a royal lineage.

We consequently find, in Ossian, the result of a deeper and more varied pressure of calamity than could possibly have occurred to Homer, occupying as he did, a much humbler station in society; for the poet of the Highlands mourned not merely for his own personal privations, but for the extinction of the royal house, and the comparative

degeneracy of his countrymen, he felt not only as a bard, but as a warrior and legislator (192).

Beyond the blindness and old age of the fallen warrior, which he accepts with a "dignified and philosophic resignation...mingled with the most pathetic expression of his sufferings and sorrows," Drake stresses the extraordinary devotion of Malvina to her father-in-law. Drake's "striking and picturesque," evocation of the young-old contrast which served as a frontispiece to the Poems of Ossian reveals what sentimentalists found to admire in Macpherson's poetry.

Fallen from his high estate, blind, forlorn, and silvered over with age, we behold the once mighty minstrel of Morven, leaning on the arm of the beautiful Malvina; she who had loved the noble son with a pure and constant affection, and now found her greatest pleasure in ministering to the wants of his father.

There is nothing, indeed, in the history of human affection, more hallowed and more lovely than the various representations which are given us in the works of Ossian, of the intercourse subsisting between the aged poet and his youthful attendant; they are, in short, exquisite lessons of mutual charity and kindness and they place both characters in the most interesting points of view (194).

In summary, the negative connotations attached to the term "sentimentality" in the twentieth century disguise a movement which had validity and important consequences in its heyday. And while we can find mawkish emotionalism, along with overly benign neglect for the less pleasant

aspects of human nature in its extreme manifestations, the movement also embodied a spiritual aim to celebrate the goodness of man, and a reformist zeal to improve the circumstances of those in need.

Although the psychopathology of the impostor may seem out of place in a study of eighteenth-century sentimentalism, there is a relationship between them, besides the obvious fact that a notable impostor produced a series of works which came to be labelled sentimental--sentimentalism is only one manifestation of this age's fascination with human psychology. All the scientific, philosophical, and psychological trends discussed in the previous pages: Lockean empiricism, the consciousness of history and new awareness of personal identity, benevolism, primitivism, as well as the literature of process, can be related to a growing need in the century to peer into the human soul and seek out that which is essential. Lockean empiricism provided an impetus to the search because it accepted none of the old answers; insisting that knowledge can only be gained from experience and that all traditional suppositions about human nature and human relations should be subject to reexamination.

Benevolism and sentimentalism seem to make enormous claims for human nature, claims which could not be substantiated in either the long or the short run.

(Brissenden singles out the French Revolution as a major cause of the disillusionment with Sentimentalist optimism.) The importance of the Ossianic poems in this context is that those who believed in them--and these advocates were passionate and widespread--found a human spirit with which they could identify, and a group of human beings in whom they could believe. For Sheridan and Mrs. Sheridan, Nathan Drake, and many like them, The Poems of Ossian were an education in feeling.

Notes

1. Martin Price in the introduction to the Eighteenth Century Studies issue devoted to the topic of Sensibility, (Vol. 4, 1970), discusses the Symposium on Periods in the 1970 issue of NLH. Price quotes Lawrence Lipking who points out that any label we choose for identifying the English literature of the late Eighteenth Century whether it is "the Georgian Age, the Age of Sensibility, Pre-Romanticism, Neoclassicism, the Age of Revolution, the Enlightenment, the Age of Prose, Sturm and Drang, The Age of Johnson or even, at last, the Late Eighteenth-Century [reveals] our own premises." Lipking also suggests that various types of periodization are desirable; their very diversity "may be the best safeguard we possess against our own historical preoccupations." Price makes the interesting suggestion that "sensibility" is a useful term because it indicates "that this occasion may be only one of a recurrent tendency in the arts, variously realized at different historical moments."

2. The best modern discussion of the fortunes of the term "sentimental" is Erik Erametsa, The Word Sentimental and its Derivatives... Helsinki, 1951. Brissenden (160) cites an early example, George Colman's play, Polly Honeycombe (1760) for a derogative use of "sentimental."

3. See n. 2, pages 312-13, for more information on Johnson's commitment to proving that the Ossianic poetry was a hoax.

James Macpherson and the Scottish Enlightenment

Within the last two decades, a good deal of scholarly attention has focused on the genesis of "The Awakening," "The Scottish Renaissance" or more commonly, "The Scottish Enlightenment," and the distinctive character of Scottish Enlightenment thought. /1/ And while scholars have come to a consensus that the period and place which produced David Hume, Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson, William Robertson and Thomas Reid (among many others) merit analysis, neither the origins, nor the specific forms this enlightenment assumed, have been agreed upon. Scholars cannot not even decide on the specific period when this enlightenment flourished. In fact, as Donald J. Withrington has recently demonstrated in an article entitled "What was Distinctive about the Scottish Enlightenment?" the scholarship on this period seems particularly subject to personal bias. /2/

The biases of modern scholars, to the extent that they reproduce the eighteenth-century situation, are relevant to the content of this chapter, which is concerned with tracing the Enlightenment roots of the Ossianic poems, their roots in the intellectual developments of their time, as well as their genesis in the network of personal relationships among Scottish Enlightenment thinkers. The

recognition that some of those who have recently written on this period cannot yet give the Scots their due and continue to look elsewhere for explanations of Enlightenment achievements reinforces our impression of the negative conditions under which the Ossianic poems were created and promoted.

Withrington's article reveals that modern scholarship on this period was stimulated by the insight that the Scottish Enlightenment was a problem. "How," Withrington asks, paraphrasing Professor Hugh Trevor-Roper, Lord Dacre, "could benighted, poverty-stricken, kirk dominated, inward-looking Scotland of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries have ever been able by itself to bring forth such majestic intellectual development, to lead the world in such a range of intellectual enquiries?" (11). Trevor-Roper's ground-breaking paper, called simply "The Scottish Enlightenment," which was read before the Second International Congress on the Enlightenment in 1967, encouraged a number of writers who agreed with him that Scotland, in and of itself, was not capable of such intellectual energy, and that the explanation for this "puzzling phenomenon" is to be found in the activity of groups outside the mainstream of Scottish life. Trevor-Roper credited the Episcopalian, Jacobite society of North-East Scotland with much of the responsibility for the

intellectual developments of the period /3/.

Nicholas Phillipson's 1973 article, "Towards A Definition of the Scottish Enlightenment" is in line with the Trevor-Roper approach. Phillipson also finds the Scottish Enlightenment "one of the most puzzling phenomena of eighteenth-century cultural history" (125). In Phillipson's version, however, it is not the Jacobites who are given the honors, but the scholars identified with the city of Edinburgh. However, Phillipson's Scottish Enlightenment is also not an indigenous movement; it was only possible after the upheavals in Scottish society caused by the Union of 1707, which opened opportunities for ideas that would have previously been unacceptable. As many of those ideas came from the friendly nation of France, Withrington attributes Phillipson's focus on Edinburgh to his conscious or unconscious assumption that the Scottish situation was analogous to that of the French, and that Edinburgh could be compared to Paris, the educational, ecclesiastical and legal capital of its country. Therefore, it is reasonable to concentrate one's attention on the events and ideas emanating from Edinburgh (12).

Another writer who comes under Withrington's scrutiny is Dr. John Robertson. Robertson's book, The Scottish Enlightenment and the Militia Question (1985), is mainly

concerned with the Militia issue (Scotch agitation for the right to bear arms, which was lost after the Act of Union with Britain in 1707); yet he, also, does not hesitate to comment on the quality of Scottish intellectual life during this period. Unable to find internal explanations, Robertson maintains that "what Scotland could not provide were the intellectual resources with which to pursue the interest: these had to come from the common stock of European thought," and from particular "alien" groups within the country (12).

If the Trevor-Roper approach is to deny the possibility of an indigenous Scottish Enlightenment (this could be called "the outlander hypothesis"), another similar approach is to limit the Enlightenment thinkers to a small group of men, thereby suggesting the limited nature of the movement. For Phillipson only those living in the environs of Edinburgh qualify. For Trevor-Roper the Scottish Enlightenment encompassed Hutcheson, Hume, Ferguson, Robertson, Smith and Millar (excluding, Withrington notes, Thomas Reid and Dugald Stewart). Richard B. Sher, in a very recent book, Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: the Moderate Literati of Edinburgh (1985), studies the contributions of the group Sher has named "The Moderate literati," five influential Church of Scotland ministers whose lives and work illuminate the very profound

cultural changes which occurred in the middle years of the eighteenth century. These five were Hugh Blair, Alexander Carlyle, Adam Ferguson, John Home, and William Robertson. Sher is careful to note that while these five do not constitute the whole of the Scottish Enlightenment, the "extensive network of experiences, beliefs, values and sentiments that defined their collective identity as a distinctive coterie" was at the center of Enlightenment life, and he echoes Ernest Mossner's insight that "the philosophy of Moderatism...was part and parcel of the philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment" (15-16). Sher's five, especially Home, Ferguson, and Blair, and their relationship to the genesis and promotion of Ossian, will assume a major role in this study.

The Trevor-Roper faction has its opponents, particularly a group of writers who focus on the work of Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun in their efforts to prove that the Scottish Enlightenment is basically a home-grown movement. The chief spokesman for this group is Professor J. G. A. Pocock, who has sponsored Fletcher as theorist of "civic morality," a term which in Withrington's words has become "the defining element of Enlightenment in Britain, particularly in Scotland." Once again, with this group, we have an attempt to narrow the dimensions of a very grand and complex development to a limited number of ideas.

Fletcher was a native Scotsman who contributed to the debates on the issue of union with England in the Edinburgh Parliament, but his strongly argued federalist views could not have had much influence in the Scotland which accepted the Union, and, as Withrington points out, his elitist notions of education were counter to the theories and practice of eighteenth-century Scotland. The Scottish success in educating large numbers of the populace is often cited as one reason why Enlightenment ideals--native or imported--had the appeal they did.

The debate about what time span to allot to the Scottish Enlightenment is a byproduct of the propensity to attribute Scottish achievements to outside influences: the scholars who concentrate on late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century figures such as Andrew Fletcher are concerned with proving that pre-Union Scotland was indeed capable of producing her own philosophers. Against the pre-Union emphasis is Trevor-Roper's own definition of the Scottish Enlightenment as "that efflorescence of intellectual vitality that became obvious after the defeat of the last Jacobite rebellion in 1745" and lasted through the next four or five decades ("The Scottish Enlightenment," 1637; also see Sher, Moderate Literati 4-5). Sher makes a case for the second quarter of the century, the years in which Hume's Treatise of Human Nature

made an appearance and when Francis Hutcheson taught. Scottish intellectual vitality did not wane with the beginning of the nineteenth century, when such men as Sir Walter Scott, Francis Jeffrey, and Sir William Hamilton distinguished themselves. However, confining this movement to the middle years of the eighteenth century, the years of Hume and Adam Smith, when the "Science of Man" was making great headway, and when the the Church of Scotland was undergoing an extensive liberalization, makes a good deal of sense.

Modern scholars, as we have seen, have disagreed on the origin and many specific aspects of Enlightenment achievement, but the general outlines of Scottish accomplishment during this period are clear. Most specialists stress the Scottish philosophers' intent to create a new "Science of Man" (the phrase is David Hume's) based on empirical investigations of mind and behavior. Their goals were ethical and moral: to determine how to improve society and the human condition; but their approach was scientific in the spirit of Newton and Locke. They believed that "the only data for a modern philosopher to reason about were those that could be observed."

Nicholas Phillipson's 1981 article, "The Scottish Enlightenment," (contributed to a text which views the

Enlightenment as a series of separate and discrete "enlightenments" in Europe and the colonies), /4/ by clarifying the relationship between this "Science of Man," the development of sociology, and the Scotch approach to history, goes some way towards a definition of the movement:

Intellectually, the importance of this enquiry into the Science of Man lies in the fact that it was the first attempt to make a genuinely sociological study of man, society and history. For the Scots were able to show how men's personalities were shaped by their social experience and how the political, economic and cultural institutions of society were shaped by men's expectations of them. They thought that men were sociable beings who relied on others for the satisfaction of their moral, economic and political needs. They were actors continually playing different roles in different scenes of life, seeking always to maintain a sense of identity while doing so. Society was an organization designed to satisfy the needs of those who belong to it and its structure was determined as much by the distribution of property, the division of labor and the mores of its inhabitants as by the form of its constitution. History was the story of the process by which changing property relations and changing expectations as well as the struggles for power and the preservation of constitutional liberties shaped a nation's progress from a state of rudeness to one of refinement. And through it all ran the moral concern that animated eighteenth-century Scottish culture at large-- that, properly conducted, such an enquiry would help to build a society of happier men and better citizens (21).

Although the French and Scottish Enlightenments shared this basic aim of improving social institutions, and though

there was a constant exchange of ideas between the two countries, the Scottish Enlightenment had a decidedly different character from its French counterpart. The Enlightenments of both countries were essentially movements towards secularism and away from a dependence on theological authoritarianism, but the Scottish Enlightenment had a more pragmatic cast. Perhaps because of the different nature of the relationship between individual and established authorities, whether church or state, in Scotland and France, the Scottish thinkers were reformers rather than revolutionaries. William C. Lehmann's biography of Lord Kames isolates the particular concerns of the Scottish thinkers:

While they were men engaged in inquiries into the nature of the state and into the functions of law and government and were greatly concerned with the advancement of liberty, they were not to any marked extent "politically" minded, and a demand for a radical reform of society and state, such as characterized many French thinkers, and as characterized such of their English followers as Price and Godwin, was seldom heard here. Demands for human betterment took on a more moderate, a more pragmatic character. Not "Ecrasez l'infame!", or "expropriate the landlords," but improvement of living conditions, more humane laws of land-tenure, advancement of education, removal of the survival of feudalism and superstition --these were the things which seriously engaged men of enlightenment here (Lord Kames xii-xiii).

It is, according to Lehmann, this spirit of pragmatism "in the sense of a certain realism or down-to earthness as

distinguished from anything that savored of utopianism" which is an essential characteristic of the Scottish Enlightenment, and which governs such works as Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations or Steuart's Principals of Political Economy (xiii).

The Ossianic phenomenon, then, gains relevance if it is understood as part of the general concerns of Scottish Enlightenment thinkers; if it is seen in the context of their investigations into the human mind and behavior, into the way men construct their societies and how the nature of those societies affects the way people treat one another. Viewed from this perspective the Ossianic poems are singularly "authentic," not in the sense that they are genuine relics of an ancient tradition, but in the way in which they mirror contemporary concerns and desires. They vivify through the medium of an idealized society a host of moral, political, historical, and sociological issues and cherished theories. It is no wonder that the literati and guiding lights of the Scottish Enlightenment, with notable exceptions (especially David Hume), promoted the poems so strenuously. These men were, to no small degree, responsible for their having been created in the first place.

Understanding how the Edinburgh literati shaped the Ossianic poems entails a revision of the familiar view of

James Macpherson as a literary hack, hawking his forgeries to an enthusiastic and naive audience. In reality, the Ossian phenomenon was more the result of a collaboration--one young, ambitious, and, as it later turned out, rather shrewd poet, and a group of influential ministers who were associated with the Moderate party of the Presbyterian Church, along with their influential friends. /5/.

Each of the five "Moderate literati" Richard Sher lists (Blair, Carlyle, Home, Ferguson and Robertson) had a major role in the culture of mid-century Scotland. /6/ Their activities were far-reaching, extending into most of the vital institutions of Scottish life. They were all ministers and scholars involved in church and educational reform, in scholarship and politics, in literature and science. They made notable contributions to historiography and the social science which was later to be called sociology. They were prime movers in the cultural life of their community, helping to found clubs and societies which enriched the intellectual and cultural as well as the social life of the day. And they were all, to a greater or lesser degree, involved in the cause of Ossian.

Although some scholars may not want to accept a connection, it does seem rather obvious that the competitiveness and ambition exhibited by many Scotsmen during this period is related to the loss of a national

identity after the Union, and especially after the devastating events of 1745, when Jacobite hopes were extinguished forever and England took harsh measures to ensure that Highland customs and language would be forgotten. /7/ The Scot of this post-45 period (just those years in which the Scottish Enlightenment burned brightest) was caught in a double allegiance: to England and to an irretrievable Scotland, the home of his ancestors.

Recognizing that Scotland historically was the home of two distinct groups, Lowlanders and Highlanders, and that the Lowlanders had stronger ties to England, it is still true that many Lowlanders felt a strong pull towards their ancestral homeland and, therefore, a divided loyalty. The Moderate literati, for example, who were all Lowlanders with the exception of Adam Ferguson, all felt the pull of this ancestral Scotland although they would have identified themselves as British patriots, if they were asked. In Sher's words:

Insofar as they approved of the Revolution Settlement of 1688-1690, the Union of 1707, the Hanoverian Succession of 1714, and the eighteenth-century constitution generally, all Whig-Presbyterian conservatives in Scotland were British patriots, eager to defend established institutions against perceived threats from Jacobites, radical Whigs, and foreign foes. Yet those same British patriots could sometimes be driven to espouse a very different set of values that may--with caution--be called "Scottish nationalism"....[The term] refers chiefly to the passionate attachment and deep pride that many

eighteenth-century Scots felt for their native land, particularly when they believed it was being unjustly maligned by "John Bull" (Moderate Literati 17-18).

The genesis and promotion of the Ossianic poems is one major chapter in the development of "Scottish nationalism," and, indeed, was a major stimulus to nationalistic movements in other countries as well, especially Germany. However, a discussion of the uses to which the Germans put Ossian is beyond the scope of this undertaking. /8/ Our immediate focus must be on the ideals and issues which motivated the men responsible for Ossian. And because three of these men met in the Scottish resort town of Moffat in late September, 1759, the narrative of Ossianic genesis has a convenient starting point.

While older versions of the meeting between John Home and James Macpherson at Moffat imply that it was an accidental encounter (Home was there for a cure and Macpherson was there with the young laird whose education he was overseeing), there is evidence to suggest that Macpherson was seeking Home out. It seems that both men had a friend in common who was actively promoting a meeting between them. This friend was Adam Ferguson. Ferguson had known Home since their college days at the University of Edinburgh and had recently become acquainted with Macpherson. Ferguson had entertained Macpherson at his

family home in Perthshire early in 1759 (Macpherson's pupil was the son of a Perthshire laird, Graham of Balgowan), and there is reason to believe that they had discussed Macpherson's collection of Gaelic manuscripts at this meeting. /9/

So Macpherson was armed with an introduction when he approached Home, the famous author of Douglas. And of course the creator of Douglas would naturally be interested in the young poet who himself had written a poem championing ancient Scottish virtues and who possessed a number of Gaelic manuscripts. Would not Scottish literature be enhanced if it could be demonstrated that these poems had some value? There was a precedent. In 1756, the same year Douglas was produced, a Scottish schoolmaster, Jerome Stone, had published a translation of a Gaelic poem called "Albin and the Daughter of Mey." /10/ In fact, Macpherson had gained access to some of Jerome Stone's manuscripts after Stone's death, later in that same year. He also knew the poems in the Dean of Lismore's volume, Leabhar na Feinne, which was a collection of Gaelic ballads gathered in the early sixteenth century (the MSS is dated 1512). Several of these poems are headed "Auctor hujus Ossin" (Colgan 344).

Home entreated Macpherson to translate a few of these Gaelic "fragments," and a few days later Macpherson brought

him "The Death of Oscar." Several more translations followed, so that by the time Home was joined by Alexander Carlyle on October 2, Home had a small group of translations to show to his friend. Carlyle was delighted that his friend Home "had at last found what he had long been looking for, a person who could make him acquainted with ancient Highland poetry, of which he had heard so much." And convinced as to the value of this "precious discovery," Home took the translations to several friends in Edinburgh: Ferguson, Hugh Blair, William Robertson, Patrick Murray, Lord Elibank and almost certainly, Lord Bute (Sher, Moderate Literati 244).

So here was the genesis of the Ossianic poems. Far from being the inspiration of one, lone, literary hack, they were the creation of a group of men who were all interested in what John Hill Burton, David Hume's nineteenth-century biographer, called "the resuscitation of early national literature." At the core of this group were those Moderate ministers whom Sher calls the "Moderate literati." While we can credit these ministers with achievements in a variety of different fields (belles lettres, history, moral philosophy), a common preoccupation with Scottish national identity can be traced through many of their works, although it finds expression in different ways.

Ossian as a manifestation of Scottish patriotism is one thread which connects a number of apparently unrelated literary productions. The works of the Moderate literati and their contemporaries which bear some relation to Ossian will be discussed in much greater detail later in this chapter. Here we can take note of the fact that not only was Hugh Blair instrumental in arranging for the publication of Macpherson's fragments; he also included a discussion of early poetry, in the form of Ossian's poems, in the series of lectures on rhetoric and belles lettres which he was preparing at the time (see page 118). Ferguson's Essay on the History of Civil Society is another work which had its origins in the discussions on the manners, language, and poetry of early man held by Adam Smith, Lord Kames, David Hume and others during the 1740s and 50s. Likewise, William Robertson's History of America looked at a culture contemporary with his own, yet primitive in nature.

The collaborative genesis of the Ossianic poems is confirmed by contemporary accounts. Those who were at Moffat stress how reluctant Macpherson was to make the translations. In his response to the inquiries made by Henry Mackenzie's Highland Society Committee forty years later, Home remembers that he had to coax Macpherson "with some difficulty" into turning his Gaelic fragments into

English (App. 4, 69). Blair says the same thing in his letter to the Committee. He recalls that Macpherson was "extremely reluctant and averse" to doing the work and did so after "much and repeated importunity" (57). David Hume's version of the story confirms the others. In a letter to an unknown correspondent dated from Edinburgh, August 16, 1760, Hume speaks about his dawning suspicions that the Ossianic poems were not authentic. "The first time I was shown the copies of some of them in manuscript, I was inclined to be a little incredulous on that head; but Mr. Home removed my scruples, by informing me of the manner in which he procured them from Mr. Macpherson, the translator."

Macpherson's discomfort with his assigned task seemed to indicate that he was acting in good faith at the time:

These two gentlemen [Home and Macpherson] were drinking the waters together at Moffat last Autumn, when their conversation fell upon Highland poetry, which Mr. Macpherson extolled very highly. Our friend, who knew him to be a good scholar, and a man of taste, found his curiosity excited, and asked whether he had ever translated any of them. Mr. Macpherson replied, that he never attempted any such thing; and doubted whether it was possible to transfuse such beauties into our language; but, for Mr. Home's satisfaction, and in order to give him a general notion of the strain of that wild poetry, he would endeavor to turn one of them into English. He accordingly brought him one next day, which our friend was so much pleased with that he never ceased soliciting Mr. Macpherson, till he insensibly produced that small volume which has

been published (Burton, Life and Correspondence of Hume 1: 463).

Macpherson, himself, in his letters to George Lawrie, a minister friend who was also visiting Moffat during those crucial days, conveys his anxiety and insecurity about the work he was asked to do. Of the four letters to Lawrie in the Yale University Library, the one dated Balgowan, 18th March 1760, is the most revealing. It begins with the report of a missed rendezvous and ends with a self-deprecating comment. It shows a far younger, less confident Macpherson than the arrogant and politically powerful propagandist who had the assurance to threaten Samuel Johnson in the 1770s.

The letter begins with the regret that Macpherson had not reconnected with his friend after an earlier meeting. Apparently, Macpherson had planned to meet with Lawrie after this earlier encounter but had missed him. Significantly, his main regret is that he had been unable to ask him for any "Irish fragments" Lawrie might have. The intent is to get more translatable material for Hugh Blair.

I had it much in my head to ask of you all the coppies of the Irish fragments you have, as I have not been at the pains of keeping a copy of them myself; nor so much as remember the subject of some of them. I beg you transmit me in course all those you have in your hands, and you will be sure to have faithfully returned in a few days. Tho' I made a sort of promise to Doctor Blair of sending

more of our Highland Rhapsodies, I would rather chuse he would dispense with it upon several accounts.

But I am a man of my word, and accordingly have made preparations for satisfying his curiosity, if he does not easily pass from it.

I believe first and last I have translated five or six fragments, most of which, if not all, you have. These with other six I have in my hands and have already translated, will make up the dozen required. I could not make out more among my Northern correspondents, tho', they, say themselves, have been at pains to procure them. The truth is they think as little of them as I did myself, and reckon me unreasonably curious.

I have so little esteem for my own abilities that I have no desire my translations should appear in public. Some may find beauties in these fragments, but the generality will not understand them; neither has one so much prospect of fame or profit as to make it worth while either to write notes or illustrations on them; were his abilities and liesure greater than mine. However I shall transmit a dozen in a few weeks to the Doctor, and let him and the geni do what seems fit. I am sure they will not readily expose me, if they are not really worth the attention of the Publick, as it was with reluctance, and out of no desire of applause, I begun to translate them at all.

I shall be glad for the honour of my country if they are approven, and if otherwise, I have the comfort my expectations of them were not high. I am sorry I have no better subject to entertain you with; or to merit your acquaintance with some thing more than a flimsy piece of poetry. My complements to Miss Lawrie, all my friends of your acquaintance, and the good rector, whose acquaintance I am sorry I so long wanted. Direct to me simply at Balgowan by Perth. Write me immediately with these coppies. /11/

Several themes emerge from this very interesting letter. Macpherson's devaluing of the poetry, his

self-doubts and tentativeness about the Ossianic venture, his placing the responsibility on Blair and his associates for its success or failure, the association between publication of the poems and his country's honor can all be discerned. His disclaimer of any desire for fame can certainly be taken with a grain of salt (he was, after all, a published poet), but the clear impression is left that the publication of the Fragments of Ancient Poetry by Ossian the Son of Fingal is entirely out of his hands. He can only hope that Blair and the rest of the "genii" will not readily "expose" him (expose here means publish, yet its use in this context is surely revealing). Macpherson's anxiety to receive additional examples of Erse poetry from Lawrie, indicated by his stress on the request at the beginning and ending of the letter, also reveals how much he wants to please Blair and company by providing more material to be translated.

Although Macpherson's claim that he had uncovered and translated third century Scottish poetry cannot be justified, it is easy to understand how he could become carried away by the enthusiasm of his mentors, particularly Blair, who took responsibility for seeing that Macpherson completed the translations and saw them through publication. It is often noted that Macpherson was employed in the rather demeaning position of tutor when he

met John Home at Moffat, but it is rarely observed that he did not have a university degree although he had attended both of the Aberdeen colleges, King's and Marischal. His prospects could not have seemed bright at this time, and he must have felt that the Doctor and the rest of the "genii" were offering him a golden opportunity.

On the other side, the "Cabal," as Blair and his friends were called at the time, who were primed to promote a Scottish literary heritage, had made a find. They had discovered the person with the means (Macpherson knew some Gaelic and had a collection of Gaelic poetry), and the ability (Macpherson had two poems in the Scots Magazine to his credit) to make adequate translations of "Ossianic" poetry. The word "translation" should be stressed, however, because, as Blair makes clear in his letter to Hume discussed below, Blair did not think that Macpherson had the talent to compose Ossianic poetry.

Hugh Blair's rather remarkable suspension of disbelief in the early stages of the project is illuminated his letter to David Hume. Hume by this time is pretty well convinced that Macpherson's Ossianic translations are fabrications and has written to Blair, asking him to obtain the original manuscripts and testimonies which will insure the authenticity of the poems. "My present purpose,

therefore, is to apply to you, in the name of all men of letters of this, and I may say of all other countries, to establish this capital point, and to give us proof that these poems are, I do not say as ancient as the age of Severus, but that they were not forged within these five years by James Macpherson" (Burton 1: 466).

Blair's reply dated 29th of September, 1763, gives a number of reasons "aside from their internal characters" which attest to the authenticity of the poems. A major argument for authenticity resides in the person of the translator. Blair does not believe that Macpherson has the talent or the perseverance to carry through the deception. "Neither Macpherson's parts, though good, nor his industry, were equal to such a forgery." He also recalls the events which led up to the translations. "The whole publication, you know, was in its first rise accidental. Macpherson was entreated and dragged into it. Some of the MSS. sent to him passed through my hands. Several of them he translated, in a manner under my eye. He gave these naive and genuine accounts of them, which bore plain characters of truth. What he said was often confirmed to me by others." And beside the testimony he had from others, Blair cannot believe that Macpherson "would venture to forge such a body of poetry" when such poetry was well-known throughout the Highlands, and "he could have been refuted and exposed by every one of his own

countrymen." "Who but John Bull," Blair exclaims, "could entertain the belief of an imposture so incredible as this?" The rest of the letter goes on to report in detail the correspondents he applied to in the Highlands for additional confirmation of the authenticity of the poems (Burton 1: 468-69).

The Scots who investigated the origins of early societies and the evolution of social institutions were themselves a close-knit group involved in a network of interconnected relationships. This point was made before, but it should be emphasized, as it helps to explain why opposition to Ossian among the Scots was so muted. Those who doubted were undoubtedly quiet for political reasons, but also because they hesitated to offend their friends. Hume, for example, wrote a pamphlet questioning Ossianic authenticity, the "Essay on the Authenticity of Ossian's Poems," but never published it, probably in deference to Hugh Blair. According to John Hill Burton, Hume's nineteenth-century biographer, "It is probable that the sole reason why Hume never published this detection, was a kindly feeling to his friend Dr. Blair against whom he might not want to appear in a controversy, where the critical powers of the latter would be so severely tested" (Burton 2: 85).

In an age of clubs and societies, Scotch clubs were

preeminent, rivalling the universities in their contributions to Scotch intellectual life. Friendships flourished in the convivial atmosphere of the clubs, but they had a more serious purpose, and many of the vital issues of the day were introduced and debated under the auspices of one society or another. One early club, the Philosophical Club, was originally founded in 1731 as a medical society. However, the agenda of the society broadened to other areas: a paper read before the Philosophical Society by Sir John Clerk of Pencuik in 1742 was titled "An Inquiry into the Ancient Languages of Great Britain." In 1754 the Select Society debated "whether ought we to prefer ancient or modern manners with regard to the condition and treatment of women?" and "whether the difference of national characters be chiefly owing to the nature of different climates, or to moral and political causes?" indicating that historical relativism and primitivism were part of the contemporary horizon long before the Ossianic poems appeared. (Steeves 75; Dugald Stewart 316).

The most important of the Scottish clubs in the 1750s and 60s, and the one with the strongest relationship to Ossian, was the Select Society of Edinburgh. It was started in 1754 by Hume, Adam Smith, Lord Kames, the younger Allan Ramsay, and a small group of others to

"improve themselves in reasoning and eloquence, and by the freedom of debate, to discover the most effectual means of promoting the good of the country." This aim must have had a wide appeal, for the club was soon swamped with requests for membership. By 1759 there were 135 members and there would have been many more if all those who inquired had been accommodated. It is noteworthy that these members were not only the acknowledged intellectuals of the country but also those in, or soon to be in, positions of political power. "Well over three-quarters were to fill significant and efficient places in government, in the military and ecclestical establishments, and in the universities" (Phillipson, "Towards A Definition..." 139).

The fact that these prominent citizens first learned of the Poems of Ossian at one of the meetings of their own Select Society in 1759 (transcripts of the manuscript which was to be published as Fragments of Ancient Poetry... were presented by John Home) goes some way in explaining why the Scots supported Ossian so enthusiastically. The manuscript had the backing of the author of Douglas, and, when Blair took up the standard of Ossian, of one of their most respected intellectuals.

The Select Society declined in the 1760s for reasons which also have some bearing on the Ossianic question. In 1761 Thomas Sheridan, the itinerant elocution teacher,

persuaded a good many of the members to take up the cause of improving their language by eradicating Scottish pronunciation and substituting English in its place. Sheridan's popular lectures, delivered in a "rich Irish brogue," led to the establishing of a satellite club, the Select Society for Promoting the Reading and Speaking of the English Language in Scotland. And although the aims of this organization were supported by the intelligentsia, the general public was less sympathetic. In Steeves's words, "the plan met with a general ridicule which brought it to an ignominious end; and with the decay of the fad, the Select Society itself ceased to be" (85). This anecdote provides another instance of the Scot's ambivalence towards being identified as a member of what the twentieth century would call a "minority group," and is consistent with the "dissociation of sensibility" which David Daiches saw at the center of Scotch life and art (see pages 263-65). Obviously, eliminating the accent which identified the Scot as a member of a a distrusted minority group would allow him greater access to the privileges of the majority, but it would also be a renunciation of his native heritage, and a repudiation of some aspect of himself. With this in mind, we can link the Ossianic imposture to part of a much larger imposture: that movement across the Tweed which allowed the Scot to assimilate into English life. The

Ossianic poems supplied a fantasy heritage suitable for the ideals of an age of sensibility, but many Scots were willing to abandon any connection to their native land. The expatriate Scottish poet David Malloch (1705-1765), for example, changed his surname to Mallet, claiming that "there is not one Englishman that can pronounce" Malloch.

/12/

The alternative to denying one's heritage is to strenuously defend it. Scotch patriotism was behind John Home's initial enthusiasm for the Ossianic "fragments" he saw at Moffat. Patriotic motives inspired Alexander Carlyle, and George Lawrie who brought the poetry to Edinburgh with Home, and the efforts of Hugh Blair, William Robertson, and Lord Elibank to seek a publisher for fifteen of Macpherson's "translations." The small book which appeared on June 14, 1760, entitled Fragments of Ancient Poetry, collected in the Highlands of Scotland, with an anonymous preface by Blair, generated a great deal of excitement: excerpts were printed in the Scots Magazine, and a second edition followed the first in record time.

Hugh Blair's preface to the Fragments asserts confidently that these "genuine remains of ancient Scottish poetry," published as "detached pieces in this collection," belonged to a longer work on the wars of Fingal. Not only does Blair assign the last three poems of the collection,

Fragments XII, XIV, and XV, specifically to this epic, but he outlines a plot which conforms to the published Fingal in every important detail. (He spells the name of the enemy country "Lochlyn" instead of Lochlin, the enemy king "Swarthan" instead of Macpherson's Swaran, and the Irish king "Cuchulaid," a spelling which also appears in the Fragments. The Irish king appears in Fingal as "Cuchullin.")

The subject [of this lost epic] is, an invasion of Ireland by Swarthan King of Lochlyn; which is the name of Denmark in the Erse language. Cuchulaid, the General or Chief of the Irish tribes, upon intelligence of the invasion, assembles his forces. Councils are held; and battles fought. But after several unsuccessful engagements, the Irish are forced to submit. At length, Fingal King of Scotland, called in this poem, "The Desert of the hills," arrives with his ships to assist Cuchulaid. He expels the Danes from the country; and returns home victorious (4).

This plot synopsis demonstrates that Macpherson (who supplied Blair with the outline for his "epic") was prepared to find a completed "epic" in the Highlands before he went out to search for it. Moreover, the time period of this poetry, "an area of the most remote antiquity," had already been decided upon, as had its author, Ossian, "the last of the Heroes." And not only was Ossian the last hero, but he was the first bard, "the first of a succession of bards who handed the poetry down "from race to race, some in manuscript, but more by oral tradition." Blair's

assertion in the preface that "there is reason to hope that one work of considerable length, and which deserves to be styled an heroic poem, might be recovered and translated, if encouragement were given to such an undertaking" (4) is prescient, for he was to encourage the recovery of the epic, and when it had been "recovered," he was to supervise its translation.

The search for this epic was not an immediate consequence of Macpherson's first Ossianic success. After the publication of the Fragments, Macpherson's doubts and misgivings returned, and he was again ready to abandon Ossian. To rekindle his enthusiasm, the Edinburgh literati, led by Blair, organized a dinner in Macpherson's honor which was chaired by Patrick Murray, Lord Elibank, and attended by John Home, William Robertson, Adam Ferguson, Robert Chalmers, an Edinburgh merchant, and others. /13/

A subscription campaign which Chalmers opened in Parliament House was designed to subsidize Macpherson's trip to the Highlands in search of the ancient epic. Forty individuals, many of them prominent, contributed £100 towards the recovery of Fingal. The final list included the names of Lord Kames, Adam Ferguson, and William Robertson. Hume's name also appeared on the list, as did that of James Boswell, and Elizabeth Montagu (Schmitz 48).

The first of Macpherson's journeys took him to Perthshire, Argyllshire, and Inverness-shire on the mainland; north to the Hebridean islands of Skye, North and South Uist, and Benbecula; home to Ruthven for a visit, and finally to the Argyllshire coast and the island of Mull (Sher, Edinburgh Literati 246). Armed with introductions from Blair to local nobility and clergymen, James, accompanied by his cousin Lachlan Macpherson who knew Gaelic well, listened to oral recitations of Scots vernacular poetry, and Gaelic poetry, and borrowed Gaelic manuscripts (although it has never been determined exactly what records of recitations or manuscripts Macpherson brought back on either of his two Ossianic journeys). It was on Skye that James met a family also named Macpherson. The minister of Sleat, Rev. John Macpherson, made his own contribution to the Ossianic cause in the form of a monograph, "A Dissertation on the Aera of Ossian," affixed to the 1761 Fingal, which provided the spurious historical background for the epic. The younger John Macpherson had a prominent role in James's later career, when the two Macphersons worked together to promote the interests of the Nabob of Arcot (see n. 3, pages 116-17).

When James returned from this first journey in January of 1761, his Edinburgh friends were close by. Blair, especially, monitored the progress of Macpherson's

"translations" from rooms above Macpherson's in Blackfriar's wynd. Adam Ferguson looked in from time to time. By early spring Macpherson's friends were encouraged enough by his progress with Fingal to urge him to travel with Robert Chalmers to London in search of a publisher. In London he renewed his acquaintance with John Home, who was then employed as Lord Bute's private secretary. The Bute connection was to prove advantageous for Macpherson. Not only did he gain a friend in high places, but Bute was to sponsor, at least partially, Macpherson's second journey, with Home, to the Highlands in the spring and summer of 1761. Home, incidentally, had his own mission in this journey. Inspired by Macpherson's ninth fragment, Home was seeking additional material for a play which he planned to call Rivine. This play was finally produced in 1769 under the title, The Fatal Discovery. (Sher, "Scotch Imposters" 59; also see page 219). By the end of 1761 Macpherson finished his epic, which was actually published in December of 1761, although the first edition gives 1762 as the date.

While the Select Society was involved in the fortunes of Ossian at the beginning of its history, another Scottish society was behind the efforts to determine Ossianic authenticity forty years later. The Highland and Agricultural Society was organized in 1784 to continue the

work of Sir James Sinclair, and improve Scottish agriculture. Significantly, some of the government funds made available to the Society came from the estates seized by England in 1745 from supporters of the Young Pretender (Rogers 229). In 1797, a committee set up by the Society and headed by Henry Mackenzie began an investigation of existing collections of Gaelic poetry and the sources Macpherson had available to him. Their conclusions, published in 1805 as the Report of the Committee of the Highland Society of Scotland, appointed to inquire into the Nature and Authenticity of the poems of Ossian have, in the main, been verified by Derick Thomson in this century. /14/ The Society found that Macpherson based his works on old Gaelic ballads but "was in use to supply chasms, and to give connections, by inserting passages which he did not find, and to add what he conceived to be dignity and delicacy to the original composition, by striking out passages, by softening incidents, by refining the language, in short by changing what he considered as too simple or too rude for a modern ear, and elevating what in his opinion was below the standard of good poetry." (Highland Society Report 151).

The men who were responsible for Ossian were aware that Macpherson took considerable freedom with his material. Adam Ferguson, for example, says in his "testimony" to the

Committee that he "was far from apprehending any imposture" in any of Mr. Macpherson's communications to him. However, when the finished products, Fingal and Temora, appeared, "I was inclined to think some pains must have been bestowed, and even liberties taken, in piecing together what was found in separate or broken fragments, with defects attending all such traditionary strains." Ferguson's defense of Macpherson's treatment of his material is the familiar one that Homer's epics were similarly produced. "May we not, ...recollect a similar tradition relating to the scattered rhapsodies of Homer himself? and as the collector left no intimation of the pains or liberties he took, we embrace Homer, as we now do Ossian, as the sole author of strains which bear his name" (64).

A more significant defense is Ferguson's claim that Macpherson's efforts gave their language, and therefore their native heritage, back to the Scottish people.

When I consider the late fashion of the times, respecting the contents of a language which is now thought so interesting, I am not surprised that the gleanings of Mr. Macpherson has left so little vestige behind. It was a language spoken in the cottage, but not in the parlor, or at the table of any gentleman. Its greatest elegancies were to be learned from herdsmen or deer-stealers. It was connected with disaffection, and proscribed by government. Schools were erected to supplant it, by teaching a different language. There were no books in it, but the manuals of religion, and these in so awkward and clumsy a spelling that few could read them. The fashionable world in the neighbourhood, as usual, derided the tone and

accent of Highlanders, believing their own to be models of elegance and harmony. It was more genteel to be ignorant than knowing of what such a language contained; and it required all the genius, learning, and courage of James Macpherson, to perceive and affirm that the ancient strains of Gaelic poetry might compare with other nations more celebrated (64-65).

Scotch nationalistic pride combined with the dissatisfaction with a subservient and dependent status led to the founding of another club with direct relevance to the Ossianic industry. This was the Poker Club, started in 1762 to promote a Scottish militia. The militia issue touched a nerve with the Scots, revealing how very dependent they were to the English, because, while the provisions of the Act of Union of 1707 allowed them to retain their own legal, religious, and educational institutions, they were forbidden to take up arms in their own defense. Obviously, the lack of a native militia was a great source of shame to an nation which prided herself on her military history, although the issue took on added urgency, when in 1760, during the middle years of the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), a French squadron under Admiral Thurot appeared in Scottish waters.

A Militia Bill was passed by the English Parliament in 1757 which did not mention the Scotch at all, ostensibly because they were too poor to finance their own army. In actuality, the British had not forgotten the "Forty Five"

and were not anxious to encourage a new rebellion. Scotch hopes were disappointed again when an extension of the English Militia Bill was passed in April, 1760 (Sher, "Scotch Imposters" 56-57).

What has all this to do with Ossian? Richard B. Sher sees the Ossianic poems primarily as pieces of propaganda supported by the men we have already come to know in their relations with James Macpherson. In Sher's view, the Militia issue was behind support for Ossian, as it was the stimulus for the founding of the Poker Club in 1762 by this same group of Scottish patriots. The name "Poker" was a private joke, chosen by Adam Ferguson, because the club was established solely to stir up the fires on the Militia issue.

Sher makes a case for a mutually supportive relationship between the club founded solely to agitate for a Scottish militia, and a group of poems highlighting Scotland's glorious past. Not only do the dates coincide (Fingal was published late in 1761, the Poker Club founded early in 1762), but the same individuals were involved in both causes. The poems were promoted because they reinforced that vision of a virtuous, valorous, and militaristic nation which corresponded to the idealized Scotland the Militia men were so anxious to promote.

Scottish literary nationalism was not the only

cause for which Fingal's sharp sword did strike. By bravely performing his duty as king and warrior in a world of continual adversity, by fighting only for public virtue, and above all by successfully defending Scotland against armies of foreign invaders, Fingal raised to epic proportions the theme of martial virtue in the service of national defense that had been suggested in a fragmentary way by Macpherson's first book of Ossianic poetry. By contemporary standards Fingal's forces were in fact nothing but a "Raw Militia"--as Alexander Carlyle later termed the army of Highlanders that had beaten Cope's regulars at Prestonpans in 1745--and it seems likely that Fingal was read by its Scottish patrons as a pro-militia statement. How else can we explain the fact that the men who formed the nucleus of the Edinburgh "cabal" responsible for Fingal also constituted the nucleus of the Poker Club, which came into being within weeks of Fingal's publication for the purpose of spreading Scots militia propaganda? (Sher, "Scotch Imposters" 60).

We are already familiar with most of the people involved. Founding members of the Poker Club included Carlyle, Ferguson and Lord Elibank. Home, Robertson, and Blair were also included in the list of early members (60).

Sher has made a very important contribution to the modern scholarship on Ossian, but he has, by concentrating only on the political aspects of the Ossianic background, ignored other contemporary developments which prepared for Ossian. John Home's fascination with early Gaelic poetry can be seen as a byproduct of an almost exclusively Scottish interest in the earliest periods of human society. The Ossianic era, of course, is a fantasized version of one of these very early cultures, and therefore

can be shown to be a graphic representation of (or at least indebted to) the theories of the Scottish "conjectural historians" who were publishing during this period. And "conjectural history," which can be defined as the speculative reconstruction of the earliest human societies, is just one aspect of the larger study of human history and sociology which Hume called the "Science of Man." Scottish contributions to conjectural history will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Of course, Scottish social science during the Enlightenment years cannot be completely divorced from Scottish politics. The search for origins has to have had some relationship to the cultural deprivations experienced by a dependent nation, and the resulting retrospective reinvention of earlier history; the investigation of progress must have had some connection to the desire to find the means to overcome a subservient status. The Rev. John Macpherson's elaborate monograph on the "aera of Ossian" prefaced to the first edition of Fingal in 1761 can be seen in this context as propaganda: an attempt to devise a history for Scotland which will correspond with his political agenda. His claim that the Celts colonized Scotland before they came to Ireland is motivated by the desire to enhance the honor of his country, the very same motivation behind much of the Ossianic enthusiasm.

Yet Ossian takes on greater meaning and resonance if recognized as a byproduct, however flawed, of the investigations into the origins of human societies conducted by Scottish Enlightenment thinkers. /15/ There is a direct relationship between the scientific study of the human mind and the interest in man's earliest attempts at social organization: it is through these earliest cultures that we can deduce the most basic structures of human interaction and human need.

William Robertson understood this connection very well. In his History of America he shows how the "philosophic" interest in American civilization was kindled when it was recognized that "the contemplation of the condition and character of the Americans in their original state, tended to complete our knowledge of the human species; might enable us to fill up a considerable chasm in the history of its progress; and lead to speculations no less curious than important." Robertson believed that a study of "the conditions and character of the American nations at the time when they became known to the Europeans...is one of the most important as well as instructive researches which can occupy the philosopher or historian." He goes on to explain that

in order to complete the history of the human mind, and attain to a perfect knowledge of its nature and operations, we must contemplate man in

all those various situations wherein he has been placed. We must follow him in his progress through the different stages of society, as he gradually advances from the infant state of civil life towards its maturity and decline. We must observe, at each period, how the faculties of his understanding unfold; we must attend to the efforts of his active powers, watch the various movements of desire and affection, as they rise in his breast, and mark whither they tend, and with what ardour they are exerted (8: 49-50).

America was scrutinized by the eighteenth-century historians as the singular example of an original society contemporaneous with their own, but one society obviously could not serve as the only model for the earliest human cultures, nor was it possible to be positive that earlier societies resembled contemporaneous ones. Robertson recognized the inadequacies of "conjectural history." An investigation into the origin of the Mexican people leads him to speculate that they originated on the continent of Asia. He cannot be sure of the truth of such an important matter but believes that "it would have been improper to omit it in writing the history of America." His opinions on the subject should be recorded. "I have ventured to inquire," he asserts, "but without presuming to decide. Satisfied with offering conjectures, I pretend not to establish any system. When an investigation is, from its nature, so intricate and obscure, that it is impossible to arrive at conclusions which are certain, there may be some merit in pointing out such as are probable" (8: 48-9).

Robertson was operating within the discipline that Dugald Stewart called "Conjectural or Speculative History." The locus classicus, explaining why the Scots had to invent a field of study to account for man's early behavior, is Stewart's Life and Writings of Adam Smith. Stewart is stimulated to give a name to that kind of inquiry which he finds exemplified by Smith's early Dissertation on the Origin of Languages. This work illustrates for Stewart, that "specimen of a particular sort of inquiry, which so far as I know, is entirely modern in origin, and which seems, in a peculiar degree, to have interested Mr. Smith's curiosity." To this "species of philosophical investigation" Stewart gives the name Theoretical or Conjectural History, explaining that the name "coincides pretty nearly in its meaning with that of Natural History, as employed by Mr. Hume, and with what some French writers have called Histoire Raisonnée" (46, 49).

The impetus for such speculations comes, in Stewart's mind, from the observable contrasts between modern and primitive cultures. "When, in such a period of society as that in which we live, we compare our intellectual acquirements, our opinions, manners, and institutions, with those which prevail among rude tribes, it cannot fail to occur to us as an interesting question, by what gradual

steps the transition has been made from the first simple steps of uncultivated nature, to a state of things so wonderful and complicated" (47).

The way in which the Scots systematized this transition from "uncultivated nature" to a much more complicated state of things, from "a state of rudeness to one of refinement" in a theory which differentiated four separate stages of civilization, is an important part of the Ossianic background and we will return to it in the chapter on epic theory. For the moment, however, we should not pass over Stewart's description of the lines of inquiry which conjectural or theoretical history opened up to the Scottish thinkers.

Whence has arisen that systematical beauty which we admire in the structure of a cultivated language; that analogy which runs through the mixture of languages spoken by the most remote and unconnected nations; and those peculiarities by which they are distinguished from one another? Whence the origin of the different sciences and the different arts; and by what chain has the mind been led from the first rudiments to their last and most refined improvements? Whence the astonishing fabric of the political union; the fundamental principles which are common to all governments; and the different forms which civilized society has assumed in different ages of the world? (47)

In one respect Stewart is reconstructing the spirit of the 1740s and 1750s, when these kinds of questions were in the air. Yet since his memoir of Smith was written in

1793, this passage can also be seen as a description of what the conjectural historians, (who were, not coincidentally, either Moderate literati or their good friends), had actually achieved. /16/ The same men who sponsored Macpherson wrote scholarly treatises on the origins of political systems, or histories of Scotland. Adam Smith wrote treatises on the origin of language and the beginnings of astronomy. Henry Home, Lord Kames, wrote of the beginnings of Scottish law in his Historical Law Tracts (1758), and of the development of many social institutions in Sketches of the History of Man (1774), which includes a lengthy defense of Ossian. Ferguson's most popular book, the Essay on the History of Civil Society (1757), makes a reference to the Ossianic poems. William Robertson, along with David Hume, was perhaps the most highly regarded Scottish historian of the century. Robertson's History of Scotland was published in 1759. His History of America (1777) treats of a primitive society analogous to that of Ossianic Scotland. The title of his last book, published in 1791, the Historical Disquisition concerning the knowledge which the ancients had of India points to an enduring interest in the historical origins and alternative forms of civilized societies.

A passage in Stewart's discussion of conjectural history illuminates the Ossianic horizon from another

angle. Stewart is concerned with justifying an approach which involves so much guessing. He admits that very little evidence is available from early civilizations, as it took many centuries before men began to record their transactions. Without direct evidence "we are under necessity of supplying the place of fact by conjecture; and when we are unable to ascertain how men have actually conducted themselves upon particular occasions, of considering in what manner they are likely to have proceeded, from the principles of their nature and the circumstances of their external situation" (48). The relevance of this passage to Macpherson's creation is obvious: Macpherson (with a great deal of encouragement and support) extended the speculations of the conjectural historians into the realm of literature and passed off his imaginary world as a real one. /17/

When it is understood that Macpherson's third-century Scotland lies within the traditions of conjectural history, it can also be recognized as a Utopian community. By holding the mirror up to its own culture it reveals alternative social structures and modes of human interaction. This point will become clearer if we return to Dugald Stewart's explanation for original motivations behind the speculations of Smith and the other conjectural historians. As knowledge of primitive peoples in other

areas of the world increased, the contrast between their own "polished age" and these cultures was accentuated. "When, in such a period of society as that in which we live, we compare our intellectual acquirements, our opinions, manners, and institutions, with those which prevail among rude tribes, it cannot fail to occur to us as an interesting question, by what gradual steps the transition has been made from the first simple steps of uncultivated nature, to a state of things so wonderfully artificial and complicated." Stewart represents the usual attitude growing out of the awareness of the contrast between "rude" and civilized lifestyles, (available close to home in the extreme contrast between Highland and Lowland cultures), which was to appreciate the changes wrought by progress. Macpherson and his fellow primitivists thought differently. The primitivist position is stated forcefully in James Macpherson's "Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian."

Without derogating from the fame of Greece and Rome, we may consider antiquity beyond the pale of their empire worthy of some attention. The nobler passions of the mind never shoot forth more free and unrestrained than in the times we call barbarous. That irregular manner of life and those manly pursuits, from which barbarity takes its name, are highly favorable to a strength of mind unknown in polished times. In advanced society, the characters of men are more uniform and disguised. The human passions lie in some degree concealed behind forms and artificial manners; and the powers of the soul, without an

opportunity of exerting them, lose their vigor. The times of regular government, and polished manners, are therefore to be wished for by the feeble and weak in mind. An unsettled state, and those convulsions which attend it, is the proper field for an exalted character, and the exertion of great parts. Merit there rises always superior; no fortuitous event can raise the timid and mean into power. To those who look upon antiquity in this light, it is an agreeable prospect; and they alone can have real pleasure in tracing nations to their source (57-58).

This extraordinary passage clearly can be set within the conjectural historiographical tradition, even down to the wording, "tracing nations to their source," but as a good primitivist Macpherson uses the tradition for his own ends. Who would want to live in a time of settled government, where the rulers are timid and mean, when one can discover the superiority of one's parts and rise to the occasion in a time of tumult and danger?

It would be natural to assume that the Scottish conjectural historians were influenced by the man who shared their fascination with man's original nature, their confidence that man in "the state of nature" was good, and belief that this original goodness was compromised and corrupted by the debased values of civilized society. However, although obvious parallels in thought can be discovered between Rousseau and the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, their true predecessor in the investigation of the origins of human institutions was Montesquieu, not

Rousseau. Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson, and Thomas Blackwell admired L'Esprit des Lois; Hume helped to translate the 1750 Edinburgh edition. But Rousseau's Discours sur l'origine de L'inégalité parmi des hommes was published in 1755, years after Adam Smith had formulated his crucial theory which isolates four distinct stages of human history (see page 101-02). The well-known letter which Smith wrote to the authors of the first Edinburgh Review in 1756 even suggests that Rousseau was influenced by English philosophy, rather than the other way around (Whitney, "Primitivistic Theories" 351-2). Naming "Mr. Hobbes, Mr. Lock, Dr. Mandevil, Lord Shaftsbury, Dr. Butler, Dr. Clarke, and Mr. Hutcheson," Smith claims that although their "different and inconsistent systems" are now neglected by the English themselves, this branch of English philosophy has been transported into France. "I observe some traces of it," he notes, "not only in the Encyclopedie, but in the Theory of agreeable sentiments, by Mr. de Pouilly, a work that is in many respects original; and above all in the late discourse upon the origin and foundation of the inequality amongst mankind, by Mr. Rousseau of Geneva" (72-73).

Smith's Letter is a plea to the editors of this ill-fated journal (only two numbers were published) to include not only material from Scottish publications but

also information and opinions from the publications of other European nations. /18/ To convince them of the value of such material he includes a survey of the current state of European learning, devoting a great part of this survey, four of its sixteen pages (75-78), to translations from Rousseau's Essay on Inequality. We can assume, therefore, that the founding fathers of the Scottish Enlightenment would have read the first issues of this new (and native) publication and become familiar with the general nature of Rousseau's ideas after 1756. Here is, for example, how Rousseau draws the familiar comparison between the situation of the savage and that of civilized man (in Smith's translation).

Man...in his savage, and man in his civilized state differ so essentially in their passions and inclinations, that what makes the supreme happiness of one, would reduce the other to despair. The savage breathes nothing but liberty and repose; he desires only to live and to be at leisure; and the ataraxia of the Stoic does not approach to his profound indifference for every other object. The citizen, on the contrary, toils, bestirs and torments himself without end, to obtain employments which are still more laborious; he labours on till his death, he even hastens it, in order to put himself in a condition to live, or renounces life to acquire immortality. He makes his court to the great whom he hates, and to the rich whom he despises; he spares nothing to obtain the honour of serving them; he vainly boasts of his own meanness and their protection, and, proud of his slavery, speaks with disdain of those who have not the honour to share it (77).

Rousseau, like the Scottish conjectural historians, was attempting to reach some fundamental truths about human nature, and like them rejected what he considered inadequate empirical investigations for the truths which can only be arrived at through intuition. He goes much further than they do in idealizing original man, but his reliance on extra-scientific methods parallels theirs, and the conclusions he reaches are similarly fanciful.

Rousseau attributes earlier philosophical confusion to erroneous views about the nature of man and its relationship with natural law. To solve this problem it is necessary to abandon scientific treatises and reflect upon the "first and simplest operations of the human soul," as Rousseau himself had done when he first meditated his Discours sur l'inégalité in the forest of Saint Germain....Although any account of human history is bound to be conjectural, this is unimportant, since it is not a question of advancing "historical truths," but only "hypothetical and conditional reasonings intended to illuminate the nature of things" rather than to "show their true origin." No doubt the notes appended to the second Discours put forward scientific and historical evidence drawn from travel-books as well as from scientific and philosophical treatises such as those of Locke, Buffon, and Condillac, but this supporting testimony is meant simply to confirm the conjectures made on intuitive grounds (Grimsley 31).

Whether Macpherson knew of Rousseau's work or not, his savages were certainly not the carefree primitives Rousseau depicted. Macpherson, rather, appropriated the ideas of such conjectural historians as Adam Smith, Lord Kames, and

William Robertson. (His connections with the most notable early Scottish primitivist, Thomas Blackwell, will be discussed in the next chapter.) For example, Macpherson could have learned about the four-stages theory from Robertson's History of America. Robertson's observation quoted earlier, that any history of the human mind must involve contemplating man in all the situations in which he has been placed and tracing his progress through all the different stages of society, "as he gradually advances from the infant state of civil life towards its maturity and decline," is a concise summary of the approach. The key to understanding what stages were involved and how progress occurred is the phrase "mode of subsistence." In Robertson's words: "in every inquiry concerning the operations of men when united together in society, the first object of attention should be their mode of subsistence. Accordingly as that varies, their laws and policies must be different" (9: 108-9). Progress was conceived as occurring "naturally" through four consecutive stages which corresponded to the mode of subsistence prevalent at the same time: these differentiated into the four stages of hunting, pasturage, agriculture, and commerce. Each of these four stages was demonstrably different, with different systems of government, law, morality and economic institutions, but the primary factor

determining the level of government which developed at a particular stage was the prevailing attitude to property. In Adam Smith's words: "Property and civil government very much depend on one another. The preservation of property and the inequality of possession first formed it, and the state of property must always vary with the form of government" (Lectures on Justice, Police, Revenue and Arms, 8).

The four-stages theory was vital to the scientific investigation of human affairs and the development of the disciplines of sociology, economics and political science, which have been associated with the names of Adam Smith, John Millar, Adam Ferguson, Lord Kames and their followers. Although direct evidence was destroyed at Smith's death, student notes which have survived from his days of teaching jurisprudence to the Moral Philosophy class at the University of Glasgow suggest that Smith had developed an outline of the theory as early as 1748, and a full-blown version by 1751-1752. Apparently the versions of the theory which appeared in Dalrymple's History of Feudal Property and Kames's Historical Law Tracts derive from Smith. /19/ Our point here is not so much to determine who originated the theory as to show that it represented one way to codify in a "scientific" manner the contemporary and historical information on the varieties of

human experience. In general, with reservations and exceptions, the theory was used to demonstrate social progress and human perfectibility. This is evident in John Millar's description of Smith's treatment of "Justice" in those jurisprudence lectures dating from the early 1750s. "Upon this subject he followed the plan that seems to be followed by Montesquieu; endeavoring to trace the gradual progress of jurisprudence, both public and private, from the rudest to the most refined ages, and to point out the effects of those arts which contribute to subsistence, and to the accumulations of property, in producing correspondent improvements or alterations in law and government" (Life and Writings 14).

The development of the concept of "property" in the second, (pasturage) and third (agriculture) stages provided the stimulus for legal and social structures of more advanced societies. James Macpherson's appropriation of the four stages theory took a different tack.

[About the beginning of the fifth century] we must fix the beginning of the decay of that species of heroism which subsisted in the days of Fingal. There are three stages in human society. The first is the result of consanguinity, and the natural affection of the members a family to one another. The second begins when property is established, and men enter into associations for mutual defense, against the invasions and injustice of neighbours. Mankind submit, in the third, to certain laws and subordinations of government, to which they trust the safety of their persons and property. As the first is

formed on nature, so, of course, it is the most disinterested and noble. Men, in the last, have leisure to cultivate the mind, and to restore it, with reflection, to a primeval dignity of sentiment. The middle state is the region of complete barbarism and ignorance ("Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian" 68).

Actually the ideas in this passage are quite muddled, like those of John Macpherson's version of Scottish history, "A Dissertation on the Aera of Ossian," also prefixed to the first edition of Fingal. (It should be noted that James Macpherson differentiates three stages, not four.) Is he suggesting that the establishment of property brought about barbarism and ignorance? If that is true, then why has the third stage--when property enables those with leisure to cultivate their minds--not been considered even more pernicious than the second? The explanation lies in a primitivism which requires the imposition of benevolist notions upon an alien progressivist structure, accompanied by the cyclical notion that men living in a polished age can effect a return to an earlier state, the "First Return to Nature" (see pages 151-52). The muddle is not so important, however, as the fact that Macpherson knew the theories of conjectural historians enough to appropriate them for his own work.

The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to two works of conjectural history which are relevant to Ossian. They reveal how much Macpherson's poetry was an integral

part of the spirit of mid-century Scotland, as a creative, dramatic "translation" of cherished methods: i.e. conjectural history, and cherished theories: that the human species (especially of the Scottish variety) is inherently benevolent and noble. Kames's Sketches on the History of Man has a long section on Ossian with a double motivation. Kames is concerned to show that the poems are genuine and that they reveal essential facts about men in the earliest stages of society. Adam Ferguson's Essay on the History of Civil Society also discusses the poems.

Henry Home, Lord Kames (1696-1782), was one of the leading intellectuals of his time. Heir to a small estate in Berwickshire, he came into his title when he inherited the estate of Blair Drummond through his wife in 1766. Trained for the law, he rose through the ranks of the Scottish judicial system, becoming a Lord of the Justiciary Court (in place of Sir Gilbert Elliot of Minto) in April of 1763. He was a member of many of the clubs and societies which contributed so much to Enlightenment life, including the Rankenian and Philosophical Clubs and the Select Society, which he helped found. Home has never been considered an original thinker of the caliber of Adam Smith or John Millar, but his sponsorship of younger men earned him a reputation as one of the most influential men of the Scottish Enlightenment. The writer of Scotland and

Scotsmen in the Eighteenth Century, James Ramsay of Ochtertyre, says of Kames that "he did more to promote the interests of philosophy and belles lettres in Scotland than all the men of law had done for a century before" (179). This is not an exaggeration. Kames, for example, had sponsored David Hume's candidacy for the Chair of Ethics and Pneumatical Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh in 1744-5. (Hume did not get the position, because his views on religion offended a number of important people, including Francis Hutcheson (Ross 82-83).) Kames obtained a lectureship in Rhetoric and Belles Lettres at the University of Edinburgh for Adam Smith in 1748, and later sponsored Hugh Blair for the same position (Whitney 343). John Millar, whose Origin of the Distinction of Ranks is a leading Scottish Enlightenment text, tutored Kames's son George from 1758 to 1760. And Kames took James Boswell under his wing in the early 1760s, before Boswell came to London and met Samuel Johnson. Much of our information about Kames's early years comes from Boswell. If we had no other indication that Kames was a great man in the eyes of his contemporaries, the fact that Boswell planned to write his biography would tell us this. But unfortunately, although Boswell collected notes and reminiscences for a biography of Kames, this biography had a fate similar to many of the other works Boswell projected but was never able to complete (Ross 248).

Kames managed through a long life to offer his opinion on many contemporary issues. The titles of his books span a wide range of interests from ethics to literary criticism to farming to antiquarian researches and legal history. His most famous work, Sketches on the History of Man, was not published until 1774, but it is actually part of the Ossianic background because it evolved from conversations Kames had with Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson and others, as far back as the 1740s. The collaborative nature of the work (and Kames, like Hugh Blair, was never credited with being an original thinker) confirms the spirit of cooperation or at least the collective spirit which characterized the productions of the period. The collaborative spirit was, as we have seen, also operating in Ossianic genesis, and was one major reason why the poems were acceptable to so many people. They vivified theories which had been circulating among a close-knit group of people for some time.

Kames's fascination with the "origin and progress" theme is evident in his earlier Historical Law Tracts, which he published in 1758. In the Preface to the book he writes: "The history of mankind is a delightful subject. A rational inquirer is not less entertained than instructed, when he traces the gradual progress of manners, of laws, of arts, from their birth to their present

maturity" (qtd. in Whitney, "Primitivistic Theories" 344).

A significant part of the Sketches is a defense of Ossianic authenticity on the basis of Ossianic manners (pages 344-90). Kames defines "manners" as "a mode of behavior peculiar to a certain person, or to a certain nation." In a fine example of circular reasoning, Kames finds it difficult to believe that Ossian could have invented ways of behaving he could not have experienced, or which were "so opposite to any notion he could form of savage manners" (344). Unlike other advocates, Kames finds the poems "all of a piece throughout," realistic in their portrayal of the earliest stages of human development.

The by-now-familiar theory of human progression through four "modes of subsistence" is used by Kames to buttress his contention that lack of property is concomitant with the refined manners of the early Caledonians.

Another circumstance, common to the Caledonians with every other nation in the first stage of society, concurred to form their manners; which is, that avarice was unknown them. People in that stage, ignorant of habitual wants, and having a ready supply of all that nature requires, have little notion of property, and not the slightest desire of accumulating the goods of fortune; and for that reason are always found honest and disinterested (372-73).

Kames bases his case for the authenticity of the Ossianic poems on their consistency with what the primitivists believed about how men behaved in the early

stages of society, or, to be more specific, the first or hunting stage, and his arguments give us some insight into what Macpherson had achieved. Kames argues that a poet is most believable when he works out of his own experience. "It is a noted and well-founded observation, that manners are never painted to the life by anyone to whom they are not familiar" (344). The manners depicted must be true to life because they "are delineated in a variety of incidents, of sentiments, of images and of allusions, making one entire picture, without once deviating into the slightest incongruity. Every scene in Ossian relates to hunting, to fighting, or to love, the sole occupations of men in the original state of society: there is not a single image, simile, or allusion, but what is borrowed from that state, without a jarring circumstance." There is no mention of any of the names of the clans, of fish as food, of the Christian religion, especially of any of the "modes of subsistence" characteristic of later developmental stages. "Can it be supposed, that a modern writer could be so constantly on his guard, as never to mention corn or cattle? In a story so scant of poetical images, the sedentary life of a shepherd, and the industry of a husbandman would make a capital figure: the cloven foot would somewhere peep out." Yet the poems never mention agriculture and allude to a herd of cattle only once or

twice (345-46).

Kames's second argument for the authenticity of the poems turns on a paradox. Ossian offered an alternative view of an original society, consistent with contemporary benevolism and primitivism but inconsistent with traditional ideas of what life in such a society was like (as, for example, the life revealed in the Homeric epics). The work must therefore be authentic because no poet would have the audacity to create a system of manners "so opposite to any notion he could form of savage manners" unless it were true. Furthermore, Ossianic manners conform to descriptions of the manners of the Gauls, other Celts, and Scandinavian societies of the same period (347, 382-98).

Supporters of Ossian delighted in proving the superiority of his poetry to the epics of Homer, a natural comparison, as both poets were identified with the earliest societies. Kames's treatment of the comparison helps to clarify how the critical judgments of Homer and Ossian were dependent upon historical conjecture. Because Ossian lived in the "consanguineous" period, the age of hunters, when concepts of property had not developed, his heroes could behave honorably towards their enemies. Homer, in contrast, celebrated a different, later stage when the mode of subsistence was pasturage. Men were conscious of

private ownership, and consequently behaved more brutally towards one another. (We will meet these two stages again under the labels "Savage" and "Barbarian.")

Adam Ferguson's Essay on the History of Civil Society, although a product of the "Science of Man," is actually not the kind of "conjectural history" exemplified by Kames's Sketches. Ferguson is concerned with tracing the development of human societies from "rudeness to civilization," but he does not believe, with the primitivist, that the earlier cultures were superior, nor does he contend that the refinements of advanced cultures are necessarily improvements. Ferguson is a relativist; he has the imagination to find virtues in the variety of human experience, and find the explanation for this variety in human nature. /20/ Because he wants to observe the human species scientifically, he rejects the speculations of the conjectural historians. "We are," he warns, "often tempted into these boundless regions of ignorance or conjecture, by a fancy which delights in creating rather than in merely retaining the forms which are presented before it. We are the dupes of a subtilty, which promises to supply every defect of our knowledge, and by filling up a few blanks in the story of nature, pretends to conduct our apprehension nearer to the source of existence" (Essay 6).

Ferguson's Essay contains no elaborate study of the

Ossianic poems as evidence for early societies, no defense of their authenticity on the basis of the genuineness of their manners. There is, however, in the Essay a recognition of the place of conflict in the growth and development of social institutions which places a special kind of value on the kind of society Ossian depicts. Ferguson does not say, with the primitivist, that original society was better than later societies, yet he acknowledges that the wars and perpetual hostilities which occurred among the "small and simple tribes" elicited some of the best qualities of the human species.

These observations [of national passions and prejudices] seem to arraign our species, and to give an unfavourable picture of mankind; and yet the particulars we have mentioned are consistent with the most amiable qualities of our nature, and often furnish a scene for the exercise of our greatest abilities. They are sentiments of generosity and self-denial that animate the warrior in defense of his country; and they are dispositions most favorable to mankind, that become the principles of apparent hostility to mankind....

Without the rivalship of nations, and the practice of war, civil society itself could scarcely have found an object, or a form. Mankind might have traded without any formal convention, but they cannot be safe without a national concert. The necessity of a public defence, has given rise to many departments of state, and the intellectual talents of men have found their busiest scene in wielding their national forces. To overawe, or intimidate, or, when we cannot persuade with reason, to resist with fortitude, are the occupations which give its most animating exercise, and its greatest triumphs, to a vigorous mind; and he who has never struggled with his

fellow-creatures, is a stranger to half the sentiments of mankind (23-24).

Passages such as this give a theoretical rationale for the society structured on militaristic principles in which public-spirited citizens organize for their mutual defense. Ossianic society, then, is the ideal, a far cry from the situation of a contemporary Scotland, enervated and dependent on others for its security. The issue, we remember, which occupied Ferguson and his fellow literati was the establishing of a Scotch militia by the English Parliament, an issue which led to the founding of the Poker Club in 1762. And we have noted Richard Sher's belief that the enthusiasm stimulated by the Ossianic poems was fueled by the agitation over the Militia. Both causes evoked passions over ancestral honor and national pride.

Ferguson was the one Enlightenment thinker who shared Macpherson's Highland origins. He shared Macpherson's loyalty to his origins, as well. Ferguson served for seven years (1747-1754) as chaplain to the Black Watch regiment, more effectively, no doubt, because he was a Gaelic speaker. The Essay understandably avoids direct praise of Highland society, but his admiration of comparable cultures (Sparta, the American Indian) reveals his bias. Duncan Forbes, who has written an incisive introduction to a modern edition of the Essay (Edinburgh, 1966), sees

Ferguson's experience of the great contrasts between Highland and Lowland societies behind his emphasis on the virtues of these simpler cultures. Ferguson praises the clansman's loyalty to his chief, the social equality among the members of the clan, and the courage and selflessness which accompany identification with a unity larger than the self. The feudalistic social structure of the Highlands is, for Ferguson, "the form of government best suited to human nature in its perfection, because it rests on virtue, on selfless regard for the community so that compared with the republics of antiquity the monarchies of modern Europe are corrupt" (Forbes xl).

The only direct reference to Ossian in the Essay occurs in the section titled "Of the History of Literature." There a footnote cites Ossianic poetry as exemplary of the artless song of the savage whose magnificent beauty "no change of language can improve and no refinements of the critic reform." "See," we are told, "Translations of Gaelic Poetry by James Macpherson" (173, 288).

In summary, this chapter has been an attempt to isolate those intellectual, social and political circumstances which made the Ossianic poetry possible and to retrieve that horizon of expectations, that familiar territory which permitted acceptance of the poems. We have seen anew how these poems constitute a kind of ideal case of the ways in

which a poem is a product of its particular age, not, as Jauss tells it, because they are "parodies," but in the remarkable ways in which they mirror the vital concerns of Scotland in the middle years of the eighteenth century. Jauss has shown how we can construct a horizon of expectations through the implicit relationships existing between the text in question and other familiar works of its literary-historical surroundings. We have seen how the poems of Ossian bring to life Enlightenment optimism about the basic goodness of human nature, a cultural relativism which permits the scrutiny of alternative cultures, and a belief that a scientific approach to human problems will better the human lot. A moral purpose is not what most commentators would see as the fundamental impetus behind what was so fraudulent an enterprise. But the desire to find some constancy for a culture which was experiencing so many changes was major objective of the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, and of Macpherson, as well. As political propaganda, the Ossianic poems provided their readers with a valuable past, and they offered glimpses into a simpler mode of existence for a culture which was becoming increasingly uncomfortable with the excesses of civilization. These ideas will emerge in a different form in the following chapter, which discusses how the "Science of Man" transformed epic theory.

James Macpherson and the Scottish Enlightenment

1. According to Richard B. Sher the term "Scottish Enlightenment" was introduced by William Robert Scott in 1900. Scott's rather vague definition was "the diffusion of philosophic ideas in Scotland and the encouragement of speculative tastes" among those Scots who reached maturity about the middle of the century. See Sher's Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985), 4.

2. Withrington's article, along with others cited in this study, comes from a new book on the Scottish Enlightenment which originated in a conference at Aberdeen University held in 1987. The book, Aberdeen and the Enlightenment Proceedings of a Conference held at the University of Aberdeen, was edited by Jennifer J. Carter and Joan H. Pittock (Aberdeen U. Press, 1987).

3. Trevor-Roper's article was published in Studies in Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 58 (1967), 1635-58. However, Trevor-Roper wrote another article on Scottish tradition which is also extremely relevant to this study. The thesis of "The Invention of Tradition: The Highland Tradition of Scotland" is that the costumes, customs, and ceremonies we now associate with Highland Scotland were the work of the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. For example, Trevor-Roper traces the history of the kilt woven in the distinctive color and pattern of one or another clan to the resourcefulness of a firm of fabric manufacturers, William Wilson and Son of Bannockburn, preparing for a royal visit in 1819 (30).

More important to this investigation is the statement that "the whole concept of a distinct Highland culture and tradition is a retrospective invention," because the Highlanders were not a distinct people before the later years of the seventeenth century but were rather "the overflow of Ireland." The myth of an independent Highland required a newly fabricated history, and Trevor-Roper names as fabricators of that history individuals whom we have encountered in the course of this study. Trevor-Roper tells how the old legend that "the Celtic, Irish-speaking Highlanders of Scotland were not merely invaders from Ireland in the fifth century A.D., but had an ancient history in Scotland and were in fact Caledonians who had resisted the Roman armies" was revived by two writers with the same surname, James Macpherson, and the Rev. John

Macpherson of Sleat in the island of Skye.

Ossianic literature, a fabrication, needed the context of Ossianic history and "both this literature and this history, in so far as they had any connection with reality had been stolen from Ireland."

Both John Macphersons figure importantly in James's life. The father wrote that Critical Dissertation on the Aera of Ossian affixed to Fingal in 1761 which rewrote Scottish history, giving Ossian the necessary historical context, and carried the claim that the true Celtic literature had its origin in Scotland, not Ireland. This claim was repeated when James used the minister's papers in his Introduction to the History of Great Britain and Ireland (1771). The son, John Macpherson, Governor General of India, became an accomplice of James's (17). John and James's highly imaginative and unscrupulous collaborations in the cause of the Nabob of Arcot during the late 1760s and 70s is the subject of a highly entertaining article by George McElroy from the Carter and Pittock volume called "Ossianic Imagination and the History of India: James and John Macpherson as Propagandists and Intriguers" (363-74).

My argument with Trevor-Roper lies not in his information but rather in the gleeful scorn with which he relays the information. The tone of the following paragraph is typical.

Being a cultural dependency of Ireland under the "foreign" and somewhat ineffective, rule of the Scottish crown, the Highlands and islands of Scotland were culturally depressed. Their literature, such as it was, was a crude echo of Irish literature. The bards of the Scottish chieftains came from Ireland or went thither to learn their trade. Indeed, we are told by an early eighteenth-century writer--an Irishman--that the Scottish bards were the rubbish of Ireland periodically cleared out of Ireland and deposited in that convenient dump. Even under the oppressive rule of England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Celtic Ireland remained, culturally, an historic nation, while Celtic Scotland was, at best, its poor sister. It had--could have--no independent tradition ("Highland Tradition" 16).

Trevor-Roper's references to Highland bards as "the rubbish of Ireland," and Scotland as a "convenient dump" remind us that age-old prejudices are not so easy to eradicate.

4. The text referred to is The Enlightenment in National Context. ed. Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981).

5. I am indebted to the chapter in Richard Sher's book titled "The Call of the Highland Bard" for this point, and other instances of Macpherson's indebtedness to the Moderate literati in the following paragraphs.

6. The Moderate minister, Alexander "Jupiter" Carlyle, is peripheral to the story of Ossian, but he was quite an important personage in his own period. His memoirs, Anecdotes and Characters of the Times, which was brought out in a new edition in 1973 by James Kinsley (Oxford UP), is a gold mine for the issues and personalities of the period under investigation in this study. Carlyle knew everyone. He had been in Edinburgh when Bonnie Prince Charlie's forces were threatening the town in 1745; he was a major defender with Adam Ferguson, of John Home's Douglas in the Scottish Assembly in 1756. He was at Moffat in the autumn of 1759. Carlyle thought Hugh Blair credulous (148), did not much care for the imperiousness, affectation, and shrewd business sense of Elizabeth Montagu (236), and is responsible for the observation that James Macpherson was good looking and of large size but he had thick legs "to hide which he generally wore boots, thou' not then in fashion" (203).

7. The English laws passed after the "Forty Five" were designed to ensure that no other Stuart rebellion would ever recur. A Disarming Act was passed, the estates of the rebel chieftains were confiscated, the tartan and kilt outlawed, the Gaelic language prohibited. Gaelic was not permitted in the S.P.C.K. or charity schools until 1767, and then only for the purpose of religious instruction. See William Ferguson, Scotland 1689 to the Present (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1968), 153-54 and John Lorne Campbell, Gaelic in Scottish Education and Life (Edinburgh: W. and A.K. Johnston Ltd., 1945), 56.

8. See Rudolph Tombo's Ossian in Germany for the history of Ossianic reception in that country.

9. The source of this information is Richard Sher's book on the Moderate Literati cited earlier. In the chapter titled "The Call of the Highland Bard," Sher notes that this information originally came from an article by Allan Sinclair, "The Authenticity of the Poems of Ossian," in the Celtic Magazine of June 5, 1880, 311. Sinclair says that Macpherson and his pupil met Adam Ferguson when they visited the manse at Logieriat, Ferguson's father's parish. Macpherson showed Ferguson his translations of Gaelic poetry, which Ferguson urged him to enlarge. Sinclair also mentions the letter of introduction to John Home given to Macpherson because he was expecting to be at Moffat, where Home also went for the benefit of his health.

10. "Albin and the Daughter of Mey" is a curious precursor of Macpherson's poetry. In the first place, Stone's introductory letter to the author of the Scots Magazine claims that he has translated the poem from the Irish language, an attribution that Macpherson would have scorned. Unlike the Ossianic poems, this poem's narrative content is clearly in the romance tradition. While the rivalry between a mother and daughter for a young man's affections could be a plot element in an Ossianic fragment or epic, the dragon to which the mother sends the hero would be out of place in Ossian. Whatever Stone's original source looked like, he fashioned a regular, neo-classic poem full of balance, antithesis, and alliteration. Yet while "Albin and the Daughter of Mey" resembles Ossianic poetry very little stylistically, Stone's comments on it have an Ossianic flavor. He praises this poem for its "tenderness and simplicity, as must be greatly affecting to every mind that is the least tinctured with the softer passions of pity and humanity." And he gives the highland bard who wrote it high marks in comparison with "the great father of poetry" whose story of Bellerophon was on a similar theme, anticipating the numerous Homer-Ossian comparisons to come.

Here is stanza in which the maiden mourns her lover's death.

But now he's gone! and nought remains but woe
For wretched me; with him my joys are fled,
Around his tomb my tears shall ever flow,
The rock my dwelling, and the clay my bed!
Ye maids and matrons, from your hills descend,
To join my moan, and answer tear for tear;
With me the hero to his grave attend
And sing the songs of mourning round his bier.
Through his own grove his praise we will proclaim,
And bid the place for ever bear his name.

11. James Macpherson, letter to George Lawrie, 18 March, 1760, Yale Editions of the Private Papers of James Boswell, Yale University Library, New Haven.

12. Dr. Johnson amusingly used this name change to retaliate against Mallet. The octavo edition of his Dictionary defines alias as "otherwise, as Mallet alias Malloch, that is, otherwise Malloch" (DNB "Mallet, David" 872).

13. The source for most of the information about the genesis of Ossian is to be found in the letters written to the Highland Society committee headed by Henry Mackenzie, which was created in 1797 to investigate the authenticity of the poems. Appendix No. IV of the report published by this committee contains letters from Hugh Blair, Alexander Carlyle, and Adam Ferguson as well as "A note from Mr. Home" (which seems to have been dictated and is translated into the third person).

14. Derick S. Thomson in his study, The Gaelic Sources of Macpherson's 'Ossian,' (1951), has conclusively demonstrated that Macpherson used fourteen or fifteen ballads as the basis of his "translations." Thomson shows that he made use of these ballads in various ways, from merely a passing reference to working closely with the ballad in question (10).

15. A now classic text on the contributions of Scottish Enlightenment thinkers is Gladys Bryson's Man and Society: The Scottish Inquiry of the Eighteenth Century (1945). Bryson is especially informative on the comprehensive nature of the term "Moral Philosophy," the chair to which Adam Ferguson was appointed in 1764. She points out that a book containing the term "moral philosophy" in its title could include discussions of "human nature, social forces, progress, marriage and family relationships, economic processes, maintenance of government, religion, international relations, elementary jurisprudence, primitive customs, history of institutions, ethics, [and] aesthetics." In short, "this old moral philosophy displays itself, even to cursory examination, as the matrix of the social sciences" (4).

16. The two oldest friends among the Moderate Church of Scotland ministers Sher calls the "Moderate literati" were William Robertson and John Home who had met while they were students at Edinburgh University in the 1730s. Adam Ferguson did not enter Edinburgh University until 1742, after the other two had graduated. However, Ferguson was one of the thirteen original members of the Select Society, which was founded in 1754. Robertson was also in this original group, along with Adam Smith, David Hume, Alexander Wedderburn, Sir Gilbert Elliot, Lord Elibank, Lord Monboddo, Lord Kames, and Lord Woodhouselee. Robertson, Ferguson, and Alexander Carlyle defended John Home in the General Assembly of the Scottish Church in 1756 when he was condemned for writing a play, and permitting its production. They were among the eleven who defended those ministers who had attended a performance of Home's Douglas ("Adam Ferguson," DNB 1201; "William Robertson," DNB 311-12).

17. Peter Gay's comment on the "realism" of the philosophes in an essay entitled "Why was the Enlightenment?" seems appropriate in this context. Gay says that because the philosophes were intimately and continually engaged with their world, they put a premium on perceiving the political, social, intellectual and religious structures of their own day realistically. However, he goes on to note, "[the philosophes] were not always realistic in their realism: like other realists, they often failed to discriminate between wishes and realities" (69-70). If the philosophes were unrealistic about their own social structures, it is likely that the wishes, rather than the realities, would predominate in the descriptions of earlier societies, which were fantasies at the outset.

18. The fate of the first Edinburgh Review is indicative of the conflict between liberalizing and reactionary forces in the Scotland of the 1750s. The Review started under the editorship of Alexander Wedderburn with the purpose of reviewing books either published in Scotland or which were published elsewhere but "have any particular title to public attention" within a half year's period. Only two issues were published, one covering the period from January to July, 1755, and the other from July, 1755, to January, 1756. The periodical failed because the editors were fearful of publishing anything controversial. David Hume and Henry Home were in trouble with the Church of Scotland for their "heretical" views, John Home for

writing the tragedy of Douglas, although a clergyman, and the Review not only "was careful to exclude any notice of the works of David Hume and Kames from its pages [but] [the editors] appear not to have known that their friends Adam Smith, Blair, Jardine, Robertson, and Wedderburn were all involved in its production" (Ross 177-8).

19. See Ronald L. Meek, Social Science and the Ignoble Savage (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1976), 110.

20. Adam Ferguson's differences with the conjectural historians are discussed in Duncan Forbes's introduction to Ferguson's Essay (Edinburgh, 1966), especially page xvi.

Epic Rationale and the Approach to Fingal

Lionel Trilling's evocation of the frustrations inherent in attempts to recapture a past time, in his essay, "Manners, Morals and the Novel," is of especial relevance to this study. As we investigate an age which was looking nostalgically back to an earlier, idealized time, Trilling provides a rationale for a double set of frustrations, ours and theirs, in achieving a sense of the past. We have the explicit statements of that time, the great formulated monuments it has left us, but what we do not have is what Trilling calls "the buzz of implication," "the whole evanescent context in which its explicit statements are made."

The retrieval of this context, what Trilling calls "manners," with a larger reference than that of current usage, involves knowing "what never gets fully stated, coming in the tone of greetings and the tone of quarrels, in slang and humor and popular songs, in the way children play, in the gesture the waiter makes when he puts down the plate, in the nature of the food we prefer." We are of two minds about the past. Sometimes we patronize. We have a degree of perspective; we make generalizations, identify innovations. The past seems simpler than our own multi-layered experience.

Some of the charm of the past consists of the quiet--the great distracting buzz of implication has stopped and we are left with what has been fully phrased and precisely stated.

But there is so much that we would like to retrieve and which will always remain elusive.

And part of the melancholy of the past comes from our knowledge that the huge unrecorded hum of implication was once there and left no trace--we feel that because it is evanescent it is especially human. We feel, too, that the truth of the great preserved monuments of the past does not fully appear without it. From letters and diaries, from the remote unconscious corners of the great works themselves, we try to guess what the sound of the multifarious implication was and what it meant (205-06).

What Trilling has articulated so well here is one objective of the reader-response critics, the recovery of a moment by means of the testimonies of those who lived through that moment. Hans Robert Jauss's "horizon of expectations," whether it is defined as the "internalized expectations, references or mind set that a hypothetical individual might bring to any text," or "the collective grayness of received ideas and ideologies," is a subcategory of Trilling's larger cultural context. And while the "horizon of expectations" refers specifically to a literary response, the literature of a period, as Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser have shown, carries on a significant dialogue with the dominant values of that

culture and can be, itself, a socially formative force for change.

For the modern reader one of the great puzzles of the Ossianic moment is the enthusiastic reception of Macpherson's Fingal, and the acceptance of Fingal as an epic in a class with Homer's Iliad and Virgil's Aeneid. Why, in the first place, did Ossianic enthusiasts find Fingal to be an epic? And what reasons did they give in support of the claim that it equalled, or even surpassed, the great epics of the past?

The answers to these questions require an investigation into eighteenth-century conjectural history and such contemporary issues as the conditions which contribute to original genius, the nature of primitive language, and of primitive religion. Understanding the contemporary background requires a discussion of primitivism as the eighteenth century conceived it, idealizing primitive man and his poetry. "Epic," then, in eighteenth-century thought, involves a host of primitivistic assumptions which greatly affected the reception of the Ossianic canon.

Macpherson, as we have seen, did not write in isolation. Scotland had lost its political independence after the Union of 1707, yet other Scottish institutions--the law, the church, and the educational system--were flourishing in the eighteenth century. We

have also seen how some modern scholars have tried to discredit the Scots or explain away the extraordinary flowering of culture in this period, while others acknowledge a level of achievement attained by few other societies. The intellectual Enlightenment or "Scottish Awakening" of eighteenth-century Scotland has been compared by Lord Kames's modern biographer to the Age of Pericles in Greece, the Augustan Age in Rome, the Renaissance in Italy, the scientific and literary achievements of seventeenth-century England, and the French Enlightenment associated with the Encyclopedists (Lehmann, Lord Kames xv). Scottish universities rivalled those of the English; Scotland's philosophers, historians, economists, critics: Hume, Ferguson, Robertson, Adam Smith, Hugh Blair, were of the first rank. Scots had reached the highest levels of power. Against the objections of his subjects, George III had appointed John Stuart, Lord Bute, as his Prime Minister during the years when Ossian was in flower, and Bute brought many of his countrymen into the government. Bute's administration was in part resented by the English because he promoted the interests of many of his fellow countrymen, including James Macpherson. /1/

In the previous chapter the Scottish intellectuals of this period were shown to be a close-knit and friendly group, supportive of each other and of the cause of

Scotland. We also saw that a political dependency on England did not translate into dependency in other areas, and that the Scots had a reputation for intellectual achievement in this period. This was in part due to Scottish innovation in the new social sciences of sociology, political science, and what we now call economics and they called political economy, studies which are an integral part of their larger interest in the human mind. We traced a connection between the fascination with the history of human institutions and the development of conjectural history which, in the tradition of Montesquieu, speculated on the beginnings of established institutions. The poems of Ossian were shown to have originated in this spirit with this group of friends, Home, Ferguson, Blair and their associates, who were anxious to demonstrate the heritage of a proud people, and familiar with a habit of mind which transformed speculative into "creative" history.

When the first Ossianic volume, Fragments of Ancient Poetry..., appeared in 1760, the preface promised that the short pieces in this collection were actually part of an extended epic poem, and it was to find this epic that Macpherson travelled to the Highlands in 1760 and 1761. Fingal and Temora were the results of this search.

The epics were necessary to establish Ossian's credibility as a primitive poet, because epic was what the

poet in the first stages of society "wrote," (or rather "sang" because it was becoming apparent that these cultures were pre-literate). /2/ Much of this chapter will be concerned with contemporary notions of epic, and why Fingal needed to be identified as an epic in order to be authentic, in other words, what "epic" meant in the the critical theory of the middle years of the eighteenth century. But there also are connections to be made between epic poetry and conjectural history. It is obvious that the epic, as a record of an original society, provides invaluable insight into the fundamental operations of the human mind. Here is vital evidence for the "Science of Man."

From another perspective, "insight into the fundamental operations of the human mind" could describe the objectives of another group of intellectuals who had some influence on Macpherson. The poets of the Warton school, Thomas Gray, William Collins, and Joseph and Thomas Warton, were not trying to trace human institutions to their origins as the conjectural historians were, but they were, in Wallace Jackson's words, attempting "to delineate the unbodied realities of the human spirit that the eighteenth century called the passions" (3). Because we have in the oldest, most primitive poetry, not only an outpouring of human feeling but this outpouring as it becomes a poetic utterance, and as a record of the kind of behavior which

carried meaning to the singer, there is in this primordial poetry both the original emotion and the action which that emotion inspires. The tales reproduce that moment when the teller realizes that his tales have a meaning and speak of the most important things, memorializing the beginnings of human institutions.

Macpherson borrowed from the conventions of epic poetry, but created a poetry which has much more in common with the melancholy poems of the Warton school than it does with Homeric or Virgilian epic, although Ossian-Homer comparisons became a commonplace of the Ossianic critical heritage. Ossianic poetry has nothing of the specificity of Homer, the grounding in a pre-literate culture, and the true oral tradition of Homeric poetry. It is, rather, a poetry of the imagination, with roots in traditions shared with melancholy poetry: ut pictura poesis, /3/ the sublime, and primitivism, both cultural and aesthetic (Jackson 4).

Jackson's phrase for the objective of the melancholy poets: "they wished to create...an anatomy of the passions that would reveal the magnitude of the human spirit," coincides nicely with Ossianic benevolism and primitivism (4). We are in the realm of the imagination when we are reading Collins, Macpherson, or Kames or Adam Ferguson, back in an imagined time and place when the simplest passions prevailed and the poet, in Adam Ferguson's often

quoted words, "delivers the emotions of the heart, in words suggested by the heart: for he knows no other" (Civil Society 285).

Later in this study I will discuss the genre of the Ossianic poems in more detail, but here it is necessary to point out that the conjectural historian's desire to trace human institutions to their origins, the sources of inspiration of the epic poet, and the melancholy poet's wish to create an anatomy of the passions found common ground in Ossian. Audience expectations for all poetry changed, and epic poetry was not exempt: Kirsti Simonsuuri, in her study on the changing attitudes in Homeric criticism throughout the eighteenth century, shows how the consummate artist of the Augustans was transmogrified into an inspired bard. /4/

But just as conjectural history merges with imaginative experience at the beginnings of the human story, this bard, who is creator of the first poetry, is also the first historian. He memorializes the deeds of his community's heroes so that they will not be forgotten. John Brown, in his Dissertation on the Rise, Union, and Power, . . . of Poetry and Music (1763), describes the development of the epic:

The Epic Poem would naturally arise and be sung by its composers at their public Solemnities. For it appears above, that their earliest Histories

should be written in Verse, and make a part of their public Song Feasts. Now the Epic Poem is but a Kind of fabulous History, rowling chiefly on the chief Actions of ancient Gods and Heroes, and artificially composed under certain limitations with Respect to its Manner, for the Ends of Pleasure, Admiration, and Instruction (31).

The reader-response theorists call our attention to the complex interactions between readers and text. When we recognize how indebted Macpherson was to the primitivists and their friends, how, indeed, the Ossianic poems owe their existence in great part to the ideas these thinkers were developing in the 1750s, then the Scottish defense of the poems takes on a new dimension. The primitivists, notably Hugh Blair, Lord Kames and Adam Ferguson, were not so much defending a fellow Scot or a personal friend, as a group of poems which provided living proof of their own theories. /5/

There were two centers of primitivist thought in Scotland--Edinburgh and Aberdeen. The most influential of the Aberdeen thinkers was Thomas Blackwell, who had published his Inquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer in 1735. Blackwell held a Professorship in Greek at Marischal College from 1723 until his death in 1757, during which time he inspired many students, Macpherson among them. Macpherson could not have taken Greek with Blackwell, because he transferred from King's College to Marischal in 1754 and Greek was a first-year course, but it

is possible that he attended Blackwell's lectures in ancient history, geography and chronology. However, he could not have missed coming under Blackwell's influence (Whitney, "Primitivistic Theories" 340).

Blackwell's explorations into conjectural history, the origin of epic, and the nature of primitive languages stimulated many of his students besides Macpherson. The most famous of these was James Burnet, Lord Monboddo, who wrote both The Origin and Progress of Language and Ancient Metaphysics or the Science of Universals. Both William Duff, who wrote An Essay on Original Genius (1767) and Critical Observations on the Writings of the Most Celebrated Original Geniuses in Poetry (1770), and John Olgivie, author of An Essay on the Lyric Poetry of the Ancients (1762), went to Marischal College during Blackwell's tenure there. Alexander Gerard, who wrote An Essay on Taste and An Essay on Genius, taught at Marischal and later, King's College (340). /6/

Thomas Blackwell's Enquiry Into the Life and Writings of Homer (1735) is both an obvious source of Macpherson's socio-historical explanations and a stimulus to the kind of poetry Macpherson wrote. In reader-response terms, Blackwell provided a set of norms against which Ossian is foregrounded. These norms place Blackwell among the ranks of those Enlightenment thinkers (Perrault, Voltaire, Vico)

who searched out rationalistic explanations for phenomena which had traditionally been given supernatural causes. As "the favourite miracle of the classically educated," Homer's genius had never been questioned until Blackwell searched out the hereditary and environmental factors-- "Natural Faculties," "Chances,"--as well as the entire range of experiential, educational, historical, and social circumstances which enabled Homer to produce his masterpieces (Simonsuuri 104).

Blackwell's stimulus for investigating Homer's origins is reminiscent of Macpherson's elimination of organized religion in the Ossianic poems. Disproving Homer's "divine" origins was associated for Blackwell with a defiance of classical, and by extension, religious authority. By refuting notions of Homer's divine origin, "Blackwell clearly identified himself with the opposition to the High Church men of Anglican persuasion.... Questioning Homer's divinity was somehow associated in Blackwell's mind with the examination of the fundamentals of religion." /7/ Blackwell's father, probably not coincidentally, had been a Presbyterian minister in the Scottish Church, with an interest in liberalizing church policies (Simonsuuri 102).

The approach which sought rationalistic explanations for natural phenomena, Blackwell's approach to Homeric

origins and creativity, coincides with the aim of the conjectural historians, who were also concerned with routing superstition. Dugald Stewart, in the passage from his biography of Adam Smith quoted in the preceding chapter, emphasizes the scientific (as they understood the term) nature of the conjectural historians' methods. In their view they were operating "from the known principles of human nature," a process which offered the satisfaction that "the mind is not only to a certain degree satisfied, but a check is given to that indolent philosophy, which refers to a miracle, whatever appearances, both in the natural and moral worlds, it is unable to explain" (48-49). In the light of the relationship between sentimentalism and the philosophy of Shaftesbury (see pages 33-35), it is noteworthy that Blackwell was also seen as a channel for Shaftesbury's ideas during his years at Marischal (Whitney 339).

Although Aberdeen was a flourishing community with two colleges and a serious intellectual life, Edinburgh was the focus of commercial, legal, religious, and scholarly activity. Eventually, some of the primitivists associated with the Aberdeen group moved to Edinburgh or kept ties with those who lived there. Whitney names Monboddo and Gregory in the first group (along with Macpherson) and Gerard, Beattie, and Dunbar in the second. The most

prominent primitivists in Edinburgh were Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson, Lord Kames, and Hugh Blair.

We have already looked at the relationship between these men and James Macpherson and discussed the genesis of Ossian in the context of Scottish Enlightenment thought. But it may be useful to isolate those particular ideas which are associated with the primitivists in order to trace further the connections between Ossian and epic theory.

Primitivism takes from conjectural history the notion that each society is unique and offers its own lessons, but adds the notion that the first ages of society provided the greatest possibility of human happiness. Different reasons for this happiness were suggested, but the various reasons had a common basis: the discontents of contemporary man when contrasted with the imagined felicities of the primitive state. Freedom, simplicity of lifestyle, natural surroundings, a coherent system of values, a hierarchy based on merit and heroic achievement, and the opportunity for self-expression--the blessings attributed to men living in earlier cultures highlight the failures of later ones.

Another belief of the primitivists is suggested by Lois Whitney's definition of primitivism. Whitney finds primitivism to be "not only a general idealization of

primitive man, but also an idealization of primitive poets" (337), a logical association because primitive society is the logical environment for the fostering of creativity. The primitivists' utilization of the four-stages theory developed by Adam Smith suggests that they did not view the history of civilization developmentally, but rather visualized each stage as a discrete entity, having its own individual laws and customs.

The first stage was far more conducive to the fostering of original genius than any other, for just those reasons already mentioned: these poets' closeness to elemental human experience, the absence of societal restraints and refinements, as well as the lack of inhibiting models of established poets. Moreover, the bard served his society in the most basic ways by memorializing the deeds of its heroes and perpetuating its values. He was not only the historian but the conscience of his culture. Ossian and Homer were the prime examples of such original genius, and as we will see, Ossian was often thought to be the superior genius because of the conditions which prevailed in his society and its greater antiquity.

Hugh Blair's Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian is a rich repository of primitivist theory. Primitive poetry is valuable, Blair tells us, not so much for the history it relates, "involved in fabulous

confusion" as that must be, but for the picture it renders of ancient manners. "These present to us what is more valuable than the history of such transactions as a rude age can afford--the history of human imagination and passion." The description of the unfettered life of the original poet is familiar.

In the infancy of societies, men live scattered and dispersed in the midst of solitary rural scenes, where the beauties of nature are their chief entertainment. They meet with many objects to them new and strange; their wonder and surprise are frequently excited; and by the sudden changes of fortune occurring in their unsettled state of life their passions are raised to the utmost; their passions have nothing to restrain them, their imagination has nothing to check it. They display themselves to one another without disguise, and converse and act in the uncovered simplicity of nature. As their feelings are strong so their language, of itself, assumes a poetical turn. Prone to exaggerate, they describe every thing in the strongest colors; which of course renders their speech picturesque and figurative (88-89).

William Duff's original genius inhabits a slightly different landscape from Blair's, closer to that of the melancholy wanderers in the Warton's poetry, or the Romantic solitaires of a later date. Simonsuuri considers Duff's description of the bard in his Essay on Original Genius to be "a eulogy of the primitive poet which in its unreality and beauty may well be called the primitivist thesis" (127).

Happily exempted from that tormenting ambition, and those vexatious desires, which trouble the current of modern life, he wanders with a serene, contented heart, through walks and groves consecrated to the muses; or, indulging a sublime, pensive and sweet-soothing melancholy, strays with a slow and solemn step, through the unfrequented desert, along the naked beach, or the bleak and barren heath. In such a situation, every theme is a source of inspiration, whether he describes the beauties of nature, which he surveys with transport; or the peaceful innocence of those happy times which are so wonderfully soothing and pleasing to the imagination (Duff 169-70).

One of the problems the primitivists considered as early as Thomas Blackwell was the origin of language. If the impulse was to trace human institutions to their origins, what more natural than to speculate on the beginnings of language, the basis of all human institutions and social interactions? Since the Scots were very social creatures, many students of the period, like Anand Chitnis, have speculated that interest in this topic reflected their own gregarious natures.

Language was clearly an important attribute of social man, simply because there could be no society without it. On the practical level, the social institutions of the Scottish Enlightenment...were highly dependent on social intercourse, and so in a sense, the philosophers both practiced and were intimately involved in sociality. Secondly, it is clear that the study of language and disquisitions upon it relate closely to an important area of eighteenth-century Scottish thought...namely philosophy of the mind. Language was an index of intelligence and reflected human mentality, knowledge, memory, sensibility. The history of society and of the human mind were linked.... (Chitnis 111).

It was, we recall, Adam Smith's early study of the evolution of language which inspired Dugald Stewart to designate as "Theoretical or Conjectural History" the discipline which "supplies the place of fact by conjecture...when we are unable to ascertain how men have actually conducted themselves upon particular occasions, [by] considering in what manner they are likely to have proceeded, from the principles of their nature and the circumstances of their external situation" (Stewart 48).

Smith's early essay "Considerations Concerning the First Formation of Languages and the Different Genius of Original and Compounded Languages" demonstrates that the primitive poet produces superior poetry because he has superior materials with which to work: the earliest languages. Smith shows how, as languages were made simpler through the course of time, they lost much of their beauty and usefulness for the poet. He contrasts the machine which improves as it is modernized with the spoken word, which, as it is simplified, becomes "more imperfect and less proper for many of the purposes of language" (44).

The loss of declensions and conjugations in modern languages results in the loss of elegance and sweetness. "What a Roman expressed by the single word, amavissem, an Englishman is obliged to express by four different words, I

should have loved." Also the rigidity of English word order consequent upon the lack of terminations "ties down many words to a particular situation, although they might be placed in another with much more beauty." Smith sums up his argument:

How much this power of transposing the order of their words must have felicitated the composition of the ancients, both in verse and prose can hardly be imagined. That it must greatly have facilitated their versification it is needless to observe; and in prose, whatever beauty depends upon the arrangement and construction of the several members of the period, must to them have been acquirable with much more ease, and to much greater perfection, than it can be to those whose expression is constantly confined by the prolixness, constraint and monotony of modern languages (Works 1: 46-48).

A significant connection between Smith's essay on the origin of language and Hugh Blair's Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian again underlines the network of relationships among the Scottish intellectuals. The Dissertation was first published with Fingal in 1761 and became incorporated into Blair's lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres which he delivered at Edinburgh University between 1759 and 1783 (his position obtained for him by Lord Kames). It was a work which enhanced Blair's reputation and contributed to the way in which the Ossianic poems were perceived. The Dissertation is remarkable, not so much for Blair's blind faith in the authenticity of the

poetry as for the zeal he exhibits in elaborating on the virtues of Ossian. The Critical Dissertation has been called "one of the most eloquent and convincing pronouncements on the wrong side of a case that can be found in English literary history."

Very little of the content of the Critical Dissertation is original. This is not surprising, considering the nature of Scottish Enlightenment life, where friends met privately and in clubs to discuss politics and moral philosophy, ethics and literature, but Blair's work is more derivative than most. His nineteenth-century biographer believes that he never had an original idea.

Blair was friendly with Adam Smith and familiar with his work. Lois Whitney believes that Blair received the bulk of his ideas for the Dissertation from lectures given by Smith at the University of Edinburgh in 1748. ("Primitivist Theories" 346-48). These lectures have not survived, but later work, such as the "Considerations concerning the First Formation of Languages..." and Smith's investigations into the origins of philosophy in such works as "The History of Astronomy" and "The Principles which lead and direct Philosophical Enquiries, illustrated by the History of Ancient Physics" attest to his interest in the history of ideas and the origins of human institutions. We have already also seen how the

four-stages theory originated in these same early lectures.

If we return to Blackwell's Life and Writings of Homer we find an early expression of the same concerns with the origins of human institutions (the earliest poetry), human language, and human culture, which are later taken up by the conjectural historians. Homer wrote epic poetry because, for Blackwell, the epic was the original poetry, reflecting man's sources of inspiration in nature and human nature, especially the latter. Epic poetry represents an unmediated passion and an unmediated virtue which both arise out of the same natural impulse. The song is a direct expression of harmony with one's inner being, one's surroundings and one's fellow men. "The social passions and noblest Affections," Blackwell says, "must prevail in an epic poem" (58).

Blackwell anticipates later primitivists in relating the first attempts at language to feeling. The first expressions of feeling "uttered...in a much higher Note than we do our Words now" easily evolved into the songs which were the first poems.

[The ancients] thought, it should seem, that Language was the first tamer of men, and its Origin to have been certain accidental Sounds, which that Naked Company of scrambling Mortals emitted by chance. Upon this supposition it will follow, that at first they uttered these Sounds in a much higher Note than we do our Words now; occasioned perhaps by their falling on them under some passion, Fear, Wonder or Pain; and then using

the same Sound, either when the Object or Accident recurred, or when they wanted to describe it by what they felt: Neither the syllables, nor the tone could be ascertained; but when they put several of these vocal Marks together, they would seem to sing...and hence came the ancient Opinion, "That Poetry was before Prose" (37-38).

Ossianic style surely owes a debt to two characteristic features of primitive language described by Blackwell: its monosyllabic roughness and its reliance on metaphor.

But however these things be, it is certain that the Primitive Parts of the languages reputed Original, are many of them rough, undeclined, impersonal monosyllables; expressive commonly of the highest Passions, and most striking Objects that present themselves in solitary savage Life (40).

From this Deduction it is plain that any language formed as above described must be full of metaphor; and that metaphor of the boldest, daring and most natural kind. For words taken wholly from rough Nature, and invented under some Passion, as Terror, Rage or Want (which readily extort sounds from Men), would be expressive of that Fanaticism and Dread, which is incident to Creatures living wild and defenseless. We must imagine their Speech to be broken, unequal and boisterous; one Word or Sound, according to its Analogy to different Ideas would stand for them all; a Quality we often mistake for Strength and Expression, while it is a real Defect (41-42).

Blackwell's Homer was exceedingly fortunate because his circumstances were ideally suited to his talents: he had the natural endowments, the education, the benign climate, a culture and a language at just those critical periods of development in which the creative artist flourishes. The

epic, in Blackwell's view, is only possible between the ages of "Nakedness and Barbarity, and those periods in which "private Passions are buried in the common Order and established Discipline" (56).

With this in mind Kames's pronouncement that Fingal and Temora are the only epic works now in existence from the first or hunting stage of society and probably "the only epic poems that were ever composed in that state" (my italics) (Sketches 399) take on an added significance. Not only was Ossian an original genius who, in Kames's view, overcame all obstacles to creation (except the purity of his country's manners): illiteracy, an "unhospitable climate" and "the face of the country so deformed as scarce to afford a pleasing object," but he gives us a unique window into the earliest of societies. And it is the only unmediated picture of a savage society that we will ever see.

Blackwell's suggestion that certain historical periods were more conducive to the writing of epic than other periods becomes, in the hands of later speculative historians, a full-blown theory of historical stages and the interrelationship of historical circumstance and literary creation. We have already looked at the work of Adam Smith and his followers, who considered the development of human institutions to have developed as a

function of the four distinct stages of subsistence: hunting, pasturage, agriculture and commerce. Others renamed the earliest periods according to a scheme which assigned positive values to the first, Savagery, and negative values to the second, Barbarism. Under this system, the almost inevitable coupling of Ossian's name with Homer's gains relevance. Ossianic poetry belonged to the very earliest phase of human development, what was now termed Savagery, and Homeric poetry was characteristic of the time of Barbarism, a developmentally later but not necessarily more desirable period. /8/ The work of these writers was not only literature of the highest merit; it was also evidence of great significance, evidence which was used to support a complex superstructure of historical conjecture.

And the historical "evidence" was used to help the Scots adjust to political realities. Basically the four-stages or stadial theory codified a number of insights: that societies had existed in the past which were much less complexly organized than contemporary European societies were, that very different societal structures accompanied the different "modes of subsistence," and that the European cultures of the period were living in an advanced, or in the terms of the time, "refined" civilization. Stadial theory recognizes a final stage,

"commerce," which as a description of the contemporary scene represents enormous changes from the previous stage, "agriculture." In other words, the development of the four-stages theory coincides with profound social and political upheavals of eighteenth-century life (especially, it should be noted, in a Scotland which was experiencing rapid economic growth), which the theory attempts not only to explain but also to justify.

This contention will become clearer if we examine some of the points made in J. G. A. Pocock's article, "Gibbon and the Shepherds: The Stages of Society in the Decline and Fall." Pocock sets the time of "that ideological debate over the processes of history...led by Scottish and English thinkers" to 1689 when a new political regime was taking shape in England. This regime was characterized by: "the massive growth of debtor and creditor relations between government and a new class of investors, the partial but increasing professionalization of military service, and the growth of a political oligarchy employing patronage...as its principal means of perpetuating power." What bothered the detractors of this regime, in particular, according to Pocock, was the emergence of a new class of merchants and rentiers "who had the wealth and leisure to pay the state to hire soldiers in their defense." The first debate in modern times over specialization of labor was stimulated by

what the enemies of the Whigs saw as a crucial surrender of civic virtue and political power. The question of a citizenry maintaining its own protection reappeared, as we saw, in the 1760s, when the Edinburgh literati were agitating for a Scottish militia.

Whig defenders demonstrated how personal liberty is enhanced when representatives assume the duties one otherwise would have to take on oneself--managing public security and government. They envisioned the alternative to their own commercial society as a slaveholding system, either that of the ancient world or the feudal economy of the Middle Ages, when individuals had to directly assume responsibilities which can be delegated in the newer system (194-95).

It is now clearer how the Ossianic poems are ideologically in tune with the anti-Whig, or reactionary (my term) faction. The stages invoked by the Whig defenders (not entirely congruent with the classic four stages) were invoked, says Pocock, "as means to the ideological defense of the mercantilist regimes of the early eighteenth century." The arguers claimed that specialization of functions was a good thing and "it was better to pursue wealth and leisure, while electing representatives to control government in its exercise of legislative and military power, than to attempt to be

oneself proprietor, warrior, and citizen." The representative of an earlier society who played all those roles was thought of as a feudal baron or hero of a savage tribe, and his culture found to be "prespecialized," "precommercial," and thereby lacking in the refinements and graces of more economically advanced cultures.

The virtue and independence of savage peoples were devalued in favor of those virtues which could be practiced by those possessed of property and the freedom to enjoy it, virtues only possible in a mobile and specialized economic system. The eighteenth-century terms associated with the last, and most developed stage, "taste and politeness," "thus became a powerful weapon in the defense of commercial and rentier oligarchy." This, of course, returns us to the Shaftesburian virtuoso who, also, was a man of "taste" (see pages 39-40).

It is now evident how the primitivist turned this ideological defense upside down. The warrior-citizen who had been devalued in the Whig system was held up as the most creative, benevolent and virtuous human specimen; and where the Whigs identified their civilization with the highest refinements in culture and manners, the primitivists claimed that human societies at the very dawn of civilization were equally capable of refined behavior. Pocock claims that an Addisonian polite morality, worked

out for the defense of the English Whig regime, "permitted the Scots to reconcile themselves to the loss of political power with the consolation of economic and cultural progress" (195). This may be true, but the vogue for the mythologized Scotland of the Ossianic poems shows that other forces were also at work, and that other kinds of structures were needed to compensate the Scots for their loss of national identity.

Let us, however, look at the four-stages concept from another angle, one which had a direct relevance to mid-eighteenth-century epic theory. Adam Smith had designated the four stages: hunters, shepherds, agriculture, and commerce. Adam Ferguson believed that there were three stages: savagery, barbarism and "polished" society. The point to be made is not how the theorists differed, but that there seemed to be a watershed in these modes of subsistence between a relatively peaceful period when men did not recognize rights to property and lived in comparative harmony, and a period when property was recognized but no institutional structures established to protect individual rights. The first harmonious era was named Savagery; and the second, anarchic and chaotic, Barbarism. The contrasts drawn between these two periods are important for this study because Ossian was assigned to a Savage culture, and Homer to a Barbaric one. So when the

inevitable comparisons arose between the two primitive bards, Ossian's work was deemed superior because it reflected the values of a morally superior culture. /9/ (This is evident from Smollett's review of Fingal in the Critical Review, discussed later in this chapter.)

Here is how Adam Ferguson in the Essay on the History of Civil Society differentiates the savage from the barbaric state.

Of the nations who dwell in...the less cultivated parts of the earth, some entrust their subsistence chiefly to hunting, fishing, or the natural produce of the soil. They have little attention to property, and scarcely any beginning of subordination or government. Others having possessed themselves of herds, and depending for their provisions on pasture, know what it is to be poor and rich. They know the relations of patron and client, of servant and master, and suffer themselves to be classed according to their measures of wealth. This distinction must create a material difference of character, and may furnish two separate heads under which to consider the history of mankind in their rudest state; that of the savage, who is not yet acquainted with property; and that of the barbarian, to whom it is, although not ascertained by laws, a principal object of care and desire (81-82).

The entire focus of a recent book by Margaret Mary Rubel is on how this Savage-Barbarism dichotomy influenced critical attitudes towards Ossian and Homer, and thereby contributed to a totally new and different critical treatment of the epic. Rubel makes two interesting observations in her discussion of the three stages. The

first is that the conjectural historians conceived of the period of barbarism as chaotic, yet necessary to human progress, because without the dissolution of primordial values a more advanced set of social structures could not have developed. The second observation is that a return to the positive harmony and benevolent behavior of the savage period was possible in a contemporary culture. This notion was called the "First Return to Nature." Rubel describes the three stages in these terms:

...first came the period of Savagery, which was contemporaneous with the birth of mankind. This had been the first natural and original state of existence. Then secondly, came the period of Barbarism, an era in which Savagery became corrupted and finally dissolved. After this period of general turmoil and social disorder dawned a new era, the "First Return to Nature," which witnessed the age of the polished or civilized societies (34).

It is clear from this passage that eighteenth-century historiography is in a transitional phrase, taking into account elements of the human story, particularly the economic institutions brought into being by the "modes of subsistence" model. This model had not been considered in the traditional historical pattern, which described the birth of a civilization, its growth and development, and its inevitable decadence and decay. The "First Return to Nature" does, however, suggest another kind of cyclical model. /10/

Macpherson's own explication of the three stages, in a passage already quoted, is careful to emphasize the peace and security and social harmony of the Ossianic era in relation to the darker, more violent period succeeding it.

There are three stages in human society. The first is the result of consanguinity, and the natural affection of the members of the family to one another. The second begins when the property is established, and men enter into associations for mutual defense against the invasions and injustice of neighbors. Mankind submit, in the third, to certain laws and subordinations of government, to which they trust the safety of their persons and property. As the first is formed on nature, so, of course, it is the most disinterested and noble. Men, in the last, have leisure to cultivate the mind, and to restore it, with reflection, to a primaeval dignity of sentiment. The middle state is the region of complete barbarism and ignorance ("Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian" 68).

Rubel finds this description of stadial theory, which was part of the "Dissertation of the Poems of Ossian" appended to the 1761 edition of Fingal, to be unsurpassed in clarity of exposition by any other historian during the following forty years (34). The passage also exhibits a talent for writing propaganda, which was later to serve Macpherson well when he became the chief spokesman for Lord North's government and an agent of the Nabob of Arcot. When Macpherson was extolling the virtues of the first stages of society he was also emphasizing the superiority of Ossian over Homer, whose protagonists lived in a less

desirable period of social history.

Barbarism was not only the designation of an earlier historical moment--it represented an ever-present threat. There was nothing in the contemporary understanding of history to suggest that history would not repeat itself and, indeed, the belief of the conjectural historians that they were living in a period which was often called the "First Return to Nature" implied other possible recurrences. Their fears were not negligible. While, as we have seen, Barbarism was an intermediary stage which made subsequent developments such as a regular form of government and the concept of private property possible, it was also a time of economic chaos and social anarchy.

The careful and persistent Ossianic researcher experiences a periodic but recurring impression that Macpherson was delivering to his audience messages which were subversive in intent. This is certainly true with regard to the implied superiority of the Scottish people, past and present. The subversive intent reappears when Ossianic religion is the issue. It is also inherent in the Savagery-Barbarism distinction. The conjectural historians believed that the introduction of private property initiated the change from the tranquility of the Savage State to the anarchy of Barbarism. Fruit-gatherers and hunters had no occasion to differentiate one man's property

from another man's, and therefore no reason to establish any sort of government. When, however, in the period referred to as Barbarism, notions of private property developed without any institutional government to control men's actions, the balanced social structure was destroyed--at least temporarily--without anything to take its place.

The sentimental version of primitivism which often expresses itself in a nostalgia for a fantasized golden age here takes on a political dimension. The "consanguineous" period in which Ossian lived, the time of Savagery, is a period of social egalitarianism. And although the period of Barbarism was believed to be necessary to the establishment of a higher social order, Civilization, Civilization was a higher order with a highly stratified class system, a fact which could not have been overlooked by a young Scot on the lower rungs of the social ladder. With this in mind we can see that the Macpherson "who was railing against the human species and in vast discontent ...and throwing out wild sallies against all established opinions" to the young Boswell (London Journal 264, 266), found, in Fingal, a more effective way to express his disillusionment with his own culture.

The notion that the primitivists had reforming as well as nostalgic impulses is confirmed by Hayden White. White

suggests that the concept of "Noble Savage" had a subversive intent, what he calls a magical or fetishistic function. While it seems to attribute positive qualities to an alien "wild humanity," White sees the irrational devotion lavished on the Noble Savage as a pathological displacement of libidinal interests attached to another group much closer to home (184). In White's view it is not the nobility of the savage with which the concept of the Noble Savage is concerned, but the nobility of the European nobility. His reasoning is convincing. He points out that the information which came back about the natives of the New World stressed their differentness from Europeans, and the discussions which this information inspired did not focus on those rights which Europeans and Savages ostensibly shared, the rights claimed for the European middle classes of the time: "life, liberty and property." If the Noble Savage concept had been concerned with bettering the situation of native peoples, these common rights would have been stressed. However, "the amelioration of the natives' treatment [by colonists] was not a primary consideration of those who promoted the idea of their nobility. The principal aim of the social radicals of the time was to undermine the very concept of nobility--or at least the idea of nobility tied to the notion of genetic inheritance" (192). White later goes on

to show that once the middle classes established their right to the same humanity as was formerly claimed only by the nobility, the concept of Noble Savage had outlived its usefulness and these same middle classes went on to dehumanize the classes below them as the seventeenth and eighteenth-century Europeans had dehumanized the natives of the New World (194). However, this part of our story extends far beyond Ossian. What White helps us to grasp is that buzz of implication which resonates around Ossian as a political manifesto. Macpherson's native Caledonians comment upon the class system in much the same way as Behn's Oroonoko or Addison's Yarico do. And when Fingal states that "the desert is enough for me, with all its woods and deer," he is asserting his birthright to more than just the territory of his native Morven.

When The Poems of Ossian are understood to have political implications, other puzzling aspects of Ossianic response become less mysterious. Napoleon's habit of carrying the poems with him on his campaigns is explained when it is understood that he had adopted the conjectural historian's interpretations of contemporary history. Napoleon believed that his ultimate mission was to return his civilization to the simplicity of Savagery after the Barbarism of the French Revolution. The bard who travelled with Napoleon's troops on his campaign to Egypt in 1798,

Parceval de Grandmaison, was an essential part of the enterprise. His task, like that of the bards of old, was to remind his soldier listeners of their patriotic purpose and imbue them with the heroic virtues of their ancestors.

/11/

In one memorable instance, the political and sentimental associations attached to the name of Ossian even changed the course of a nation's history. It was, according to J. S. Smart, because the Frenchman Bernadotte gave his son the name of Oscar, that the people of Sweden were even more inclined to view Bernadotte as a possible choice for their sovereign. The fact that a future king of their country might be called by the name of Ossian's heroic son appealed to them and helped to determine the result of the election. Oscar I later succeeded his father on the throne (15).

The greatest historical work of the eighteenth century, Gibbon's History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, was written under the influence of the socio-historical schemata discussed above. Gibbon also had a mission. His cautionary tale was designed to admonish and frighten a society as prone to a decline into the state of Barbarism as the Romans had been (Rubel 37).

From the perspective of the conjectural historians, instructive parallels can be drawn between The Decline and

Fall and the Ossianic poems. Both represent attempts to retrieve the "manners" of long vanished cultures and assess the meaning of those societies in an eighteenth-century context. Both look back upon the forces which brought down a once-flourishing society, and both works try to make sense of this cycle of greatness succeeded by decline and finally by cultural extinction.

The title James Hervey chose for his evangelistic musings, Meditations Among the Tombs, would have been equally appropriate for The Decline and Fall and the Ossianic poems. Gibbon pinpoints the moment when his long labor began to a meditation among the ruins of the Roman forum on October 16, 1764, and while Macpherson did not (and, obviously, could not) provide such a convenient marker, his nostalgia for a lost Scotland had its origin in ruins, which, though not as picturesque, were surely as real as those of Rome. As we have seen, English retributive actions against Scottish customs and the Scottish language accelerated after the rebellion of '45.

Macpherson makes explicit comparisons between a fantasized third-century Scotland and his own "polished age;" Gibbon shows how the civic virtues of the early Roman republic were eroded by the corruption, degeneracy and luxury of succeeding periods. (Burrow 39).

However, while both Gibbon and Macpherson had visions

of more admirable cultures than their own, Gibbon's vision was based on actual historical accounts. Because Gibbon was not trying to manipulate history to match his vision but to find the underlying causes for behavior which had been recorded, his was a philosophic, not a fantasy history.

The difference in their approaches is perhaps most evident in their attitudes towards the earliest phases of society: Savagery and Barbarism. Gibbon does not provide us with definitions of these stages of human society, yet it is clear from his examples that the people Gibbon calls barbarians are not very different from the Ossianic savages. They both are the products of militaristic societies in which virtue is identified with physical strength and military success.

However, Macpherson's third-century Scots are seen through a sentimental filter, while Gibbon is more realistic about the character of the barbarian tribes who sacked Rome. In the ninth chapter of the first volume of The Decline and Fall Gibbon discusses the paradoxes of this character.

The same barbarians are by turns the most indolent and the most restless of mankind. They delight in sloth, they detest tranquillity. The languid soul, oppressed with its own weight, anxiously required some new and powerful sensation; and war and danger were the only amusements adequate to its fierce temper. The sound that summoned the

German to arms was grateful to his ear. It roused him from his uncomfortable lethargy, gave him an active pursuit, and by strong exercise of the body, and violent emotions of the mind, restored him to a more lively sense of his existence. In the dull intervals of peace these barbarians were immoderately addicted to deep gaming and excessive drinking; both of which by different means, the one by inflaming their passions, the other by extinguishing their reason, alike relieved them of the pain of thinking (1: 239).

Gibbon touches upon Ossianic issues twice in the course of his history, and at both points he subtly questions the authenticity of the poems. In the first instance, when the subject is the Caledonian wars (A.D. 208), which were fought during that period when Fingal was said to have lived, Gibbon uses the contrast between the ferocity of the Roman rulers and the benevolence of the Erse to cast doubt on Macpherson's veracity. After describing how Fingal defeats Caracul, the son of the King of the World (using Macpherson's phraseology is a nice touch) at the battle of Carun, Gibbon undercuts the account by claiming that "something of a doubtful mist still hangs over these Highland traditions; nor can it be entirely dispelled by the most ingenious researches of modern criticism." "If," he continues, "we could with safety, indulge the pleasing supposition that Fingal lived and Ossian sung, the striking contrast of the situation and manners of the contending nations might amuse a philosophic mind."

The parallel would be little to the advantage of

the more civilized people, if we compared the unrelenting revenge of Severus with the generous clemency of Fingal; the timid and brutal cruelty of Caracalla, with the bravery, the tenderness, the elegant genius of Ossian; the mercenary chiefs who from motives of fear or interest, served under the Imperial standard, with the freeborn warriors who started to arms at the voice of the King of Morven; if in a word, we contemplated the untutored Caledonians, glowing with the warm virtues of nature, and the degenerate Romans, polluted with the mean vices of wealth and slavery (1: 141-42).

A note to "the most ingenious researches of modern criticism" reveals that Ossian refers to Severus's son by a nickname, Caracul (the Caracalla of Roman history), that he did not obtain until four years after the wars, and which was seldom used by contemporary historians. The philosophic mind speculates that this usage by the highland bard "may seem strange" (1: 142 note).

In the famous fifteenth chapter, Gibbon brings up the possibility that the Christian faith may have penetrated into Britain by the second century A. D. He points out, in a note, that "about a century afterwards, Ossian the son of Fingal is said to have disputed, in his extreme old age, with one of the foreign missionaries and the dispute is still extant, in verse and in the Erse language." He refers his readers to "Mr. Macpherson's Dissertation on the Antiquity of Ossian's Poems, p.10." (2: 68).

Like Gibbon, Horace Walpole in the '70s was inclined to be pessimistic about contemporary culture. In a letter to

Mason dated July 22, 1772, Walpole compares the possibilities of an age "in which all arts, all sciences are encouraged and rewarded" with what that age has actually produced. Significantly, his melancholy litany of literary names begins with the antiquarians and ends with an ironic reference to the Ossianic epic.

Mr. Cole has told me of somebody else, I forgot who it is, that is going to republish old historians à la Hearne. This taste of digging up antiquated relics flourishes abundantly, unless Foote's last new piece blows us up. He has introduced the learned society in Chancery Lane, sitting as they really did, on Whittington and his cat; and as I do not love to be answerable for any fooleries, but my own, I think I shall scratch my name out of their books. Oxford has lately contributed to the mass The Lives of Leland, Hearne and Wood. In the latter's journal one of the most important entries is, This day old Joan began to make my bed. What a figure will this our Augustan age make! Garrick's prologues, epilogues and verses, Sir W. Chamber's gardening, Dr. Nowel's sermon, Whittington and his cat, Sir John Dalrymple's history and the Life of Henry II. What a library of poetry, taste, good sense, veracity and vivacity! ungrateful Shebbear! indolent Smollett! trifling Johnson! piddling Goldsmith! how little have they contributed to the glory of a period in which all arts, all sciences are encouraged and rewarded. Guthrie buried his first genius in a Review, and Mallet died of the first effusions of his loyalty. The retrospect makes one melancholy, but Ossian has appeared, and were Paradise once more lost, we should not want an epic poem (28: 40-41).

Walpole, incidentally, questioned the authenticity of the Ossianic poems from the very beginning. He later vacillated but finally returned to his original disbelief.

Writing to David Dalrymple in June of 1760 after he had seen the Fragments, he comments: "I am much obliged to you, Sir, for the volume of Erse poetry; all of it has merit....I can, however, by no means agree with the publisher that they seem to be parts of an heroic poem; nothing can be more unlike." Walpole compares this choice of genre with "[taking] all the epitaphs in Westminster Abbey and [saying] it was an epic poem on the history of England. The greatest part are evidently elegies...." Walpole admired Hugh Blair: "A man who knows Dr. Blair's character will undoubtedly take his word," yet sided with the sceptics who "will demand proofs, not assertions" (42: 69).

If we return to the question of epic definition we can see that the mid-eighteenth-century concept of epic was foregrounded against the socio-historical framework we have been considering. Epic was identified with primitive, that is Savage or Barbarous societies. However, as little was known about these societies except what was derived from ancient historical documents, travellers' narratives, or poems, a good deal of speculative interpretation could be derived from a small amount of material. With Homer, obviously, some such speculation had a basis in fact. /12/ In the case of Ossian any historical conjecture had to be a reflection of the perceiver, because there was little

actual material on which this speculation could be based. The result was that the arguments became circular, the predictions self-fulfilling. The Ossianic poems contributed to current information about the period of Savagery, and the concept of the period of Savagery fed back into the critical perception of the poems. For example, Blair in his Critical Dissertation claims that Ossianic society is a society of hunters "not merely because of some internal evidence for this in the Poems themselves, but rather because this sort of activity was already known from eighteenth-century history-writing as an eminently suitable occupation for savages" (Rubel 53). John Millar, the author of The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks, another contemporary account of conjectural history (Millar was a protege of Lord Kames and an eminent jurist in his own right), viewed the behavior of people living in a shepherd society as mild and gentle. /13/ However, "this opinion was not based on "any intrinsic analysis of such societies but seems to rest on an inference from Ossian, which he has then generalised as being relevant for a historical analysis" (Rubel 53).

Millar's wholehearted acceptance of Ossianic history as well as the histrionic "manners" of the Ossianic protagonists is a striking illustration of those aspects of a text which Peter Rabinowitz calls "silences," places that

the contemporary reader passes over without comment because he or she accepts them as realistic (see pages 224-25).

In his Origin of the Distinction of Ranks, Millar finds a direct correspondence between "the manners of a people acquainted with pasturage" and "a degree of tenderness and delicacy of sentiment which can be hardly be equalled in the most refined productions of a civilized age." He allows that "some allowance ... must be made for the heightening of a poet possessed of uncommon genius and sensibility," but still maintains the probability that "the real history of his countrymen was the groundwork of those events which he has related, and of those tragical effects which he frequently ascribes to the passion between the sexes" (206).

The picture which Millar paints of the idyllic life lived by shepherds in the golden age is clearly influenced by the works of Ossian. (It should be noted, however, that Millar's benevolent shepherds belong to the second stage, "pasturage," not the first, "hunting," stage of human society. This does not exclude Ossian from Millar's theory but only demonstrates that different commentators developed the stadial theory in different ways.)

In the agreeable pictures of the golden age, handed down from remote antiquity, we may discover the opinion that was generally entertained of the situation and manners of shepherds. Hence, that particular species of poetry, which is now

appropriated by fashion, to describe the pleasures of rural retirement, accompanied with innocence and simplicity, and with the indulgence of all the tender passions. There is very good reason to believe, that these representations of the pastoral life were not inconsistent with the real conditions of shepherds, and that the poets, who were the first historians, have only embellished the traditions of early times. In Arcadia, in Sicily, and in some parts of Italy where the climate was favorable to the rearing of cattle, or where the inhabitants were but little exposed to the depredations of their neighbors, it is probable that the refinement natural to the pastoral state was carried to a great height. This refinement was the more likely to become the subject of exaggeration and poetical embellishment, as from a view of the progressive improvements in society, it was contrasted, on the one hand, with the barbarous manners of real savages; and, on the other, with the opposite style of behavior in polished nations, who, being constantly engaged in the pursuit of gain, and immersed in the cares of business, have contracted habits of industry, avarice and selfishness (207).

According to Margaret Rubel, an additional set of assumptions contributed to the horizon of expectations which attended the reception of Ossian. It was believed that the contemporary stage of history represented a "First Return to Nature" which was analogous to the period of the Ossianic poems, and, therefore, it became natural to seek out and discover attractive parallels between one's own period and Ossian's.

...there were other reasons for the enormous popularity of Ossian's poems, reasons stronger than the mere narrow vision of the Scottish patriot. For the general British public Ossian offered an image of the character of the would-be natural man, simple and straightforward, sentimental and fair, not cunning and brutal, and

though not religious as yet, nevertheless behaving as if he somehow already knew what sort of moral norms a Protestant ecclesiastic would preach from the pulpit during his customary Sunday sermon. After all, the period of Savagery had been the first natural state of man's existence, and contemporary British civilization was moreover regarded as the First Return to Nature--so some sort of similarity would have been believed to exist between these two periods to make such analogies possible. Certainly, British readers of the period could, rationally, make the necessary historical adjustment; nonetheless, emotionally they were only too willing to claim a kinship with the period of Savagery, and moulded their highly sympathetic reception of Ossian's poems accordingly (52).

Another major focus of eighteenth-century historiography is relevant to the search for analogies between contemporary and Ossianic experience, and this is the rise of interest in social history. This fascination with what Trilling, quoted at the beginning of this chapter (and the historians themselves), called "manners" influences many different areas of response. The details which Macpherson provided of the everyday life of people in the "consanguineous" period of society provoked a great deal of discussion and speculation: commentators wanted to know what utensils were used for eating, where people slept, and what they wore, as well as what they felt and did. /14/ The identification with earlier societies which had implications for contemporary ethical behavior was also, as we have seen, part of the attempt to retrieve the natural, unencumbered self, and to recapture authentic

feeling.

However, the details of social history contributed to the picture of a nation's history which is another crucial aspect of Macpherson's achievement. Fingal and Temora are native epics. Ossian, therefore, was to be revered as the original genius who preserved the story of his people.

The preoccupation with originality and the discovery of original geniuses of all sorts during this period reflects the desire to seek out a true poetry, that poetry which "delivers the emotions of the heart, in words suggested by the heart: for [the primitive poet] knows no other" (Adam Ferguson, Civil Society 285). The essential quality of this natural genius was not that he belonged to an early stage of society but that he could get in touch with his natural self. As Abrams points out, the terms "primitive" and "natural" were used in extraordinarily large, diverse, and vaguely defined ways (82).

Hugh Blair supposes that human societies are most alike in the earliest stages of development: "mankind never bear such resembling features as they do in the beginnings of society" (Critical Dissertation 91). And because it was the developmental state of a particular society rather than its antiquity which determined its primitiveness, such dissimilar works as Homer's epics, the sacred Hebrew texts,

Runic odes and Ossian's poems were all qualified to be considered as the products of original geniuses. For this reason the poems of contemporary South Sea Islanders and American Indians could be judged in the same light. Another group of primitive poets, those native sons and daughters with a natural gift, came in for some attention when primitivism was in vogue. Among this group are Stephen Duck, the thresher poet; Ann Yearsley, the milkmaid; Thomas Blacklock, the blind Scottish poet; and most notably, Robert Burns, who consciously assumed the role of the natural genius, far more successfully than the others. Chatterton conceived his alter ego, the monk Rowley, as a native genius, but, ironically, it was Chatterton himself who was to be included in this select society after his untimely death (Sherburn and Bond 1103). Finally, as Abrams shows, Spenser and Shakespeare were linked with these other original geniuses, because although they were products of a more advanced culture they, "whether through ignorance of models or strength of innate poetic faculty, composed from nature rather than art" (82-83).

The study of Homeric criticism as its focus changed during the eighteenth century reveals, in miniature, the shifting nature of the entire corpus of eighteenth-century criticism.

From the the neo-classic approach of the "Moderns" /15/ who treated Homer as the father of the epic (and therefore inferior to Virgil in his conformity to epic conventions), Homer at the end of the century is seen as the original genius who served as the collective voice of a tribal society (Simonsuuri 153). Blackwell as early as 1735 was treating Homer as a spirit of his age, while Smollett as late as 1761 was still talking about epic "rules," but in the main the Romantic aesthetic was emerging, with Homer assuming a Romantic role as blind rhapsodist and his creation, epic, becoming merely another variety of lyric, that original expression of primitive feeling (see n. 19, pages 211-12).

Eighteenth-century critical attitudes toward Homer shifted as the century progressed (this, in itself, a demonstration of the historical relativism which had developed during this period), but epic retained prestige as the embodiment of nationalistic ideals. In fact, the demand for a native epic increased with the development of nationalistic awareness. Writers had long been conscious of the lack of any native English work comparable to the Iliad. Milton, as a young man, had investigated many legendary episodes from English history in his search for appropriate subjects, and Dryden in his Original and Progress of Satire (1693) had lamented his failure to produce a native epic (Haywood 50). However, Macpherson's

situation differed significantly from that of Milton and Dryden in two major respects: he had to take cognizance of the advances in historiography, including the recognition of historical relativism, which had occurred in the eighteenth century, and he had the burden of preserving the records of a dying culture (69).

If Fingal (and later Temora) were to be accepted as epics, Macpherson had to give his readers sufficient reasons for doing so. Although Ossianic poetry has more in common with the melancholy poetry of the mid-eighteenth century than with the poems of Homer or Virgil, Macpherson did incorporate epic features or at least an aura of "epicness" to keep consistency with his claims to have discovered ancient bardic remains, and retain the prestige associated with such discoveries. The Iliad, rather than the Aeneid, would be the more logical model, because the Aeneid was produced in a later, less heroic age. And it is the heroic ethos, the *raison d'être* of epic, which Macpherson tried hardest to approximate.

For example, Ossian's description of Fingal's first meeting with the enemy chieftain Swaran in Book II of Fingal reveals how Macpherson was able to convey the values of a militaristic society and create epic on his own terms through his bardic impersonation. Swaran is the King of a country in Scandinavia which Macpherson calls Lochlin. Fingal, the King of Morven in Western Scotland, has come to

turn back the invading Lochlannachs from Ireland (Erin).

Ullin came with aged steps, and spoke to Starno's son. "O thou that dwellest afar, surrounded, like a rock, with thy waves! come to the feast of the king, and pass the day in rest. To-morrow, let us fight, O Swaran, and break the echoing shields."--"To-day," said Starno's wrathful son, "we break the echoing shields: to-morrow my feast shall be spread; but Fingal shall lie on earth."--"To-morrow let his feast be spread," said

Fingal, with a smile. "To-day, O my sons! we shall break the echoing shields. Ossian, stand thou near my arm. Gaul, lift thy terrible sword. Fergus, bend thy crooked yew. Throw, Fillan, thy lance through heaven. Lift your shields like the darkened moon. Be your spears the meteors of death. Follow me in the path of my fame. Equal my deeds in battle" (324-5).

The battle rages:

As a hundred winds on Morven; as the streams of a hundred hills, as clouds fly successive over heaven; as the dark ocean assails the shore of the desert: so roaring, so vast, so terrible, the armies mixed on Lena's echoing heath. The groans of the people spread over the hills; it was like the thunder of night, when the cloud bursts on Cona; and a thousand ghosts shriek on the hollow wind. Fingal rushed on in his strength, terrible as the spirit of Trenmor; when in a whirlwind he comes to Morven to see the children of his pride. The oaks resound on their mountains, and the rocks fall down before him. Dimly seen as lightens the night, he strides largely from hill to hill. Bloody was the hand of my father, when he whirled the gleam of his sword. He remembers the battles of his youth. The field is wasted in its course! (325).

At day's end when the victorious Caledonians gather to listen to the tales of the bards, Fingal, his thoughts on

"the days of other years," confides his philosophy to his grandson, Oscar.

Son of my son," began the king. "O, Oscar, pride of youth: I saw the shining of the sword. I gloried in my race. Pursue the fame of our fathers; be thou what they have been, when Trenmor lived, the first of men, and Trathal, the father of heroes! They fought the battle in their youth. They are the song of bards. O Oscar! bend the strong in arm; but spare the feeble hand. Be thou a stream of many tides against the foes of thy people; but like the gale, that moves the grass, to those who ask thine aid. So Trenmor lived; such Trathal was; and such has Fingal been. My arm was the support of the injured; the weak rested behind the lightning of my steel (326).

In the fifteenth book of Pope's version of the Iliad, Nestor exhorts the dejected and defeated Greeks to rally, with similar appeals to national and family pride.

O Friends! be Men: your generous Breasts inflame
 With mutual Honour, and with mutual shame!
 Think of your Hopes, your Fortunes; all the Care
 Your Wives, your Infants, and your Parents share:
 Think of each living Father's rev'rend Head;
 Think of each Ancestor with Glory dead;
 Absent, by me they speak, by me they sue;
 They ask their Safety and their Fame from you:
 The Gods their Fates on this one Action lay,
 And all are lost, if you desert the Day
 (15.796-805).

Even a superficial reading of these two passages provides a concrete demonstration that the readers of the 1720s had very different expectations of epic poetry from their counterparts in the 1760s. The theme of the two passages is essentially the same: "Fight bravely so that

you will not dishonor your family name," (although Macpherson adds the sentimental enjoiner, "bend the strong in arm; but spare the feeble hand"). However, only a monumental restructuring of public taste would account for the acceptance of such an enormously variant poetic spirit. Pope's hard-edged couplets command notice and stay in the memory, didactically memorable. Macpherson's artless sentences slide out of the mind leaving impressions, free-floating emotions. Macpherson offered heroism and benevolence idealized beyond credibility; Pope (after Homer) believable actions of psychological validity.

The armies of Fingal and Starvo were compared to streams, winds and clouds. The opposing armies of the third book of the Iliad are likened to seasonal changes in a famous simile:

Thus by their Leader's care each martial Band
 Moves into Ranks, and stretches o'er the Land.
 With Shouts the Trojans rushing from afar
 Proclaim their Motions, and provoke the War:
 So when inclement Winters vex the Plain
 With piercing Frosts, or thick-descending Rain,
 To warmer Seas the Cranes embody'd fly,
 With Noise, and Order, thro' the mid-way Sky;
 To Pygmy-Nations Wounds and Death they bring,
 And all the War descends upon the Wing.
 (3.1-10)

In comparison, the metaphoric clouds of the Scotch warriors pale next to the clouds of dust raised by the Greeks and Trojans:

Lost and confus'd amidst the thicken'd Day:
So wrapt in gathering dust, the Grecian train
A moving Cloud, swept on, and hid the Plain.
(3.20-23)

The Iliad is the most obvious source of several episodes in Fingal. For example, the Greek code of aristeia, which requires that the warrior demonstrate his courage in individual combat, is responsible for several contests, most notably the decisive match between Fingal and Swaran in the fifth book of Fingal which ends this Irish war. /16/

But behold the king of Morven! He moves,
below, like a pillar of fire. His strength is
like the stream of Lubar or the wind of the
echoing Cromla, when the branchy /17/ forests of
night are torn from all their rocks. Happy are
thy people, O Fingal! thine arm shall finish their
wars. Thou art the first in their dangers: the
wisest in the days of their peace. Thou speakest
and thousands obey: armies tremble at the sound of
thy steel. Happy are thy people, O Fingal! king
of resounding Selma. Who is that so dark and
terrible coming in the thunder of his course? who
but Starno's son, to meet the King of Morven?
Behold the battle of the chiefs. it is the storm
of the ocean, when two spirits meet far distant,
and contend for the rolling of the waves. The
hunter hears the noise on his hill. He sees the
high billows advancing to Ardven's shore. Such
were the words of Connal when the heroes met in
fight. There was the clang of arms! there every
blow like the hundred hammers of the furnace.
Terrible is the battle of the kings; dreadful the
look of their eyes. Their dark-brown shields are
cleft in twain. Their steel flies, broken from
their helms. They fling their weapons down. Each
rushes to the heroes' grasp; their sinewy arms
bend round each other: they turn from side to
side, and strain and stretch their large-spreading
limbs below. But when the pride of their strength
arose, they shook the hill with their heels.

Rocks tumble from their places on high; the green headed bushes are overturned. At length the strength of Swaran fell; the king of the groves is bound. Thus have I seen on Cona; but Cona I behold no more! thus have I seen two dark hills removed from their place by the strength of their bursting stream. They turn from side to side in their fall; their tall oaks meet one another on high. Then they tumble together with all their rocks and trees. The streams are turned by their side. The red ruin is seen afar (340-41).

Macpherson has adopted another convention of heroic poetry: the war council. Gerald Tyson has pointed out the similarity between the council convened by Cuthullin in the first book of Fingal, when the Lochlannach invaders are threatening, and the meeting of the Greek warriors in Book IX of the Iliad, when Agamemnon, depressed over the course of the war, suggests that his troops return to their ships and leave Troy (55).

"Hail," said Cuthullin, "sons of the narrow vales! hail hunters of the deer! Another sport is drawing near: it is like the dark rolling of that wave on the coast! Or shall we fight, ye sons of war! or yield green Erin to Lochlin? (295).

Another epic technique found frequently in Ossian and most certainly derived from Homeric poetry, although it is frequent in the novels of the period, is the interpolated episode. Tyson characterizes the interpolations in the Iliad as "organic," that is, they "provide the reader with information which augments his understanding of the action's significance and lends variety or amplitude to the

plot." His example is the description of Hephaistos forging the shield of Achilles. The shield as a gift from the gods emblemizes both the central events of Homer's epic and the ultimate significance of those events (56).

In contrast, Tyson claims that the interpolated episodes in Fingal are not "organic" to the plot: "instead of giving the reader a clearer understanding of the action's import, they serve a largely affective purpose." However, when it is understood that the affective purpose stands in as a substitute for "action" in the Ossianic poems, then the interpolated episodes can seem to have as "organic" a relation to the ethos of Macpherson's poetry as Homer's plots have to the social context of his poetry. The nineteenth-century Gothic novelist Maturin's comment about his method is relevant here. "Emotions," Maturin stated, "are my events."

A typical such episode, the tale of Comal and Galbina, ends Book II of Fingal. In this book the Irish have been losing and their king, Cuthullin, attributes his recent defeats in battle to the fact that he had killed his friend Ferda some time before. The minstrel Carril tells Cuthullin this tale of "the hapless pair" to convince him that "ill success did not always attend those who innocently kill their friends." If that is the ostensible moral, another level of meaning is implied by these young

lovers meeting untimely deaths. When Galbina "clothed her fair sides with armor" to try Comal's love, he thought that she was an enemy and slew her. When "he searched for [his own] death along the field," he could not find it, for "who could slay the mighty Comal?" Finally, he "threw away his dark brown shield" and "an arrow found his manly breast" (317). The elements in this story are the familiar elements of Macpherson's particular brand of sentimentality: misunderstandings, unrealized possibilities, untimely deaths, even the young woman who meets her death in men's clothing, and, as these sentimental "events" accumulate from episode to episode, they compound the melancholia which underlies the Ossianic "action."

Ossianic supporters frequently commented upon the barbaric (in both senses: as examples of the manners of the stage of development they labeled Barbarism, as well as cruel and brutal) behavior of Homer's heroes. Achilles' withdrawal from battle, the Greeks' treatment of Hector's body, are the classic examples, but Paris's flight from his duel with Menelaus also provides a striking contrast to the Fingalian heroes, who strive to defend the weak and injured, pursue the fame of their fathers, and be worthy subjects of bardic songs. Yet, while Ossian's heroes can rarely be accused of cowardice, they also have less

phrase is common in contemporary criticism), has created "a new species of composition."

It would be as absurd to examine this poem by the rules of Aristotle, as it would be to judge a Lapland jacket by the fashion of an Armenian gabardine. Some critics, more attached to the form than to the spirit of poetry, have condemned Ariosto because he deviated from the established rules of the Stagyrite; and others have as strenuously asserted, that he had a right to invent a new species of composition....Without all doubt, if the poetry is agreeable, the poet has a natural right to choose the manner in which it shall be presented. If the liquor be delicious in taste and flavour, what matters it, whether it is offered in a plain conch shell, or a cup of agat sparkling with gems.

Smollett contends that if Ariosto could be excused for neglecting the epic rules which he knew, "surely it cannot be criminal in a Scottish bard to compose differently from a critic whose works he could not possibly know."

On the other hand, the epic conventions remain a matter of importance, and Smollett emphasizes that Fingal does conform, in essential ways, to Aristotle's rules for the epic, and is therefore, "a truly epic poem,... in many places superior even to Homer and Virgil." It "celebrates and records the actions of heroes." "The subject is single, great, intire, and...complete," in contrast with the Iliad and Aeneid. "It has the narrative mixed with the dramatic, manners or characters, episodes and changes of fortune." And "it is unified--more perfectly than the Iliad itself." (410).

We have seen earlier in this chapter how the Savage-Barbarian dichotomy colored the Ossian-Homer debate. But since Smollett's review was written shortly after Fingal was published, it is, if not the earliest, at least one of the earliest accounts of Ossian's superiority over Homer. As we would imagine from the idealizations of what Macpherson calls the "consanguineous" period of human history, Smollett bestows the highest praise on Ossianic character. It is in the area of character, Smollett tells us, that Ossian provides the greatest contrast with Homer and Virgil.

Because Smollett sees no incongruity between the views of character in a sentimental and a heroic age, and does not differentiate between the benevolent actions of sentimental protagonists and the machismic behavior of epic heroes, we can guess that his patriotic enthusiasm for Scottish literature has overtaken his judgment, or, alternatively, that he has been reading too much conjectural history.

That particular which, of all others, will be the most apt to excite the admiration and command the applause, is the generous humanity of heart which distinguishes the principal personages of this amazing performance. That in those times of barbarity, before the mind was extended by cultivation, or the heart softened by the precepts and examples of true religion, a race of heroes should appear on the desert hills of Scotland, endued with all the tenderness of human nature; is a circumstance that even transcends the ordinary

mounds [bounds] of credibility. It is a circumstance, in which, we will be bold to say, the Celtic bard Ossian has far excelled, not only his blind brother Maenides of Greece, but also the mild, civilized and sentimental Mantuan (412).

William Kenrick, the critic who wrote the reviews of Fingal in Ralph Griffith's Monthly Review for February and March, 1762, disagrees with Smollett in almost every important respect. /18/ Kenrick uses the same socio-historical and literary-critical background to reach very different conclusions, employing the very same conventions Smollett uses, to prove that Fingal is not an epic at all. He draws upon the conjectural historians to demonstrate that Ossian could not have written an epic in any case.

In his view, the primitive age in which Ossian lived was not conducive to epic. He lived too early to observe and record the manifold operations of the human mind.

In the very early infancy of languages and states, when the manners of men were simple, and their intercourse confined, they must evidently want the means of acquiring an extensive knowledge of mankind, and thereby a very intimate acquaintance with the various faculties and operations of the human mind. Hence the poet must be necessarily, in a great degree, deficient in the powers of diversifying his personages, distinguishing them by mental characteristics, and making them express themselves with a propriety of speech and sentiment, justly adapted to their characters on every occasion. Had Ossian therefore possessed even a superior genius to Homer, we conceive he could not, in the age wherein he is said to have lived, have produced an epic poem of equal merit with that of the Iliad (43).

In Kenrick's eyes, Ossian's inability to render believable or "round" characters destroys the legitimacy of his fable, and, in consequence, the life of his poem. His work cannot be identified as "epic" because the actions of his characters are not probable and therefore not consistent with a moral purpose (the fable), the *raison d'être* of epic. The incongruities and inconsistencies in Ossianic character for this reviewer obviate any clear moral purpose and therefore any merit in the poems. "In proportion therefore as an epic poem is defective in its fable, its merit declines; and, without affording instances of invention, however happy the poet may prove in his versification, or in embellishing his style with flowers of rhetoric, his performance must still continue to be deemed an history in verse." However, Kenrick does not accept Macpherson's version of history either. A secondary issue in the review is to show how the "manners" of the poems which "should be justly deduced from the times in which the transactions of the Poem are supposed to have happened" are not so deduced. Kenrick uncovers what he considers to be striking incongruities in Macpherson's work. Kenrick's major concern, though, is to find a critical basis for his dissatisfaction with Fingal.

How he does this is evident in his discussion of the episode of Duchomar, Cathbat and Morna. When Fingal is

taking an inventory of his troops he discovers that Cathbat and Duchomar are missing. However, Fergus conveniently arrives at this moment to recite the tale of their deaths. The reviewer finds it hard to believe that Fingal would not have already have found out that they were dead. Other implausibilities follow, but in order to appreciate them it is necessary to enter "a little particularly into the probability of the circumstances, justness of the imagery, and propriety of sentiment contained in this episode."

The story-within-a-story is a typical Macphersonian love-triangle which ends in the death of those involved.

In Kenrick's summary:

Duchomar...having slain Cathbat, the lover of Morna, returns, with a present of a stately deer, to the maid, and sollicitis her love. Morna tells him that she loves him not; that Cathbat, the son of Torman was her love, and that she waited his coming. However the gloomy Duchomar had killed Cuthbat at Branno's stream and he tells her that she will wait in vain. He tells her that he will raise Cathbat's tomb on Cromla and that she should turn her affections on him, whose arm is strong as a storm.

Kenrick points out that this circumstance of Duchomar's promising to raise the tomb of his murdered rival is calculated to soothe the grief and resentment of Morna, as such an act has been represented throughout the poems as a great mark of respect for the deceased. Her response is to kill Duchomar.

The lengthy commentary he makes on this episode is designed to back up his contention that the Poet "appears to have understood little of the human mind, and of the application of its various faculties in the conduct of mankind, in order to give cause for and verisimilitude to, the actions he describes." He discovers many absurdities, although his descriptions of the ways he believes that human beings behave owe more to his knowledge of sentimental tragedy than to the psychology of everyday life.

The first thought, which would naturally be suggested to a man who had killed a rival preferred to himself, would certainly relate to the manner in which he might reconcile that action to the object of his love; for which reason, he would not abruptly tell her that he had murdered him, and directly solicit her love. The natural way would have been to introduce the act with every circumstance that might soften and extenuate its guilt, imputing the rashness of the deed to the irresistible impulse of his passion for her, and insinuating that so ardent an affection deserved a reciprocal return; and that beauty delighted in rewarding the brave. After this he might, with propriety, have mentioned the raising the tomb of the deceased, as a proof that no malice or resentment against Cathbat entered into the cause of his death. Such an apology had not only been natural in itself, but would have as naturally suggested to Morna the means of disguising her design under a plausible pretext. She might hence have seemed to acquiesce in his sentiments, respecting the reward of superior valour; and affecting to renounce her passion for Cathbat, have asked, with propriety enough, to see that sword which slew the man, whom she had before thought invincible. But as the passage is here circumstanced, it was the most unnatural of all methods of seduction, after calling Duchomar her

foe, to request him to give her his sword because it was stained with the blood of her lover; a cause for which she must naturally have detested its sight. The weakest of men, therefore, could not have been induced to part with his sword on so groundless a pretext. (53-54).

There is much more in this vein, so much in fact that the twentieth-century reader is forced to conclude that there are fundamental differences between the modern and the eighteenth-century mind, impossible to bridge. Why, if Kenrick found the Ossianic poems so little to his taste, did he not merely give his reasons and dismiss them, rather than create an elaborate alternative scenario for an author who was supposed to have died fifteen hundred years before? It is also difficult to understand why this critic (or any others, for that matter) did not consider how easily the poems lend themselves to parody. As this Duchomar-Morna passage demonstrates, Macpherson's super-euphonious names, outlandish situations, exalted diction, and staccato ejaculations of feeling are very funny. For that matter Kenrick himself cannot entirely escape sounding like Scriblerus. For example, in the continuation of the passage quoted above, he proposes that Morna's request for the sword should have caused Duchomar "with that eagerness in lovers to believe everything which tends to put them in possession of their wishes" to give it to her. This would have given her the opportunity to plunge it into his

breast, "breaking out at the same time into some expression of vindictive joy."

A significant passage in this review not only reveals the Fingalian characters to be inconsistent internally, but also inconsistent with the ideals of the Age of Sensibility. Fingal, Kenrick notes, makes beautiful speeches: "My arm was the support of the injured and the weak rested behind the lightning of my steel"; however, he neglects to protect those who depend on him. "Could any one imagine so humane, so generous a personage as he here seems to be, could be the same noble Fingal who neglected the preservation of his mistress, that blessed him with her charms, and risked her life for his safety?" The second charge is more serious. Fingal, after the victory over Swaran's army, "cruelly bids his sons make a general slaughter, lest the enemy should save themselves by flight." "Sons of the King of Morven, said the noble Fingal, guard the King of Lochlin.---But, Oscar, Fillan, and Ryno, ye children of the race, pursue the rest of Lochlin over the heath of Lena; that no vessel may hereafter bound on the dark-rolling waves of Inistore" (138-39).

This command is incompatible with everything Fingal is supposed to stand for. Kenrick is reminded, in contrast, of the heroes of the old Scottish ballad "Chevy Chase,"

Piercy and Douglas, "who, in order to save the harmless blood of their numerous attendants, agreed to decide the quarrel between themselves by single combat." (However, see page 176.) And he finds the character of Fingal infinitely inferior to the "amiable and heroic Hector" in every respect, describing Hector as "a personage distinguished by every public and private virtue; one in whom, not only personal bravery, but filial duty, paternal tenderness, manly affection, zeal for justice, love to his country, and piety to the Gods, were eminently conspicuous" (139).

The reference to Hector's piety raises the important issue of Ossianic religion, an issue with implications beyond those discussed in this review, which will be treated in the chapter on the Ossianic sublime. For the moment, it is only necessary to note that the inconsistency and vagueness of religious beliefs in Ossian are Kenrick's main example of how the "manners" represented do not agree with the times in which the poems are supposed to have happened.

Their religion cannot well be considered as that of the Druids; the Metempsychosis, or transmigration of souls, being a doctrine inconsistent with their notions of ghosts. And though the latter be not altogether incompatible with the Christian system, yet the properties and powers attributed to such ghosts by the poet, such as consulting together concerning their friends, their revealing future events, assisting their

countrymen, directing storms and the like, are not very consistent with the earliest notions of Christianity.

Incongruities "in the representation of things which could hardly exist at the same time and place" are conscientiously listed by Kenrick. Cuchullin's elaborately decorated car and harness appear to be incompatible with his drinking out of a shell; and the magnificent pillars of his hall (which also compelled the notice of Elizabeth Montagu), seem inconsistent with the absence of tents in the field. "Surely," we are told, "that art which could frame and ornament a chariot and harness with gems might have advanced to some degree of perfection the most necessary articles of household furniture! The men who feasted in superb halls at home, would doubtless have contrived some means to defend themselves from the inclemency of the weather when in the field, and have invented utensils to prepare their viands" (139-40).

The historical fabrications of Macpherson are also taken into account. There are no records indicating that the Danes visited Ireland until five hundred years after the time of Fingal's expedition, and no king of Scotland with that name during that period of history in the historical records (140).

In his final summing up, we can see that though Kenrick's response to Fingal was organized like Smollett's

response, through the conventional epic formulas, he utilizes these formulas to reach very different conclusions. "On the whole," he concludes, "this Poem appears deficient in all the superior parts of the Epopoeia; its principal, and indeed we may say, its sole excellence, consisting in the force of words, and in the glow of description." He finds Fingal to be an object of curiosity as the work of an ancient or Scottish bard, and, therefore, worthy of admiration "but, considered in the light of an Epic poem, and set in comparison with those of Homer and Virgil, it looks like the statue of a dwarf beside the Colossal Apollo of Rhodes" (141).

The controversy over the naturalness of the Ossianic characters which is at the heart of the Kenrick's argument is one manifestation of that literary east wind which is wafting the critical current in new directions. The neoclassic critics, notably LeBossu, dictated that the fable should be the epic creator's primary concern because the fable or moral is the lesson the epic teaches, and an action is devised with appropriate characters to convey this moral purpose. /19/ However, while Kenrick remembers to stress the relationship between believable character and fable at the beginning of the review, by the end it is clear that his primary dissatisfaction with the poems lies with character, and his concern for psychological

portraiture takes precedence over didactic purpose. The distinction is made between Ossian's drawing of inanimate and animate objects. He finds that the powers of imagination are "admirably exerted and carried to the highest pitch of perfection" in the representation of inanimate objects, although he also complains that "their frequent repetition is to the last degree fatiguing and disgusting" (141). In the portrayal of the "sentimental or intellectual faculties," there is no room for praise and the "Poet's fancy and judgment appear generally poor and defective." Kenrick compares Ossian's ability to depict character to that of painters "who can give no variety of features to their figures, all appearing to belong to the same family, or having the same unmeaning expression of countenance" (141).

Many reasons have been given for the demise of epic in the eighteenth century. Perhaps the fascination with human psychology in this period offers yet another explanation. The demands made upon the epic poet by contemporary readers and critics seem excessive to the modern student of this period, unrelated to the everyday world of real things and real people which appeared in the pages of Richardson, Fielding, Smollett and Sterne. Hugh Blair's discussion of epic, in his Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres, seems particularly alien to the forms of fiction which were

coming into being at this time. Blair will not allow the "fable first" philosophy, yet feels certain "that no poetry is of a more moral nature than this." It is not a commonplace morality that one derives from a long epic work, but an effect "[which] arises from the impression which the parts of the poem separately, as well as the whole taken together, make upon the mind of the reader; from the great examples which it sets before us and the high sentiments with which it warms our hearts" (266).

In Blair's view the final purpose of epic is "to extend our ideas of human perfection: or, in other words, to excite admiration," which can only be accomplished "by proper representations of heroic deeds and virtuous characters." The benevolist basis for Blair's thought is clear in his assertion that "high virtue is the object, which all mankind are formed to admire; and, therefore, epic poems are, and must be, favourable to the cause of virtue." The universal approbation of epic poetry is evidence against the false philosophy of the sceptical philosophers, "showing by that appeal which [the writings of epic poets] constantly make to the feelings of mankind in favour of virtue, that the foundations of it are laid, deep and strong in human nature" (266-267).

It is through an identification (although Blair does not use this term) with virtuous personages that we

discover the "valour, truth, justice, fidelity, friendship, piety, magnanimity" inherent in our own natures. In behalf of these personages "our affections are engaged, in their designs, and in their distresses, we are interested; the generous and public affections are awakened; the mind is purified from sensual and mean pursuits, and accustomed to take part in great heroic enterprises."

The similarity of Blair's commentary here with his discussion of Ossianic virtue in the Critical Dissertation, particularly the qualities which Blair considers virtuous (excepting piety, to be considered below), indicates that Ossianic epic provides the prototype for Blair's definition of epic. It also reveals that characters which can be used to demonstrate the truth of a limited philosophy of human behavior will be necessarily deficient in psychological realism.

Yet there is a paradox in Ossianic response which is also suggested by Blair's definition. The readers sympathetic to that strain of optimistic benevolism in contemporary thought did identify with Macpherson's cardboard personages, feeling that these characters allowed them access to a realm of feeling which had previously been closed to them. The benevolent, sentimentalist coloring of Blair's discussion of epic suggests that there is a link between epic identification and sentimentality, that

calling Fingal and Temora epics legitimized an unmediated "honest" emotional response. Again, we are caught up in the insight of the response critics that what a text is is not so important as what the reader thinks it is and wants it to be.

Two other areas of Ossianic criticism relate to Ossian as epic. These are the all-important issues of Ossianic religion and the treatment of women in the poems. The question of Ossian's religion pervades the commentary, negative and positive, helps to shape the horizon of expectations, and as an enthusiasm for the poems in some minds seems to replace a more conventional faith, even becomes a socially formative force. Coming at a time when some were voicing dissatisfaction with conventional forms of worship and others were turning towards Methodism, at a time when the investigations into primitive institutions (real and imaginary) offered proofs of the existence of a natural religion, the absence of an organized religion in Ossian was an especially fascinating phenomenon. David B. Morris, as noted later in this study, points out that Ossian's lack of religion was a problem for his defenders because it was believed by one party, at least, that religious belief is fundamental to the human species and therefore evident in all primitive societies. The absence of religion in the poems, therefore, was an indication that

they were of modern manufacture (167).

Macpherson, by claiming for Fingal all the prestige associated with the most exalted of literary forms, was also bringing back decisively the old debate over the probable and the marvellous. Ossian had no religion, but supernatural presences and ghosts take an active role in the poems. Here the marvellous is probable and admissible because it represents the beliefs of the protagonists.

However, Ossian's lack of religion is another, perhaps the most striking, example of how Macpherson invented a historical circumstance to suit his own purpose, the purpose being the familiar one of subverting established institutions. As Fairchild shows, the connections between a sentimentalist bias and libertinism had a lengthy history (as they well might, for sentimentalism is itself a consequence of an anti-establishment view of human nature). /20/ There is also a much more blatant example of this establishment-baiting in M. G. Lewis's Gothic novel The Monk, where the propriety of allowing young women to read the Bible is questioned. /21/ It has long been recognized that Ossian was a major influence on the Gothic novel, although critics usually find Gothic foreshadowings principally in the wild theatrical landscapes and uncontrolled passions of the Ossianic protagonists. The subversive aspects of both suggest a communality of purpose

which invites further investigation.

The Rev. John Macpherson explains in "The Aera of Ossian" that Ossian refuses to touch on matters of religion for two basic reasons. The first is political: "Fingal and his son Ossian disliked the Druids, who were the declared enemies to their succession in the supreme magistracy." The second is heroic: "Gods are not necessary," Macpherson asserts, "when the poet has genius." The Scottish heroes were so proud, "carried their notions of martial honor to [such] an extravagant pitch" that "any aid given their heroes in battle were thought to derogate from their fame; and the bards immediately transferred the glory of the action to him who had given that aid" (48).

In John Smith's Galic Antiquites . . ., which is a defense of Ossianic poetry, the absence of religion is cited as one proof of its authenticity. Smith's explanation of the absence of religion comes straight from Macpherson. In the days when these poems were composed, he says, "the old religion had retired to the shades, and there were strong reasons why the descendant of a family which it had endeavored to depress, should not go out of his way to inquire for it." It is all to the good, Smith claims, that the new religion did not then make its appearance and confined itself to "caves, rocks and [other] sequestered places" because (and here the old arguments

against Christian epic are remembered) "it is certain the true religion does not so easily tally with fiction, nor so well become it, as the mythology of the heathen poets."

These heathens had to have religion, Smith asserts; everyone has religion. "Religion, however, is so natural to the mind of man, that it rather argues the poems in question to be genuine, that they have so little of it. Those real and particular causes which have been observed to operate at the time were alone able to keep them so clear of it" (121).

Macpherson's rebelliousness, translated into conjectural history, offered his readers some justification for whatever religious doubts they may have had. The fact that the Ossianic advocates could accept Macpherson's lengthy explanation of the lack of religion in Ossian suggests that they themselves were not uncomfortable with the notion of an idealized society whose only religious expression was ancestor worship.

It would not be out of place here to extend the discussion of Ossianic religion into the next century, where sympathetic readers found the absence of organized religion in the poems to be an integral part of their atmosphere of sentimental melancholy. Hazlitt, we noted earlier, described the characteristic impression of the poems as one of "privation." Ossian is never to be

forgotten, Hazlitt tells us, because he conveys better than any other poet "the sense of privation, the loss of all things, of friends, of good name, of country--he is even without God in the world." /22/

Another important feature of the poems reflects changing attitudes in Scottish Enlightenment society, and could even be said to perform what Jauss refers to as a "socially formative" function. The ways in which women were treated in ancient cultures and the place of women in contemporary society was a major preoccupation of the conjectural historians, and naturally, as Ossian was thought to exemplify the earliest kinds of social structures, the situation of women in Ossianic times would be a matter of great interest. It is significant, then, that the monogamous, passive, dependent, compliant female who has, since Utter and Needham's work, been identified as one of "Pamela's daughters," is the prevailing female character type in the poems. There are women warriors who follow their lovers into battle, for example, Comala, Sul-malla, and Cathlin of Clutha, but these are no less passive and adoring than the others. Indeed, one could speculate that they followed their lovers not out of military fervor, but because they did not want to leave them. /23/ Macpherson's women rarely assert themselves in any way which could be interpreted as threatening masculine

domination or control. Aside from one very derivative femme fatale, Deugala, these characters do not control their own destinies and are extremely passive and "feminine."

An extraordinary passage from John Smith's Galic Antiquities.... exemplifies the approach of the conjectural historian to explain this female passivity. Smith explains that, because the early Caledonians were nomadic and shifted residence from a depleted environment to one where there was plenty, they did not have to do much work.

This method of procuring subsistence at the very easy expence of a little amusement, had a benign aspect on every virtue; but was peculiarly favorable to that delicacy with which we find the tender sex always treated by Ossian's heroes. Unlike the tribes to whom they are sometimes unjustly compared, the ancient Caledonians had no lands to till, nor any rigorous services to impose upon their females. The only occupation, hunting, was the province and pleasure of the men. So that nothing remained for the other sex, but to "weave the robe for their love."--We would allow female charm and female virtue that deference which they never fail to procure when properly exerted, and which make them capable of subduing even those who can subdue the elephant and the lion. But leaving these altogether out of the question, the reason just now mentioned...is sufficient to account for the delicacy with which the fair sex are treated by our Caledonian heroes (111-12).

But, Smith's examples of the ways other early peoples treated their women contradicts his notion that the women had little to do other than exerting their female charms.

Gaulish, German, Aelian and Pisan women acted as judges. British women "as we are told by Tacitus and others, were held in such honour at that time, as to be entrusted with the reins of government, and even with the command of armies." And he adds, "there are instances on record, which shew they were not unworthy of so much confidence" (112-13). /24/

The Ossianic ghost even takes on the gender differences of an age of sensibility in a charming passage from one of Anna Seward's letters. (The entire letter, to a Miss Wingfield, is a defense of Macpherson's poetry.)

Then, surely, there is much grandeur as well as novelty in the aerial mythology. We find the souls of the warriors on the mountain winds, in the tempests or in the whirlwind, according to the nature of their earthly character and manners. Those of the softer sex, are the fair spirits of the hill; their robes are of the white clouds; their hair is of the gilded mist, as they "glide in a sun-beam of noon, over the silence of Morven" (4: 266-7).

In conclusion, calling Fingal an epic tells us nothing about the age in which Ossian was supposed to have lived and a good deal about the mid-eighteenth-century moment in which it was created. Because epic was an ancient genre with the highest prestige it was necessary that Fingal be epic, but as so little was known about the historical period in which Fingal lived or the literature of his time, the category "epic" offered almost endless opportunities.

Remnants of neo-classic critical theorizing still remain in this period, and there is therefore pressure to impose the epic conventions on Fingal. We see this in Smollett's attempts to give Macpherson's poem credibility and status on a level with the works of Homer and Virgil, but as conjectural history reveals, epic was a very open vessel, into which almost any attractive concept could be poured. For example, standards of behavior generated during the Age of Sensibility (Fingal's benevolence and magnanimity, Malvina's tenderness and compassion) which were appropriate descriptions of the behavior of the Ossianic characters, were "discovered" to be equally characteristic of other savage peoples. Millar's description of the "refinement natural to the pastoral state" is a striking example of the circularity of this kind of thinking.

Conjectural history merged with literary history on the issue of original genius. The Noble Savage, as a human in his most natural state, exemplified benevolist theory in his human interactions, and primitivistic notions about the first literatures in the works he created. These would be closer to basic human truths, more representative of human feelings and the original human language because they were first and unencumbered by cultural accretions. Hayden White has theorized, as we saw, that the Noble Savage concept has political implications, more congruent with the

desire to undermine the solidities of class than with any sympathy for the condition of the native peoples of non-European civilizations.

Calling Fingal an epic also permitted Macpherson to make disguised indictments of his society. One indictment takes the form of praise for the "consanguineous" period in which the fight over property was unknown, another centered around his insistence that Ossian had no organized religion, and a third in his portrait of idealized womanhood. This last certainly contributed to the "angel in the house" ideal that molded so many contemporary, and later, Victorian, women's lives.

Notes

1. This issue of Scotch favoritism in the government of George III had major implications in the relations between the king and his subjects. John Stuart, Lord Bute had been George's tutor when he was heir apparent, was very highly regarded by the future king, and therefore became his chief advisor when George succeeded to the throne in October, 1760. During his three-year tenure Bute brought upon himself, according to his biographer, J. A. Lovat Fraser, "an amount of hatred and detestation rarely equalled in English history" and "was probably the most unpopular minister that ever served an English monarch" (1). The English feared that Bute's view of monarchy would influence George to view his role in Stuart terms and thereby attempt to limit the liberties of Parliament. They also detested the propensity of the Scot to stand up for his own, which translated into a scandalous number of Scots filling important positions in Bute's administration. Lovat Fraser lists a great number of posts held by Bute's countrymen, including Lord Mansfield, Lord Chief Justice; Hay Drummond, Archbishop of York; Sir Gilbert Elliot and James Oswald, Lords of the Treasury; Sir Andrew Mitchell, Ambassador to Berlin; and General Murray, who had succeeded Wolfe after the taking of Quebec. Bute's biographer also notes one list of Gazette promotions published in the Opposition papers, in which out of sixteen names, eleven were Stuarts and four were Mackenzies. Pensions "paid for by the earnings of Englishmen" were granted to the upstart immigrants from the other side of the Tweed (48). It is no wonder that the Scot was resented in the early 1760s.

Macpherson is referring to Lord Bute when, in the introduction to Fingal, he refers to "the generosity of a certain noble person," whom he does not identify, "as his exalted station as well as merit has raised him above the panegyric of one so little known." The dedication in Temora does name Bute, who had just come to power under George III.

Another very telling anecdote reveals that the events of 1745 were not soon forgotten in England. In his Wilkes and Liberty, George Rudé relates that the desiccated heads of the rebels of the "Forty Five" "still grinned down from Temple Bar, a stones' throw from Johnson's chambers," one of the last of them falling on March 31, 1772 (12).

2. The most amusing evidence for this is the letter that the Reverend John Macpherson wrote to Hugh Blair. This letter, dated 27 Nov. 1763, is printed in Appendix 1

of the Report of the Highland Society Committee which investigated the authenticity of the Ossianic poems. Macpherson is certain that there was an oral tradition. If "we suppose with Mr. Macpherson that Ossian lived down to the beginning of the fourth century," he claims, then "it seems plain enough that the compositions of that poet might have been transmitted orally from one generation to another, until letters began to flourish in some degree in the Highlands and Isles." What is amusing about this letter is that the man who reinvented Scottish history in his "Dissertation on the Aera of Ossian" knows (my italics) along with "anyone who can pretends to be tolerably well versed in the History of Scotland...that our ancestors, in the western part of this kingdom, had the use of letters from the latter end of the sixth age at least" (16).

3. Ut pictura poesis is the doctrine, rooted in classical theory, that conceives of art as "Imitation" and treats the "sister arts" of poetry and painting as dependent upon the faculty of imagination--an imagination which is primarily visual. See Jean H. Hagstrum, The Sister Arts; the tradition of literary pictorialism and English poetry from Dryden to Gray (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

4. Kirsti Simonsuuri's book, Homer in English Criticism, is a recent and extremely lucid exposition of many of the issues discussed in this chapter. Simonsuuri focuses on eighteenth-century Homeric criticism but, of course must deal with Ossianic criticism as well, as the two poets were often compared. Particularly relevant are chapters nine and ten, "Notions of Poetry and Society in the Controversy about Ossian," and "Primitivists and the Primitive Bard."

5. Yet we cannot discount the influence of those friendships. An anecdote in Roberts Schmitz's biography of Hugh Blair highlights the supportive network of relationships among the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers. It seems that the first performance of John Home's Douglas was an amateur effort organized by West Digges, the actor-manager of the Canongate Theatre. Invited to this performance, which took place on Saturday afternoon, December 4, 1756, at the lodgings of Mrs. Sarah Warde, one of the acting company, were Lord Elibank, Lord Milton, Lord Kames, Lord Monboddo, and two ministers, John Steele and William Home.

The players were:

Lord Randolph.....William Robertson, the
historian
Glenalvon.....David Hume
Old Norval....Alexander Carlyle, Minister at
Inveresk
Douglas.....John Home, the author
Lady Randolph..Adam Ferguson, scientist and
historian
Anna, the maid...Hugh Blair, Minister at Lady
Yester's

The picture of Blair in this role seems particularly amusing to his biographer, who describes himself as chronicling a life in which "there were not many light moments," but it also illustrates how familiar the members of the Scottish intelligentsia were with one another (Schmitz 35). This, in turn, helps to explain why the question of Ossianic forgery made them so uncomfortable. Blair, the defender of Ossian, even more than Macpherson, the "translator," was one of their own.

6. One of the most vital of the societies and clubs of the Scottish Enlightenment was the Aberdeen Philosophical Society (1758-73) which flourished during the years which are most relevant to Ossianic reception, and which was founded by a group of Thomas Blackwell's pupils: Thomas Reid, James Dunbar, John Gregory, George Campbell, and others. In the stated purpose of this society we have a typical Scottish Enlightenment approach: the concern with inductive methods in dealing with "philosophical," i. e. scientific, issues.

The subjects of the discourses and questions shall be philosophical; all grammatical, historical, and philological discussions being conceived to be foreign to the design of this society. And philosophical matters are understood to comprehend every principle of science, which may be deduced by just and careful induction of the human mind, or of the material world; all observations and experiments that may furnish materials for such inductions; the examination of false schemes of philosophy and false methods of philosophizing; the subserviency of philosophy to arts, the principles they borrow from it, and the means of carrying them to their perfection (Simonsuuri 123).

7. Simonsuuri's point is that Blackwell was challenging the complacency of generations of scholars who never bothered to question or examine the nature of Homer's genius. His study was designed to refute the ancient tradition that "Homer was inspired from Heaven; that he sung, and wrote as the Prophet and Interpreter of the Gods." Even though the association seems "preposterous," Simonsuuri believes that Blackwell associated a "scientific" study of Homer's origins and circumstances with an opposition to High Church Anglicanism (102-03).

8. This synopsis is from a book in the tradition of reception criticism, Savage and Barbarian: Historical Attitudes in the Criticism of Homer and Ossian in Britain 1760-1800, by Margaret Mary Rubel. Rather than "drawing upon present-day knowledge of the complexities of the period which may not necessarily have been perceived at the time," Rubel attempts to reconstruct the mode of thinking of eighteenth-century socio-historians and critics of the historical school with as little interpretation as possible.

9. The importance of the Savage-Barbarian distinction is evident after reading a work like Donald M. Foerster's Homer in English Criticism, which was published in 1947. Foerster is informative as to the different critics who compared Ossian with Homer, but does not understand the implications of this comparison as the conjectural historians used it. He makes the logical association, quoting Ewan Cameron, between two original poets from similar societies: "Both wrote in an early Period of Society; both are Originals...both are distinguished by Simplicity, Sublimity and Fire." However, Foerster's conclusion reflects his misunderstanding of differences a critic such as Cameron found between these two original geniuses:

It was, however, a strange situation in which these critics placed themselves. While they dogmatically proclaimed that the two bards copied the manners of an early stage of social development and that of the two Homer lived in a somewhat refined period, they declared in the same breath that his characters were all savages compared to Ossian's! (59)

As we have seen, it was Ossian's characters who were generically Savages, not Homer's, who were Barbarians, with

each age connected to specific modes of subsistence connected with specific manners. The brutality discovered in the Homeric heroes is, therefore, not puzzling but has a theoretical basis.

10. In very general terms eighteenth-century historiography can be seen as having either a cyclical or progressive orientation. Identifying one writer with one or the other pattern is not a simple matter, however. The Savagery--Barbarism--Civilization pattern could be used to justify a belief in human progress over a course of centuries, or a cycle in which a civilization at the height of its glory carries the seeds of its own destruction. In this way the optimism implicit in a progress pattern collapses into the pessimism inherent in the view that human beings inevitably revert to the savage state.

The Enlightenment confidence in the ability of human beings to order their affairs rationally suggests that human progress is inevitable; however, the philosophes often doubted that human affairs advanced in such an unimpeded manner.

Turgot admitted temporary delays in human progress and gave it a spiral-like path towards the desired goal. 'Empires rise and fall; laws and form of government succeed each other; the arts and the sciences are in turn discovered and perfected, in turn retarded and accelerated in their progress; and they are passed on from country to country.' Emile Deschamps envisioned steep rises alternating with plateaus, evoking the image of steps in a huge staircase. Others tempered their optimism more severely when they pointed out the unpredictability of life, where a single battle could truly change the course of events. Condillac and D'Alembert spoke of peaks of civilized existence alternating with plainly barbaric periods: 'Barbarism lasts for centuries and seems to be our natural condition, while reason and good taste are destined to pass away.' Voltaire, whose own rationalism never persuaded him that all people would ever behave rationally, pointed to mankind's up and down development: the civilized Ancient period, the barbaric Middle Ages, the recovery of civilization in the Renaissance followed by a quick rebarbarization in the Reformation, and another recovery in the French civilization of Louis XIV's period. Inevitable progress was by no means an item of faith for every philosophe (Breisach 208-9).

The commonsense empirical approach of the English philosophers and historians would be even less likely to encourage the simplistic reliance on one or the other historical pattern: progress or cycle. For example, the title of Gibbon's great history implies a cyclical pattern which does not exactly hold up in practice. While Gibbon provides many reasons for the fall of the Roman Empire, his reasons were based on the empirical evidence, and not on any predetermined theory. He also had some faith in human progress, believing that "every age increased the wealth, happiness, and even virtues of the human race." If the fall of Byzantium in 1453 signalled the end of Rome, it also heralded a period of regeneration in Western culture (Breisach 216-17).

11. Ossian helped foster the French Romantics' association of bard and revolutionary. Maurice Z. Shroder in his book, Icarus: The Image of the artist in French Romanticism, relates that the lesson writers like Chassaignons and Bonneville learned from Ossian was that the bard was a "leader of peoples, not an idle fluteplayer" (24).

Napoleon envisioned his bard similarly as "the poet marching at the head of the army" inspiring the troops to great deeds. However, when his fortunes turned against him, Napoleon found other uses for Ossian. According to J. S. Smart, Napoleon had the poems in his hands during the voyage from Egypt and read them again as the ship conveyed him to St. Helena. It is not hard to imagine how his emotions of loss and defeat were echoed by the poems. At the time J. S. Smart wrote his study of Ossian (about 1905), Napoleon's copy of Ossian still existed. Smart described it as "soiled with thumbs, and covered on the margin with marks of exclamation: from its pages exhales a mingled odour, faint but perceptible, of patchouli, camphor and snuff" (15).

12. The speculations about Homer had a basis in fact although the facts were far from established. The Ossianic poems were written (1759-63) after Pope's Iliad and Odyssey (1715-26) but before the beginnings of modern Homeric scholarship, which Maynard Mack dates to F. A. Wolf's Prolegomena ad Homerum of 1795. Parnell, in his "Essay on Homer" which was included with Pope's Iliad, cites dates for Homer which range anywhere from twenty-four to about five hundred years after the Siege of Troy and settles for a time "about three hundred Years after the taking of Troy, and near a Thousand before the Christian aera" on the basis

of a tradition cited by Mme. Dacier and others. (Twickenham Iliad, 42-3).

The historical apparatus which took on such importance as an authenticating device in the Ossianic controversy was of little importance to Pope. He wanted a validating scholarship for his translations, but was more concerned with a translation of Homer which would convey the ethical values of "The Prince of Poets" to his contemporaries. (See Mack's introduction to the Twickenham Iliad, especially pages lvvi-lvvv.)

13. John Millar held the Chair of Civil Law at the University of Glasgow from 1761 until his death in 1801. A famous teacher in his time, Millar's Origin of the Distinction of Ranks (1771), has been cited as one of the earliest sociological studies. The most extensive work on Millar is William C. Lehmann's John Millar of Glasgow 1735-1801: His Life and Thought and Contributions to Sociological Analysis.

14. Macpherson's ability to invent the details of everyday life of an ancient people should not be minimized in any account of the reasons for the success of the poems. We can see this fascination with Ossianic "manners" in Millar's description of the activities of Ossianic women, in Kenrick's realization that the simplicity of accommodations in the field of battle contradicted the sophistication of Ossianic vehicles and weapons, and in Elizabeth Montagu's speculations over the puzzling "pillars" of the third-century palace.

Ian Haywood's The Making of History, which is an examination of how Macpherson's and Chatterton's forgeries both stimulated and challenged eighteenth-century notions of history and fiction, discusses the rise of social history. In Haywood's opinion, the view of social history as poetry "offered a way around the problem of fiction being corrupt history" because a poem could contain errors of history but "could still present authentic details of life in the past" (44).

For Blackwell the study of Homer's social conditions is a prerequisite for understanding Homeric poetry: reproducing these conditions is necessary if one wants to write the way Homer wrote.

But on the contrary, when we consider our own Customs, we find that our first business, when we sit down to poetize in the higher strains, is to unlearn our daily way of life; to forget our

manner of Sleeping, Eating and Diversions. We are obliged to adopt a set of more natural Manners, which however are foreign to us; and must be like Plants raised up in Hot-Beds or Green-Houses, in comparison of those which grew in soils fitted by Nature for such productions (24-25).

15. Richard Foster Jones's book, Ancient and Moderns: A Study of the Background of the Battle of the Books defines the "Moderns" as those devoted to the new science in opposition to the "Ancients," who championed the old learning. In the context of the evolution of Homeric scholarship; the "Moderns" regarded Homer as a product of his society; the "Ancients" revered him as a source of the wisdom of the ages (vii).

16. I am indebted to Gerald P. Tyson's unpublished dissertation, "The Feast of Shells: The context of James Macpherson's Ossianic Poetry," Brandeis U, 1969, 51-58, for this and the following suggestions of Homeric borrowings.

17. Professor Robert A. Day has pointed out to me that the adjective "branchy" is a familiar eighteenth-century epithet. Indeed, "branchy" along with "beamy," "bloomy," "moony," "roofy," and many others, indicate the eighteenth-century poet's propensity to form an adjective by adding the suffix y to a noun. John Arthos in his Language of Natural Description in Eighteenth-Century Poetry shows that this practice derived from the language of science, as the custom in scientific writing was to translate many Latin epithets into English adjectives ending in y. These adjectives became part of the stock diction of the poetry of this period because it was thought that they had dignity, and were well adapted to describe the appearance of material things--"glassy stream," "downy twig." Arthos devotes an entire Appendix (C) to the y suffix (393-404).

The point to be made is that Macpherson, because he was employing elements of the stock diction of his own period, is signalling his indebtedness to contemporary poetry, and thereby hinting at the modernity of his "translations."

18. According to Benjamin Nangle in his index of contributors and articles to the Monthly Review, the reviewer responsible for Macpherson's Fragments, Fingal and Temora was William Kenrick.

William Kenrick's personality, perhaps, throws a small shaft of light on his attitude towards Ossian. The Dictionary of National Biography calls Kenrick a hack, and has not much in the way of praise for his personality. "He had a strong love of notoriety," we are told, "a jealous and perverse temper, and was often drunk and violent. His vanity led him to fancy himself equal to any task without serious study" (16). He liked to be on the attack. After taking Goldsmith's position at the Monthly in January of 1759, he wrote such a scathing review of Goldsmith's Inquiry in November of that year "that even Griffiths was ashamed of it." A pamphlet he wrote assailed Johnson's Shakespeare. In relation to his review of Ossian, it is noteworthy that Kenrick was knowledgeable about the theatre, although he seems to have written only comedies. Some of these, including Falstaff's Wedding and The Widow'd Wife, were produced. Kenrick was, for a time, a protege of Garrick's, but quarrelled with him over the distribution of profits from The Widow'd Wife (DNB to 1900 11: 16-19).

19. The OED defines "fable" as (1) "a fictitious narrative or statement, a story not founded on fact; (2) a short story devised to convey some useful lesson; esp. one in which animals or inanimate things are the speakers or actors; an apologue. (3) [after the Latin fabula] The plot or story of a play or poem...." It is clear that Kenrick is limiting his use of the term "fable" to mean moral purpose and not, as it is often used, as a term synonymous with plot. But this usage is perhaps indicative of what Kenrick finds wrong with the Ossianic poems and is not able to verbalize: that actually very little is happening in them, that they have no real plot. This insight is congruent with Norman Maclean's thesis in his well-known article, "From Action to Image: Theories of the Lyric in the Eighteenth Century" that, as poetry became more and more subjective and internal during the course of the century, genre distinctions disappeared, and finally two categories of poetry remained: subjective or "pure" poetry and objective poetry.

Maclean shows the relationship between the decline of epic poetry and the new deemphasis on plot. When plot had the status, in Aristotle's words of "the soul as it were" of poetry (a status that later critics were to devalue somewhat as they elevated the ethical purpose of poetry and therefore reduced plot to a secondary function--that of exemplum or fable),

it remained in a place of high esteem, being consistently regarded as the most powerful of

poetic devices in "moving" men toward virtue and warning them away from vice, grossness, or comical exhibitions of human frailties. As long as this esteem for plot continued, epic and tragedy were generally placed at the top of the poetical hierarchy because they conveyed the most weighty matter in the most moving of devices by the language the most embellished (439).

With lyric poetry in ascendance, plots became fragmentary. The Great Ode of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries (the St. Cecilia's Day odes, for example), had had "a fragmentary plot, involving a leading character and a single act or selection of acts to reveal his attributes." The later allegorical ode, associated with the Warton school, "was a creation of the 'imagination' substituting the poet's personifications for external persons and events" (439). The relevant point is that the Ossianic poems are epics superficially, but much more like the allegorical odes in settings, mood, language--overall emotional effect.

20. Fairchild in his first volume of Religious Trends in English Poetry, "Protestantism and the Cult of Sentiment," discusses how sentimentalism may appeal to the "libertine":

Now an antinomianism supported by an appeal to the light of nature bears a kinship to the trend of philosophic libertinism which descends from Renaissance humanism. Their psychological common denominator is trust in one's inward impulses. Thus, in the Queen Anne period, wits who are strongly influenced by the libertine tradition are found satirizing enthusiasts who hold much the same fundamental philosophy. The differences between the two groups in culture, social status, and emotional temper must of course be recognized. One may also object that antinomian "nature" is the voice of God, while libertine nature is the voice of instinct. But this distinction collapses once instinct is deified. If the libertine is not a mere Satanist, he is likely to justify his position by means of moral and quasi-religious notions about nature drawn from a muddle of Epicureanism and Stoicism. The antinomian, in turn, derives similar ideas of natural goodness from his pantheistic confusion of nature and God. This curious rapprochement

explains the phenomenon which has been referred to in this study as "libertine" sentimentalism. In the eighteenth century the time-spirit draws men of pronounced libertine tendencies towards that sentimentalism which descends from their old enemies (355).

21. Lewis's criticism of the Bible was considered "blasphemous" by reviewers of The Monk, most notably in Coleridge's Critical Review article of 1797.

The crucial passage records the thoughts of the thoroughly corrupted Monk when he comes upon the innocent Antonia reading the Bible.

"How!" said the friar to himself, "Antonia reads the Bible, and is still so ignorant?"

But upon further inspection, he found that Elvira had made exactly the same remark. That prudent mother, while she admired the beauties of the sacred writings, was convinced that, unrestricted, no reading more improper could be permitted a young woman. Many of the narratives can only tend to excite ideas the worst calculated for a female breast: everything is called plainly and roundly by its name; and the annals of a brothel would scarcely furnish a greater choice of indecent expressions. Yet this is the book which is put into the hands of children, able to comprehend little more than those passages of which they had better remain ignorant, and which but too frequently inculcates the first rudiments of vice, and gives the first alarm to the sleeping passions. [Elvira had altered or omitted all improper passages before she gave the book to her daughter.].... Ambrosio perceived his mistake, and replaced the book upon the table.

For the story of the scandal surrounding The Monk and this particular passage see Lewis L. Peck's biography of M. G. Lewis (24-27).

22. Hazlitt can be classed among those who wanted to believe in the authenticity of Ossianic poetry. "If it were indeed possible to show that the writer was nothing," he asserts, "it would only be another instance of mutability, another blank made, another void left in the heart, another confirmation of that feeling which makes him so often complain, "Roll on, ye dark brown years, ye bring no joy on your wing to Ossian" (Collected Works 5: 18).

23. Women dressing as men to follow their lovers into battle is a popular theme in eighteenth-century narratives. Francoise du Sorbier, in an analysis of six of these narratives entitled "Quelques Femmes Travesties au 18e Siecle," finds that a primary motivation for this cross-dressing is, indeed, to enable the woman to pursue her lover into an arena which would ordinarily be closed to her. "Le premier moteur est donc d'ordre affectif et il entraîne une transgression: le travesti permet de s'aventurer sur un terrain réservé aux hommes, celui des champs de bataille, terrestres ou maritimes" (84). The whole story, however, is more complex. Sorbier also reveals that, when the stimulus which caused three of the women in the narratives she studied to assume masculine dress and a masculine role was removed, each of the three women realized "que la quête de l'homme n'était qu'un pretexte, qu'elle a pris goût au mode de vie masculin et qu'elle se sent incapable de mener une vie de femme au foyer."

The Ossianic warrior-heroines usually die before any such momentous decision can be made, and his female characters, in general, are stereotypically feminine and passive. But as far as the Ossianic poems reflect a degree of contemporary reality, Sorbier's study confirms an intuition about Macpherson. His extensive use of this theme suggests a degree of ambivalence about female sexuality. However, this ambivalence is nowhere as evident in the Ossianic poems as it is in the scene in Christian Davies' memoirs where she toys with the affections of a pretty burgher's daughter (89). Sorbier's point is that the existence of an alternative behavior raises questions about normal behavior: "ces récits interrogent la Normalité et rappellent que lorsqu'on déplace une donnée socio-culturelle, en l'occurrence le costume, ambivalence surgit aussitôt" (90).

The other reality that the woman in man's clothes reflects upon is the economic situation of women. Sorbier demonstrates how the assumption of a masculine identity provides a means by which these women can support themselves, while they are totally dependent upon others when they reassume female roles (roles Sorbier lists as "la pure jeune-fille," "l'honnête épouse," and "la femme perdue"). We have seen in the Ossianic commentary (particularly in John Smith's Galic Antiquities ...) how the Ossianic poems reinforce these conventions of female dependency.

24. A good source of information on women who commanded armies is a nineteenth-century work by Ellen Creathorne Clayton entitled Female Warriors. The purpose of the book is encapsulated in its subtitle, "Memorials of female valour and heroism from the mythological ages to the present era." The women warriors discussed range from the Amazon queen, Semiramis, Queen of Assyria to Camilla, Queen of the Volscians, to the British Queen Boadicea who led an army against the Romans in A.D.61. As Boadicea is almost contemporaneous with the period in which Ossian was supposed to have lived, it is interesting that Macpherson's women warriors are historically accurate (or at least accurate according to tradition). Clayton mentions the bravery of the British women who accompanied their husbands onto the battlefield. "The British and Caledonian women were, as a rule, brave and warlike, and invariably followed their husbands to battle. More than five thousand women enlisted under the banner of Boadicea, and fought, many of them, as bravely as the men" (1: 60).

Clayton also discussed the eighteenth-century women who turned soldier. Dealing with many of the same cases as Sorbier does, (see above, n. 23), she claims that nearly every European army had one or more female soldiers who either accompanied a spouse, "preferring to encounter the dangers and hardships of a foreign campaign rather than the miseries of separation," or sought out an unfaithful lover (2: 2).

Epic or Romance: Ossianic Genre

In the preceding chapter we saw why it was necessary that Fingal be considered an epic. The goal of the present chapter is to find out the actual genre of the Ossianic poems, the kind of mid-eighteenth-century poetry they most nearly resemble. The problem of the genre of Ossian is a particularly interesting one because Ossian has been identified with many kinds of poetry, a fact one commentator finds especially "curious." Spanning a wide spectrum of generic description, the poems were found to be Pindaric odes by Marmontel, of the nature of Biblical literature in the estimation of Suard and Chateaubriand, to be lyrical songs by Melchior Grimm, Scots folk poetry by Herder, and folksongs by Diderot. (Simonsuuri 187). Charles Churchill, in his "Prophecy of Famine," the satire against the Scots written at the height of Bute's power, refers to Fingal as "that old new epic pastoral Fingal." /1 / Others dismissed Fingal and Temora under the rubric "romance." These multifarious genre designations are, however, not curious at all when the particularly pliant nature of the text is recognized: each reader came to the text with his or her own personal agenda, and found what he or she wanted to find.

Smollett's approach to Fingal in the Critical Review

article is an excellent example of a critic who comes to a work with a predetermined agenda and does find what he expects to find. For political and patriotic reasons Fingal had to be rated as competitive with the greatest epics of the past. Joseph Ritson, in contrast, as an Englishman and an antiquarian, could be less partisan and more objective in his assessment of the poems. Ritson's personal copy of The Poems of Ossian (1773), owned by the Yale Beinecke Library, is inscribed with a passage from Hume's letter to Gibbon on the question of Ossianic authenticity. "It is indeed strange," Hume wrote, "that any man of sense could have imagined it possible that above twenty thousand verses, along with numberless historical facts, could have been preserved by oral traditions during fifty generations, by the rudest, perhaps of all the European nations, the most necessitous, the most turbulent, and the most unsettled." This preservation was against common sense; "[but] men run with great avidity to give their evidence in favour of what flatters their passions and their national prejudices." Hume goes on to thank Gibbon for his indulgence "in speaking of the matter with hesitation." Ritson, obviously, shares the opinions of both men, but has no compunction about labelling the Ossianic poems "romance." He traces accounts of the Fingalian heroes back no further than the tenth century and

finds them to be originally Irish. He recognizes the contemporaneity of the poems in their present form. "But to maintain that Fingal inhabited, in whatever age, any part of present Scotland, and that his Ossian composed poems of many thousand lines, preserved to this day by highland tradition and actually here given to the public, in an English dress (my italics), is of the essence of falsehood and imposture" (Ritson, marginalia). /2/

Peter J. Rabinowitz's recent work on the nature of the literary audience will help us to sort out the critical issues and categorize the varieties of audience response to the Ossianic poetry. These categories of response will, in turn, help us to define the kind of literature Macpherson wrote. In an article called "Truth in Fiction: A Reexamination of Audiences" (1977) Rabinowitz proposes that the problem of truth in the novel can be clarified through a model which differentiates four audiences, each audience responding differently to the duality of a fictional work, the paradox that it is true and untrue at the same time. The first audience is composed of the "real" flesh-and-blood people who can hold the book in their hands and over whom the author has no control. This is the actual audience.

The next group is the authorial audience. This is the hypothetical audience for whom this particular work is

designed. In order for the work to be accepted there must be good faith on both sides. The author must take into account his readers' beliefs, knowledge, and the conventions with which they are familiar; the readers must divest themselves of certain aspects of their personalities as they take on the text.

Just as the implied author is often a person ethically superior to his flesh-and-blood counterpart, so we are often forced to call upon the "best part" of ourselves when we join the authorial audience. But most novelists, even if they do call on our better selves, will only call upon those moral qualities which they believe the actual audience has in reserve, just as they try not to rely on information which we will not in fact possess. For most novelists are concerned with being read and hence try to minimize the distance between the actual and authorial audiences (126).

However, because the writer is writing for a hypothetical audience which he himself has created, there will always be a gap between the authorial and the actual audience; and this gap must be bridged by readers who wish to appreciate the book.

Rabinowitz's model gives us a new terminology with which to describe our inability to bridge this gap. He explains that we often cannot understand or appreciate a text because we do not have the information which will allow us to become members of the authorial audience (127). Sometimes, as in the case of modern readers of the

Ossianic poetry, we cannot even appreciate how the works were appreciated. We have, of course, met this problem before in this study with Wellek's "spirit of the age" and Trilling's "buzz of implication."

The third audience Rabinowitz identifies arises from the fact that the text is an imitation of another form. Rabinowitz focuses on novels, which are generally imitations of some nonfictional form, usually history (including biography and autobiography). The narrator of the novel is, then, imitating the author of the imitated form and the reader responds similarly as its reader. This is the narrative audience. If one is reading War and Peace, not only does one believe that Moscow was burned in 1812 with the authorial audience, but also that Natasha, Pierre, and Andrei "really" existed and that the events in their lives "really" occurred. "In order to read War and Peace, we must therefore do more than join Tolstoy's authorial audience; we must at the same time pretend to be a member of the imaginary narrative audience for which his narrator is writing. "Whether they think about it or not, this is what all successful readers do when approaching the text" (127).

The fourth audience is a fiction within a fiction. It is the ideal narrative audience, ideal, that is, from the narrator's point of view because it is the audience for

which the narrator wishes he were writing.

Rabinowitz's model suggests not only a classification system for the various Ossianic audiences, why there were so many of them, and how the question of audience relates to the question of genre; the Ossianic situation also adds a few new wrinkles to the blueprint, so to speak.

In the first place, we must separate out the actual readers of Ossian into the sceptics or scoffers and the believers, a process which often but not always divides them along national lines: sceptics being English and believers being Scots and Europeans. A gender or social/educational distinction can also be made, with women and the less educated generally to be aligned with the believers.

Because Macpherson's text has a problematical relation to truth, the authorial audience is itself a problem. The usual scenario has an author writing a text and assuming that his work will be accepted by a specific audience as the particular kind of work it is: prose poem or novel or epic. Macpherson, however, not only needed to create a literary persona and the conditions under which this persona could plausibly operate, along with the fragments and epics he ostensibly wrote, he also had to create the conditions for their belief and acceptance. He could assume very little.

Macpherson fashions his audience by including two different kinds of text in the volumes of poetry he published: the socio-historical and critical tracts which taught his readers how to read the poems, and the poems themselves. In the first category are included his own "Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian," the Reverend John Macpherson's "Dissertation concerning the Aera of Ossian," and Hugh Blair's extremely influential Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian, which out-Macphersons Macpherson in conjectural history and speculative literary criticism.

It is on the level of narrative audience that we confront the variety of genres discussed earlier. According to Rabinowitz the narrative audience is the imitation audience created by the demands of the imitated form. In his model, which utilizes the novel as paradigm, this method works nicely, as the novel is generally the imitation of some nonfiction form such as history or biography. The reader of War and Peace, for example, joins a narrative audience which pretends to be reading a historian's account.

In the case of Ossian, the variety of narrative audiences reflected the variety of attitudes towards the poems' authenticity and merit. And we can see more clearly how generic terminology does not arise, as it did in the

Neo-classic period, from a consideration of the nature of the work, but is a result of the reactions of the audience. If Macpherson's assertions about the society and literature of primitive Scotland were believed, then the fragments and longer poems, Fingal and Temora, were found to be epics (or pieces of epics) in all the essential ways. If Macpherson was thought to have fabricated the poems from his own imagination, they were labelled romance.

In a later article entitled, "Assertion and Assumption: Fictional Patterns and the External World" (1981), Rabinowitz uses two of his four audiences to suggest a way of reaching out from the text to the external, "real" world of the actual audience. Rabinowitz locates realism in the text, seeing it as a tendency of all texts, and defining the most realistic works as those in which the beliefs of the authorial and narrative audiences are quite close.

All texts are realistic in some respects or they would be totally incomprehensible to the authorial audience, and this is Rabinowitz's essential point: "All fiction is at heart realistic except insofar as it forces us to respond in some other fashion" (author's italics). What is it in the text which allows us to make assumptions about the authorial audience? It cannot be what the author asserts, because "there is no necessary link between assertion and

the authorial audience's beliefs, no way to move from one to the other simply on the basis of the text."

We can draw inferences about the authorial audience through the places in the text (and this procedure is very reminiscent of Iser's "blanks" and "vacancies") where there are no markers at all, "for if something in the text is assumed, that is, it is central but never stated, it can only be so because the author expects his or her readers to know it already." Rabinowitz calls these places "silences."

The problem of these "silences" returns us to the attempt to retrieve the behavior and cultural expectations of past eras and Lionel Trilling's poignant evocation of the ephemerality of those buzzes of implication which are perhaps irretrievable. The most obvious example in the context of this study is the over-emotionalism of the sentimental response. It is self-evident that those "silences" will only be discernible when what had been assumed is no longer assumed, when a twentieth-century reader sees an incongruity which had not been detected by his eighteenth-century counterpart. The highly stylized, overwrought language of the sentimental tragedies of the period, which echoes throughout the Ossianic poems, is particularly unnatural and unrealistic to a modern reader. Did Macpherson's contemporaries believe that third century savages talked this way? Did anyone, in any period, ever

really talk this way?

For example, this is how Fingal approaches the maiden Conban-Cargla, who had been captured by his enemy, Starno.

"Maid of Lulan," said Fingal, "white-handed daughter of grief! a cloud, marked with streaks of fire, is rolled along my soul. Look not to that dark robed moon; look not to those meteors of heaven. My gleaming steel is around thee, the terror of my foes! It is not the steel of the feeble, nor of the dark in soul! The maids are not shut in our caves of streams. They toss not their white arms alone. They bend fair within their locks, above the harps of Selma. Their voice is not in the desert wild. We melt along the pleasing sound!" ("Cath-Loda" 192). /3/

Compare this with the language of John Home's Douglas (1756). Douglas is offered for comparison for a number of reasons. Douglas, in a great many respects, is a major milestone on the road which leads to Ossian. Home has a Scottish medieval (and in the historical consciousness of the period, primitivistic) setting for his tragedy, and a patriotic theme (the restoration of the house of Douglas). Like Macpherson, Home traces the decline of a noble family, a decline which fictionalizes the fortunes of Scotland itself.

Home's patriotism extended to promoting the cause of Scottish literature. As one of the "Moderate literati" (see pages 56-57), Home was involved in the creation and promotion of the Ossianic poems from the beginning, encouraging Macpherson to develop his translation of "The

Death of Oscar" and presenting this translation to Edinburgh's Select Society. Home also accompanied Macpherson on his second collecting trip to the Highlands in 1761 (see page 83).

In the fifth act of Douglas, the tragic heroine, Lady Randolph, who has lost her son and heir at the hands of the treacherous Glenalvon, takes her own life.

LORD RANDOLPH

Matilda?---

ANNA

Is no more.

She ran, she flew like lightning up the hill,
Nor halted till the precipice she gained,
Beneath whose low'ring top the river falls,
Engulfed in rifted rocks: thither she came,
As fearless as the eagle lights upon it,
And headlong down--

LORD RANDOLPH

"Twas I! alas! "Twas I!

That filled her breast with fury; drove her down
The precipice of death! Wretch that I am!

ANNA O had you seen her last despairing look!

Upon the brink she stood, and cast her eyes
Down on the deep: then lifting up her head
And her white hands to heaven, seeming to say,
Why am I forced to this? she plunged herself
Into the empty air.

(5.292-305)

The realism Rabinowitz seeks lies in the very fact that contemporary readers did not find such language to be realistic.

The view that literary works are autonomous, like the view that each literary work is unique, suggests that we cannot make general claims about how to move from fiction to "reality." But my arguments here support the opposite contention: no matter how imaginative a work of fiction may be, there is always a strand of realism beneath it, even beneath its most unrealistic conventions. All imaginative literature incorporates some

vision of the real world, and by taking into account the points where the work signals to us that it is departing from that vision of reality, we can often learn what that vision is, from the very structure of the text before us. Furthermore, since the relationship between textual patterns and the presumed shape of the world lies less in assertions and conventions than in the silences behind them, we can often make the discoveries in surprising places (417-18).

Rabinowitz finds a particularly relevant example of how a literary work reveals an underlying reality and exposes fundamental assumptions in Mark Twain's novel, Pudd'nhead Wilson. This novel tells of a black woman who switches her son (who looks white) with the son of a local aristocrat in order to save him from being sold. At the denouement of the narrative the deception is revealed and the virtuous young man who has known nothing but the drudgery of slavery finds that he is the heir to a large fortune.

Twain's commentary, however, departs from the conventional happy ending.

The real heir suddenly found himself rich and free, but in a most embarrassing situation. He could neither read nor write, and his speech was the basest dialect of the negro quarter. His gait, his attitudes, his gestures, his bearing, his laugh--all were vulgar and uncouth; his manners were the manners of a slave. Money and fine clothes could not mend these defects or cover them up; they only made them the more glaring and the more pathetic. The poor fellow could not endure the terrors of the white man's parlor, and felt at home and at peace nowhere but in the kitchen. The family pew was misery to him, yet he could nevermore enter into the solacing refuge of the "nigger gallery"--that was closed to him for good and all.

This ending is shocking because Twain is overturning an audience assumption inherent in all the sudden-reward fantasies: "that while class differences may be tied to economics, they are independent of environment" or "that upward mobility cannot be checked by upbringing." Twain uses the detective genre with its final explosive revelation at the end to expose the audience's beliefs and encourage a rethinking of conventional attitudes. Because Twain is discussing social conditions and not art "we can infer that [Twain] intends the authorial audience to examine not its relationship to texts...but its relationship to the world" (416-17).

Macpherson was as concerned to expose the flaws in his culture as Twain was in the novel Pudd'nhead Wilson, and he chose a genre associated with the most primitive of cultures to do so. In this choice, as in his excoriations of his "polished" culture lies "the strand of realism," because the epic embodies original feeling and permits the recognition of contrast with current reality. Macpherson's noble savages were not aristocrats, Fingal's armies were not engaged in fighting for property but rather for honor and survival, no organized religion corrupted the culture, and the women were all tender-hearted and beautiful, the men benevolent and brave. What was all of this if not an indictment of his "polished age?"

Macpherson's fabricated return to the dawn of his nation's civilization suggests another genre directly relevant to Rabinowitz's model of audience response and to Macpherson's purpose, and that genre is, of course, "history." Macpherson's age was a period particularly conducive to historical and literary forgery, Ian Haywood claims in his study The Making of History, because historiography was in its infancy and the theoretical boundaries between fiction and history had not yet been established. While contemporary writers were refashioning recent historical events to fit ideological biases, the problem of what was history and what was fiction became acute when the only record was a "manuscript" of unknown age and of questionable provenance.

We have seen in the discussion of the Scottish primitivists how conjectural history tells us much more about the mid-eighteenth century when it was written than it does about the early ages of man. Haywood, from another angle, has a similar message. The speculations and confusions about the authenticity of ancient manuscripts gave the forgers (most notably Macpherson and Thomas Chatterton) an "immense space" in which to fabricate creative structures, false manuscripts which mirror contemporary, if not historical truths.

The most fundamental of these truths is the reason that

history can be written in the first place, that is, a recognition of the unique character of individual historical eras. Pope's translation of the Iliad, Maynard Mack tells us, "is an affirmation of the generality of human experience, and can be appreciated on no other assumption." *Ossian* is the product of a time when men were beginning to recognize the uniqueness of individual experience within the limitations of a unique culture. A pervasive consciousness of the precariousness of human time and human achievements was, of course, exacerbated in Macpherson's experience by the situation in Scotland after the rebellion of '45. However, *Ossian* is emblematic of more than just Scottish experience. "A fascination with cultural extinction was the dominant tone in historical literature of the decade or so before *Ossian*," Haywood tells us, (71), and we have the evidence of Gibbon's masterpiece to remind us that the concern with cultural annihilation remained powerful into the following decades.

It was a concern which was to persist in the work of Sir Walter Scott, who was a major beneficiary of Macpherson's and Chatterton's "making of history". The forgeries, which creatively reconstructed perplexing questions in contemporary historiography, ultimately helped writers to distinguish fiction from history, and thereby provided a basis for the new genre, historical fiction.

However, the forgeries gave more to this new genre than critical categories: fictionalizing the distant past paradoxically vivified it and gave it a "truth" it would not otherwise have had. In Haywood's words: "The essential impulse behind the forgeries flowed back towards history instead of away from it. Fiction allowed the enhancement and exploration of the past and the processes of history" (55).

Macpherson's imaginative recreation of ancient Scotland was a demonstration that there could be alternative histories, equivalent truths.

I believe that historical fiction, the imaginative writer's power of recreation was being pitted against orthodox history writing, especially as represented by the official received version of history. Historical fiction could, because of its ability to weave in and out of the recorded facts, explore and enhance them, set them in new, possibly subversive perspectives, ultimately say something valuable about the making of the past, history as process (Haywood 66).

And the fact that Macpherson's audience, in their variety of reasons, was willing to accept the possibility of alternatives (whether they embraced these alternatives as truths or as not quite truths--the situation of Anna Seward in later life) (see pages 248-49) leads to a new appreciation of the nature of this audience. Haywood's work, along with Rabinowitz's, allows us to view this audience in another perspective. Some, perhaps most of

Macpherson's supporters, were duped (or self-deceived--see the discussion of William Stukeley at the end of this chapter). Others were much less concerned with authenticity than with imaginative truth and recognized that Macpherson was providing them with a coherent vision of a primitive culture. This alternative culture not only stood in critical relation to their own but also embodied some very basic truths about the emotional temper of their own time.

"No matter how imaginative a work of fiction may be," Rabinowitz tells us, "there is always a strand of realism beneath it." However "realism" as it is generally defined seems inadequate in this instance. The standard dictionary definition of realism in literature is "fidelity in art and literature to nature or to real life and to accurate representation without idealization." With the Ossianic poetry the definition of realism must be extended to include fidelity to feeling.

The lengths to which Macpherson went to supply his poems with authenticating historical, sociological, and cultural apparatus was extraordinary, and demonstrates both his instinctive understanding of the needs and expectations of his audience and his own personal investment in his project. We can see him working to create an authorial audience as early as the first time he met John Home and

interested him in his collection of Erse poetry. We have seen Macpherson's initial reluctance to exhibit his translated fragments of Gaelic poetry. How much this reluctance reflected real insecurity, how much was calculated to create expectation, can never be known. By the time that the Fragments of Ancient Poetry... (1760) was published, however, Macpherson must have known that he was on to a good thing. The preface to the Fragments indicates that many of these fragments are integral episodes in an epic poem, the epic Macpherson was to publish as Fingal in 1761.

The recognition that Macpherson claimed his original "fragments" were pieces of an ancient "epic" leads us back to the subject of this chapter: the genre of the Ossianic poems. Haywood actually invents a new designation for Ossian, "memoir-epic," but it is probably simpler and more accurate to relate Macpherson's work to the tradition of the melancholy poem of mid-century. We cannot accept "romance" as a generic label because the poems lack the "wild adventures" (Scott) and supernatural interventions into human affairs which were characteristic of the old romances. "Epic" is inadequate to describe Ossianic poetry because of the mimetic, realistic in the conventional sense, and communally oriented nature of epic. And although Ossian incorporates methods of eighteenth-century

historiography, no historian could utilize its historical accounts in an actual history of third-century Scotland. However, Macpherson's poetry does have a good deal in common with the literary tradition of the melancholy poem which retreats from history into a private realm of fantasy and feeling.

Macpherson's poems come closest in form and content to Joseph Warton's "Ode to Fancy" or "The Enthusiast," William Collins's "Ode to Fear," Gray's "Ode on the Distant Prospect of Eton College." The anthropological, conjectural-historical apparatus is missing, yet these poems still have a great deal in common with Ossianic poetry. In Rabinowitz's language, they share the same authorial audience. Whether this audience gets its primitivism straight from a legitimate and authenticated source or from a poet who is attempting to recover his most elemental feelings, the form and content of the Ossianic and melancholy poems signal that "feeling" was at issue. The Great Ode (along with epic and tragedy) was a genre traditionally associated with the sublime. Similarly, in Macpherson's poetry the short, ejaculatory sentences were designed not only to reveal the earliest, most heartfelt language but to draw from the reader an equally heartfelt response.

We can connect a history which permits imaginative

reconstructions of "manners" of past cultures with a literary criticism which newly elevates the productions of the imagination, and recognize that Ossian is at the crossroads of both this new history and this new poetry. The key term is "imagination," accompanied by the awareness that "imagination" encompasses emotional as well as creative connotations in this period. The "allegorical and descriptive" poetry Joseph Warton produced to illustrate his plea for inventiveness and imagination in poetry is poetry in the tradition of the sublime.

Because an entire chapter of this study is devoted to the Ossianic sublime (Chapter 7), it is necessary here to trace only some of the relationships between the emotional poetry coming into being at this time and the expectations of the Ossianic readership. Norman Maclean, in his highly regarded work on the eighteenth-century lyric, singles out Joseph Warton's "Advertisement" to his Odes (1746) as a manifesto in the new spirit. "The Public," Warton asserts, "has been so much accustom'd of late to didactic Poetry alone, and essays on moral Subjects, that any work where the imagination is much indulged, will perhaps not be relished or regarded." Because he regards "Invention and Imagination to be the chief faculties of a Poet," he calls himself "happy if the following Odes may be look'd upon as an attempt to bring back Poetry into its right channel"

(Maclean 437).

Warton's emphasis on the poetry of imagination prophesies the increasingly subjective direction which literature and literary criticism is to take in the following decades, a direction which ultimately is to eliminate the traditional distinctions between literary kinds. "General aesthetic discussions of sublimity," Maclean tells us, "[are] genetically related to the distinction between 'subjective' and 'objective' poetry, the Romantic distinction that revolutionized the theory of artistic kinds and made the lyric a theoretical half (the subjective) of poetry" (437).

On the level of content, it is not simplistic to emphasize that the melancholy poem is melancholy. The underlying theme of retreat has been touched upon: a private voice is shrinking from the disillusionments he has experienced in a public world and is seeking out some source of power and meaning from an inward experience. The source of power is often a female deity who controls a realm of feeling, and the poet must join her "tribe" and become her votary in order to come in touch with the experience she represents. Thomas Warton's "Ode To Fancy" and William Collins's odes: to Fear, Pity, Evening are of this type.

It seems to me that Macpherson's poems belong in this

category, as well, even though they lack the obvious personifications of the "tribes of mind" that Warton's and Collins's poems contain. Thomas Warton's papers in Trinity College, Oxford /4/ describe the poetry which "[imitates] the actions of spirits in describing imaginary Scenes and making persons of abstracted things, such as Solitude, Innocence and many others" as "romance." It is romance, Warton claims, because it is "altogether in the spirit, (tho with more Judgement and less extravagant) and affects the Imagination in the same Manner, with the old Romances." Perhaps John Sitter's commentary on this passage will help to explain what Ritson also meant when he called The Poems of Ossian "romance." "Now, in fact," Sitter says, "the effect of the modern poetry of the mid-eighteenth century hardly at all resembles that of the old romances. But what Warton finds similar, I believe, is the attempt to make poetry nonreferential, to free it from the realm of memory and mimesis, at least from the mimesis of verifiable events and things. This new manner of poetry imitates instead the 'actions of spirits' as performed by personified abstractions upon imaginary stages" (109-110).

The resident "spirits" of the Ossianic poems can be said to be Solitude and Innocence: Solitude for the bardic voice bereft of family, friends, country, even the use of his eyes; Innocence, for the primeval age in which men had

not yet learned to be cruel. These two personifications, Solitude and Innocence, are not merely incidental, Sitter observes, but "must loom large in any attempt to generalize the action and atmosphere of many mid-century poems, in which a solitary speaker quests after some form of radical innocence" (110).

Macpherson's poems contain no identifiable personifications as Solitude, Innocence, or Pity or Fear, a fact Hugh Blair uses to confirm the antiquity of the poems (Critical Dissertation 105). The closest he comes to personification is the one-dimensionality of his protagonists, who are types rather than personalities: Fingal the benevolent warrior-king, Ossian the blind bard, Malvina the tender-hearted daughter-in-law. However, when the poems are considered as a whole, plot quickly fades in the mind and the overall impression is not unlike that made by the odes addressed to personifications where one dominant emotional state takes center stage in an imaginary theatre of the mind. Indeed, Macpherson's scenic effects: the lonely heath, the solitary tree, the moon reflected in a make-believe ocean, seem to be stage sets for the same theatre.

Readers familiar with the productions of the "Warton school" of poetry were primed for the scenic effects Macpherson offered. For example, the longest ode in Joseph

Warton's Odes on Various Subjects (1746), "To Fancy," is addressed to the spirit of poetic inspiration, the imagination or fancy. Warton's Fancy leads the poet in one section of the poem to the same idealized isolated natural surroundings as in the Ossianic poems; in both Warton's and Macpherson's poems the inspired poet seeks the settings which allow him to translate reality into dream.

The scenery of one vision in "To Fancy" specifically predicts Macpherson's primitive Scotland.

O lover of the desert, Hail!
 Say, in what deep and pathless vale,
 Or on what hoary mountain's side,
 'Midst falls of water you reside,
 'Midst broken rocks, a rugged scene,
 With green and grassy dales between,
 'Midst forests dark of aged oak,
 Ne'er echoing with the woodman's stroke,
 Where never human art appear'd
 Nor ev'n one straw-rooft cott was rear'd
 Where NATURE seems to sit alone,
 Majestic on a craggy throne; (21-32)

The second edition of Warton's odes, published April 8, 1747, contained a significant addition which may have been included after Joseph saw his brother Thomas's poem, "The Pleasures of Melancholy" (Pittock, intro. vii). In these lines Fancy is introduced to the matron Melancholy who dwells in settings as familiar as the mountainous landscapes found earlier. These are the charnel houses, churches, and ruins which gave the impulse to Gothic dreams. Melancholy, personified as a mature woman, finds

particular affinity with women's sorrows: the bride mourning her dead bridegroom, the widow grieving over her soldier husband. This section of "To Fancy" invokes the Macpherson of the warlike stance, the midnight mood, and the lost cause.

Haste, FANCY, from the scenes of folly
 To meet the matron MELANCHOLY,
 Goddess of the tearful eye.
 That loves to fold her arms and sigh;
 Let us with silent footsteps go
 To charnels and the house of Woe,
 To Gothic churches, vaults and tombs,
 Where each and night some virgin comes,
 With throbbing breast and faded cheek,
 Her promis'd bridegroom's urn to seek;
 Or to some Abby's mould'ring tow'rs,
 Where, to avoid cold wint'ry show'rs,
 The naked beggar shivering lies,
 While whistling tempests round her rise,
 And trembles, lest the tottering wall
 Should on her trembling infants fall.
 Now let us louder strike the lyre,
 For my heart glows with material fire,
 I feel, I feel, with sudden heat,
 My big tumultuous bosom beat;
 The trumpets dangers pierce my ear,
 A thousand widows' shrieks I hear,
 Give me another horse, I cry,
 Lo! the basic GALLIC squadrons fly;
 Whence is this rage? -- what spirit, say,
 To battle hurries me away?
 'Tis FANCY in her fiery car... (61-87) /5/

Two passages from the fragment, "Carthon," find Ossianic melancholy haunting an emotional landscape similar to that inhabited by Warton's matron. The difference is that Ossian speaks in his own voice of people he has known, wars he has experienced. Like Melancholy's grieving

widows, Moina, the tragic heroine of "Carthon," grieves when her soldier lover fails to return. However, Moina's death takes on added significance when it comes to stand for the death of her people, emblemized in the ruined palace of Balclutha. The second, equally characteristic, passage describes the natural portent which prophesies the immanent destruction of Moina's nation.

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 sunbeams of other days, the delight of heroes of old. I have seen the walls of Balclutha, but they were desolate. The fire had resounded in the halls: and the voice of the people is heard no more. The stream of Clutha was removed from its place by the fall of the walls. The thistle shook there its lonely head: the moss whistled to the wind. The fox looked out from the windows, the rank grass of the wall waved round its head. Desolate is the dwelling of Moina, silence is in the house of her fathers. Raise the song of mourning, O bards, over the land of strangers. They have fallen before us: for one day we must fall. Why dost thou build the hall, son of the winged days? Thou lookest from thy towers to-day: yet a few years, and the blast of the desert comes; it howls in thy empty court and whistles round thy half-worn shield. And let the blast of the desert come! we shall be renowned in our day! The mark of my arm shall be in battle; my name in the song of bards. Raise the song, send round the shell: Let joy be heard in my hall. When thou, sun of heaven! shalt fail, if thou shalt fail, thou might light! if thy brightness is for a season, like Fingal; our fame shall survive thy beams. The night passed away in song; morning returned in joy. The mountains showed their gray heads; the blue face of ocean smiled. The white wave is seen tumbling round the distant rock; a mist rose slowly from the lake. It came in the figure of an aged man along the silent plain. Its large limbs did not move in

steps, for a ghost supported it in mid air. It came towards Selma's hall, and dissolved in a shower of blood.

The king alone beheld the sight; he foresaw the death of the people....(225-26).

The literature of melancholy cannot be discussed without mention of another crucial source of background material for Ossian. This is the Reverend James Hervey's extremely popular Meditations Among the Tombs. Published, like Joseph Warton's (and William Collins's) Odes in 1746, Hervey's piece had a long publishing history in the eighteenth century. Meditations Among the Tombs was incorporated into a collection of Hervey's works entitled Meditations and Contemplations in 1748. This collection so caught the popular imagination that it was published in 38 different editions during the next 36 years.

Ossian's similarity to Hervey's Meditations was not overlooked by the members of the faction responsible for the North Briton. In Robert Lloyd's poem, "The Poetry Professor," which was published in the 22nd and 26th numbers of that paper, Lloyd suggests that modern writers should look to their own heritage for inspiration, but respect the sanctity of the classics.

...Oh forbear
to spoil with sacrilegious hand
The glories of the classic Land.
...Better be native in thy verse--
What is Fingal but genuine Erse?
Which, all sublime sonorous flows

Like HERVEY's Thoughts in drunken Prose.
(158-60; 163-6)

The ultimate end of the Meditations is religious, exhorting the reader to attend to his salvation before it is too late, but the means by which the message is conveyed is in the melancholy tradition: Hervey is the solitary speaker who utilizes (has, in fact, actively sought out) the graveyard to stimulate contemplations of last things.

While all of the Meditations are spoken in the first person like the Ossianic poems, this passage, with its reference to the natural sublime, has an especially Ossianic resonance.

I have often walked beneath the impending Promontory's craggy Cliff; I have often trod the vast Spaces of the lonely Desert; and penetrated the inmost Recesses of the dreary cavern: but never, never beheld Nature louring, with so tremendous a form; never felt such Impressions of Awe striking cold on my heart, as under these black-brow'd Arches, amidst these mouldy Walls, and surrounded by such rueful Objects; where Melancholy, deepest Melancholy, for ever spreads her Raven wings.--Let me now emerge from the damp and dreadful obscurity.--Farewell ye seats of Desolation and Shades of Death!--Gladly I revisit the realms of day (52-53).

Hervey's use of punctuation: his capitalization, underlining, hyphenation, and exclamation points to suggest a heightened emotionalism, also reveals how melancholy can so easily become sentimentality. And, indeed, there is one extended passage in the Meditations describing reactions of

a mother and father to the untimely death of their son which exhibits this aspect of contemporary taste especially well. The passage is long and detailed, but its length is part of the point. Hervey has imaginatively recreated the mother's grief so that his audience can participate directly in her reactions, and empathize with her. Like Macpherson, Hervey was educating his audiences in feeling.

Doubtless; it would have pierced one's Heart to have beheld the tender Parents, following the breathless Boy to his long Home; Perhaps drowned in tears, and all overwhelmed with Sorrows, they stood like weeping Statues, on this very SpotIs it Fancy! or do I hear the passionate Mother in an agony of Affliction, taking her final Leave of the Darling of her soul? Dumb she remained while the awful Obsequies were performing; dumb with Grief, and leaning upon the partner of her Woes. But now the inward anguish struggles for Vent; it grows too big to be repressed. She advances to the Brink of the grave. All her soul is in her eyes. She fastens one more look upon the dear doleful Object, before the pit shuts its mouth upon him. And as she looks, she cries; in broken accents, interrupted by many a rising sob, she cries--Farewel my Son? my Son! my only beloved! Would to God I had died for thee! Farewel, my child! And farewel, all my earthly Happiness!-- I shall never more see Good in the land of the Living. Attempt not to comfort me.--I will go mourning all my Days, till my grey hairs come down with sorrow, to the Grave."

Elizabeth Montagu's letter to Lord Lyttelton, dated October 31, 1760, throws light on how the Ossianic poems were received from one who wanted to believe in them. The letter presents the testimony of a member of the actual audience who wants to join the authorial audience, or even

the narrative audience, but cannot decide what kind of literature she is reading and whether the text is authentically primitive. Those places in the text which appear to her especially problematical highlight the contemporary concerns; the text would be a realistic presentation of a primitive society except for these discrepancies which force her to question its authenticity; and it is these discrepancies in turn which reveal those areas which offer problems to a contemporary (actual) audience.

It should be noted that Elizabeth Montagu was an important member of the intellectual establishment in England. The leader of the famous group of literary women, the Bluestockings, her book on Shakespeare, Essays on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare, had been well received. Her objectivity on the issue of Ossianic authenticity can be questioned, however. Montagu's friendship with Lord Kames, who as we have seen, defended Ossian in his Sketches of the History of Man, dated from a visit to Blair Drummond in 1766 and lasted till the end of her life. Kames even enlisted Montagu in the cause, "[entrusting] her with the delicate task of trying to get Macpherson to make certain improvements in any further Ossian publications" (Lehmann Lord Kames, 249).

In the letter to Lord Lyttelton, Montagu focuses on

what she finds to be historical inaccuracies of the poems. For example, Montagu has difficulty explaining the pillars. She supposes that the word "pillars" refers not to polished marble columns but to smooth lime or beech trees, "which one may suppose to have been used as supporters in very rude buildings, and which would look smooth and shapely to one not used to polished marble; and I imagine convenience taught the use of such supporters long before they were introduced as ornaments." A more serious anachronism is the mention of steel armour before it was invented. "I can imagine that the darkness of the times might cover and obscure many things but I do not see how the poet could find steel armour where it did not exist." She has learned that there was no historical Fingal: "It is very strange that any poet who intended to make his poems pass as genuine, should use the name of Fingal, if no such king is to be found. Is it not possible Fingal might be some powerful regent during whose government there might be an invasion? which invasion, too; might not be a general affair sent out by the government of Denmark, but perhaps only the gallantry of some adventurers" (1: 317-18).

These are important passages because they indicate just those sticking places which impeded the contemplative reader from wholeheartedly embracing the Ossianic cause.

They illustrate the opposite of what Rabinowitz calls "silences," those passages which the contemporary eighteenth-century reader slides over with assent, which he accepts without questioning. Montagu is responding in disbelief because these details seem especially unrealistic to her and prevent her from wholeheartedly aligning herself with the members of the Ossianic authorial audience.

Montagu has literary questions, as well. She detects the influence of "Mr. Thompson" in the passages of natural description.

The night pieces are very fine, but far short, I think, of some of the first collection. If Mr. Thompson were alive, I should suspect they were his, they are so much of his turn. The hind who raises her head on hearing the wind whistle through the horns of the stag, and lies down and sleeps, puts me much in mind of Mr. Thompson who never neglected any circumstance he had observed on his rural walks (1: 319).

However, she cannot believe that a contemporary would have presented the poems in such a form. "I find great difficulty in believing or disbelieving the authenticity of these poems; would not a modern author have wrought up these fine images with the advantages of verse? would he have sent their skeleton so unclothed and bare into the world?"

The poems appeal to her because they present a contrast with and an implicit criticism of her culture.

One should suppose, the subject of these poems was previous to any historical accounts, the manners are the most savage that is possible, the persons seem to have subsisted on hunting and fishing. There is not the least allusion to any policy or civil government; in such a state there could be no history but such records as these songs, of certain warlike achievements. I hear Lord Marchmont says, our old Highland bard is a modern gentleman of his acquaintance; if it be so, we have a living poet who may dispute the pas on Parnassus with Pindar and the greatest of the ancients, and I honor him for carrying the Muses into the country, and letting them step majestically over hills, mountains and rivers, instead of tamely walking in the Park or Picadilly (l: 318-19).

And in the final analysis, the merit of the poems outweighs their questionable authenticity.

The bishop of Ossory tells me Mr. Macpherson receives an £100 per annum subscription while he stays in the Highlands to translate the poems; if he is writing them, he should have a thousand at least (320).

This point is also made by Anna Seward in a letter she wrote to Walter Scott in 1806. By this date Ossianic authenticity was seriously in doubt. Henry Mackenzie's Highland Society Committee had made an exhaustive study of Macpherson's claims, the sources (both oral and written) that he had available to him and the poetry he "translated," and concluded in the report published in 1805 that much of the work was a fabrication (see page 85). Miss Seward could have discovered this information if she had wanted to. She makes it clear that she does not. Her

reasons are clear. "Excepting Dr. Johnson's contemelious and angry assertions, I have not examined any of the arguments that seek to prove [the Ossianic poems] forgery. I liked not to have my mind disturbed." Their authenticity is less important than their effect. "It was sufficient for me that my imagination was raised, my passions interested, and my ear gratified even to luxury, whenever I opened those pages of dubious origin." (6: 279).

She sees three possibilities for the originality of Ossian: either "it be wholly ancient, or chiefly ancient, or if it was in great measure inspiration in the mind of the ostensible translator." Her opinion "halts between the first and the last of these conjectures." Interestingly, she is, even at this late date, bringing up reasons why the poems must be "wholly ancient." The first reason turns one of Dr. Johnson's arguments against Ossianic authenticity around. Johnson had used Macpherson's translation of the Iliad (1773) as "a reason for disdaining him as a man of genius" in his famous letter responding to Macpherson's threats. Seward believes that "the weakness of that translation becomes the strength of our internal evidence, that its author was not responsible for the production of some of the noblest poetry which has been since the world began." Also, the absence of any modern phraseology and the lack of any reference to arts, science or agriculture

would seem to argue for the authenticity of the poems (6: 277-80).

On the other side of the argument, she finds no adequate explanation for the "graceful urbanity of the sentiments and manners, at a period when England was in a state so rude and barbarous...." "Would," she asks, "no historian have remarked a preference so vast and decided on the part of Scotland? and how came she to have degenerated so much in the dignity of address, and in the graces of sensibility, as, from the Border Minstrelsy, it appears she had?" Why did the Caledonian bards "exalt and refine" the manners of their heroes so much more than the druids and bards of England and Wales? (6: 278-79).

For Elizabeth Montagu the detail in the poems which did not ring true was the pillars, for Anna Seward it was the absence of wolves.

One circumstance struck me forcibly, when first, in my juvenile years, I explored [the Ossianic poems], and it is on the incredulous side of the dispute; a circumstance of which Blair's Dissertation takes no notice. The wolf, which doubtless then infested those as all other mountainous regions, is not once mentioned in these volumes. I expected to find them in the awful march of their terrible graces. His howl would have solemnly blended with the roar of their mountain streams, and with the voice of departed heroes, amid the tempestuous winds (6: 279-80).

What ultimately mattered to Elizabeth Montagu and Anna Seward was not realistic but imaginative truth, not the

realism which straight history ostensibly gives us, but the "truth" which is best rendered through fiction. They stand in contrast to the pseudo-historian who embraced the Ossianic cause because Macpherson's fantasy-history coincided with his own. If an ideal Ossianic reader in Rabinowitz's schema were sought (although Rabinowitz conceives of this reader as a fiction within a fiction), there would be no better candidate for the honor than the clergyman and conjectural-historian, William Stukeley.

In general we may profile the ideal Ossianic reader in this period as most likely Scottish, perhaps female, not highly educated, who was inclined to believe what she read in the newspapers and magazines and considered her sensibility as one of the most valuable aspects of her personality. Anna Seward and Nathan Drake, though the former was rather well educated and the latter male, fall into this profile. Stukeley, who was a gentleman and Englishman, could be considered an ideal Ossianic reader for other reasons.

Stukeley, first a physician and later a clergyman in the Church of England, embraced the Ossianic cause so enthusiastically that he could be considered a member of Rabinowitz's ideal narrative audience because Macpherson's historical speculations and fantasies paralleled Stukeley's own approach to the past. In a delightful piece of

propaganda for Ossian entitled A Letter from Dr. Stukeley to Mr. Macpherson On His Publication of Fingal and Temora with a Print of Cathmor's Shield, Stukeley explains why he is much better able to judge its authenticity than most people. /6/

It seems that Stukeley, as an antiquarian and coin collector (he has written a monograph on the coins of the "Emperor" Carausius) /7/ had visited the barrows of the ancient Britons when he was a young man.

When I rode over the most delightful downs of Salisbury plain, and those of Dorsetshire, covered over with thousands of large barrows, or tumuli; the sepultures of the first inhabitants of those beautiful regions; which the antient Greeks thought to be Elysium, the happy seat of the blessed, the fortunate island; I had then such notions of the ancient Britons, as in great measure, reading Ossian has recalled....I made innumerable drawings and admesurements of their works....When I dug into many of the barrows, finding in them what your heroes deposited,...I was capable of relishing Fingal, more than many readers, and consequently with more pleasure (Stukeley 7).

Stukeley writes his own conjectural history, making the "Britons" ancestors of Macpherson's Caledonians, rather than, as Macpherson would have it, the other way around. But this little detail is easily concealed under the mounds of praise Stukeley heaped on Macpherson's works.

I could plainly discern, your heroes to be the last remains of the ancient Britons, the first inhabitants of Dorsetshire and Wiltshire, by long succession of ages, and mutations of people, and

forces of invaders, at last driven into the Caledonian highlands, and into Ireland; where you have reviv'd and illustrated their story (7).

Like other sympathetic conjectural historians, Stukeley treats the Ossianic text as a genuine relic upon which he can weave additional fabrications. One of these, which he has discussed in his own work, is that the first British colonies are of Oriental descent. Proof of this is "their inviolable faith given, their hospitality, their general honesty, their heroism, love for after-fame, their care for the rites of sepulture, funeral Elogium, [and] notions of a future state." He also cites as "symptoms of Oriental descent" the ancient Caledonian "talent at poetry, music, the harp, their honour toward the fair sex; their Clans" (10).

On the issue of religion, which was exploited by Macpherson for his own purposes, Stukeley echoes what he had read. That there is so little mention of religion in these poems is attributed to the institution of the Druids, who committed nothing of that kind to writing, although the bards were not so scrupulous in that point. However, there is a consequence of the supposed "Oriental descent" which helps to explain one of Macpherson's later behaviors. That he tried to turn the Ossianic poems into Greek later in his life was seen by Phyllis Greenacre as a manifestation of

his irrationality. Stukeley, however, notes that "Caesar expressly informs us that the Druids used Greek letters." "The Greeks had them from Phoenisia, whence the Greeks had them from Cadmus" (11).

The biographical sketch of Stukeley given in the DNB suggests that he exemplified that kind of creative imagination which Johnson found so dangerous, and unlike the admirable Caledonians his relationship to honesty was a bit shaky. The letter to Macpherson quoted above contains a depiction of Cathmor's shield which is, of course, a fantasy built on a fantasy. And this is not the least of Stukeley's fancies. The DNB quotes from Stukeley's own autobiography (written in the third person) which informs the reader that: "He has traced the origin of Astronomy from the first ages of the world. He has traced the origin of Architecture with many designs of the Mosaic Tabernacle...and an infinity of sacred antiquities...but the artifice of booksellers discourages authors from reaping the fruits of their labors" (19: 128).

Stukeley's conjectures and attributions were discredited by his contemporaries. Gibbon says, concerning his "History of Carausius, that "I have used most of his materials and rejected most of his fanciful conjectures." Most of his productions seem to have been benevolently tolerated. The most amusing of his errors was his

misreading of the word "Fortuna" on a coin as "Oriuna," which led him to believe that the "Emperor" Carausius had a wife called Oriuna. His most serious fraud was the publication, in 1757, of the De Situ Britanniae as the genuine work of Richard of Cirencester, when it was actually a forgery by Charles Bertram (128).

The histories of Chatterton and Ireland as well as Macpherson attest to the fact that forgery was not a rare phenomenon in the period. We have dwelt on Stukeley because he is representative of many others who, at a time when a "scientific" historiography was developing, jumped into that grey area between truth and conjecture when the facts were not yet separated from the fancies. Perhaps those who fly a little too far are necessary to show the others the way. At any rate, for our purposes, he demonstrates that there were almost ideal readers of the Ossianic poems who were not benevolists or Scots (or women).

Notes

1. Charles Churchill's reference to Macpherson in "The Prophecy of Famine" encompasses many of the resentments and accusations against the Scots in general and Fingal in particular, in a very small space.

Thence issued forth, at great Macpherson's call
 That old new epic pastoral Fingal
 Now be the muse disrobed of all her pride
 Be all the glare of verse by truth supplied
 And if plain nature pours a simple strain
 Which Bute may praise and Ossian not disdain
 Ossian, sublimest, simplest bard of all
 Whom English infidels Macpherson call
 Then round my head shall Honour's ensigns wave
 And pensions mark me for a willing slave.

2. Hume, living in a literate society, had difficulty in understanding how a preliterate culture passed along its heritage, but modern studies have demonstrated how "twenty thousand verses along with numberless historical facts" could indeed be "preserved by oral traditions during fifty generations" by the rudest of all the European peoples. Eric Havelock, in his Preface to Plato solves, convincingly, the mystery of Plato's objections to poetry in the Republic by showing that Plato is reacting against a cultural phenomenon of much greater influence than that exerted by "poetry" in our sense of the word. It is that "poetic," "oral" or "Homeric" state of mind "which constituted the chief obstacle to scientific rationalism, to the use of analysis, to the classification of experience, to its rearrangement in sequence of cause and effect" to which Plato was objecting (47).

Havelock explains how the poetry of an oral culture which he calls "a reference library" and "a vast tractate in ethics and politics and warfare" could have been transmitted through the generations.

Somehow a collective social memory, tenacious and reliable, is an absolute social prerequisite for maintaining the apparatus of any civilization. But how can the living memory retain such an elaborate linguistic statement without suffering it to change in transmission from man to man and from generation to generation and so lose all fixity and authority? One need only experiment today with the transmission of a single prosaic

directive passed down from person to person in order to conclude that preservation in prose was impossible. The only possible verbal technology available to guarantee the preservation and fixity of transmission was that of the rhythmic word organized cunningly in verbal and metrical patterns unique enough to retain their shape. This is the historical genesis, the fons and origo, the moving cause of that phenomenon we still call "poetry" (42-43).

That Macpherson was able to create not only the history and sociology of a preliterate culture, but also the poetry through which that culture ostensibly transmitted its traditions must be recognized as no little achievement. Perhaps one measure of his success is the fact that many Europeans used the text of Ossian to learn the English language. Macpherson's repetitious, rhythmic and imitable prose, like true oral literature, aided the memory.

3. This passage is a demonstration of a major problem historical novelists face: creating a language which is true to the period of the novel and yet seems natural to the contemporary reader. As the Ossianic poems were a major influence on the development of the historical novel, this problem is evident from the very beginning, although in the case of Ossian, it was not seen by his audiences.

4. John Sitter's source for this quote is the two-part article by David Fairer entitled "The Poems of Thomas Warton the Elder?" in the Review of English Studies, n.s. 26 (1975): 401-2, 395-406. Fairer shows, in this important article, that the young Warton brothers had revised many of the poems, and contributed ten new poems to their father's posthumous volume, Poems on Several Occasions (1748). Since these particular poems were the ones which earlier critics had used to attribute a "romantic" voice to one of Pope's contemporaries, Fairer's point is that this "romantic" voice did not appear until the 1740's when the Warton brothers were championing a poetry of "Invention and Imagination."

5. Joan Pittock includes this passage in her introduction to Warton's Odes (vi).

6. Francis Coventry's satire on the England of the 1750s, Pompey the Little, derogates Stukeley's

scholarship. Pompey is the picaresque hero as lapdog, who, as he passes along from one owner to another, uncovers the pretensions and hypocrisies of the time. In a discussion of the genealogy of Pompey's friend Mopsa who is a cat, Coventy mocks Stukeley's and Browne Willis's creative theories about the origin of the English nation. Others had offered theories about the origin of cats in England but "the learned and ingenious Dr. Stukeley, disliking all these opinions, undertakes to prove that they were not in England till the Conquest but that they came over in the same ship with the Duke of Normandy, afterwards William the First. Which of their Conjectures is the truest, these ingenious Gentlemen must decide among themselves; which I apprehend will not be done without many volumes of controversy; but they are all unanimous in supposing the Family to be very ancient and of foreign Extraction" (51).

Robert A. Day's note on this passage informs us that "Browne Willis (1682-1760) and Dr. William Stukeley (1687-1765) were both antiquarians famous for their erudition, eccentricities and fanciful theories about Britain's remote past" (213).

7. M. Mausaeus Carausius was a self-proclaimed emperor of the provinces of Britain in late 286 or in 287 A. D. He was a Menapian from the Low Countries of humble parentage who was put in charge of the defense of the imperial frontier on the lower Rhine after he gained a reputation for courage on the battlefield. Suspicions that he had collaborated with the barbarian invaders led Maximian, the governor of the Western provinces, to order his execution. Carausius's response was to claim himself emperor and seize the provinces of Britain, ruling from Boulogne. His fall came when Constantius built a mole to close the harbor of Boulogne. Without access to his troops on the continental side of the Channel, Carausius lost a good part of his power and was soon after assassinated by one of his associates, Allectus (see Salway, Oxford History of England 1A: 288-89, 302-5).

Ossianic Reception and the Sublime

Any work on Ossian must deal with the Ossianic sublime in some fashion, if only because the Ossianic poems were considered synonymous with sublimity by those who believed in them. And clearly, the sublime, which can be defined as an experience of transcendence, of emotional transport overwhelming in its impact, has been implicit throughout this study, if not formally recognized as such. Frye's account of the poetry of sensibility in its oracular phase (see pages 43-44), the poetry of the original geniuses writing in the first ages of man described by the conjectural historians, the melancholy private poetry of the Collins-Warton school, were all considered to be "sublime." Combining the idealization of primitive cultures with the new emphasis on a literature which stressed the feelings, either of which would intimate that familiarity with the subjective life which is the hallmark of the sublime, the Ossianic poems not only "merged with the sublime as soon as they appeared" (Monk 120), but they also altered the conception of what constitutes sublime expression and content. How they did this will be the subject of this chapter, which will examine how the reception to Macpherson's innovations: the landscapes, ghosts, and "manners"--reshaped definitions of sublimity

and thereby helped to create a new type of literature.

For Hans Robert Jauss the ideal way to retrieve the horizon of expectations of an identifiable historical situation is to discover the "ideal case," that work which turns its back on or parodies the literary tradition. Works such as Madame Bovary, Don Quixote and Jacques le fataliste are ideal cases for Jauss because they "evoke the reader's horizon of expectations, formed by a convention of genre, style or form, only to destroy it step by step." This definition, however, must be seen as too narrow. As ideal cases these works are more than just literary parodies; they call into question fundamental structures and assumptions of their respective cultures. They realize Jauss's concept of a socially formative function of literature. Ossian can be considered an ideal case because it pinpoints the failures of contemporary culture and because it was viewed as sublime. The two are not incompatible. The sublime in its many incarnations offered alternatives.

Samuel H. Monk tells us specifically why Ossian was identified with the sublime: "For if the sublime is terror, what is more terrible than the ghosts of Ossian? If it is grandeur, what can be more grand than the armies and their battles, or the nobility and high thinking of Ossian's heroes and heroines? If it is energy, what can be more

energetic than the winds and the storms that blow through Ossian's lays and epics, what more intense and energetic than the expression of passion in the dark words and the bright deeds of the ancient heroes? If sublimity resides in words, what can be more lofty than the diction and style of the poems, a style so oddly akin to the King James version of the Bible?" (120). If we can understand the sublime as offering a means to retrieve the most elemental experiences and reach what in the 1960s would have been called a "higher consciousness," it is understandable that the concept had so many facets, and had an impact upon so many different areas of experience.

The ideal case gives us one way of constructing the horizon of expectations, but Jauss suggests that there are also others. Jauss's second way: "through the implicit relationships to familiar works of the literary historical surroundings" is relevant to the influences on the Ossianic poems which have already been treated: the conjectural historians such as Blackwell, Smith, Ferguson, and Kames; the epic poets; and the melancholy poets of mid-century. This chapter will treat the familiar works which illuminate the specific character of the Ossianic sublime or were crucial to its creation, notably Burke's Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful and Lowth's Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of

the Hebrews.

It is the third of Jauss's ways of constructing the horizon of expectations which leads us to a consideration of the "rhetorical sublime" as a cultural phenomenon. Jauss suggests that the historical situation can be retrieved "through the opposition of fiction and reality, between the poetic and practical function of language, which is always available to the reflective reader during the readings as a possibility of comparison."

The point here is that the historical situation of the Ossianic poems cannot be recovered through "the opposition between fiction and reality" or between the "poetic and practical functions" of language, because the reader who believed in the poems was not able to make these distinctions. In this case the historical situation is reclaimed only when these inabilities are recognized. The supposed primitive nature of the text compounds an already difficult situation. If the reader was unable to separate truth from speculation in the primitivistic theories of the conjectural historians, how could he distinguish real from spurious primitive language?

Just as melancholy poetry in its rejection of history was making a political statement, so there is also a political dimension to this incapability. The political inferiority complex of Scotland in this period and its

consequences have been noted. The conjectural historian's fascination with the origins of language has been examined. What has not been made clear is the connection between the contemporary political scene and language. David Daiches, in The Paradox of Scottish Culture: The Eighteenth-Century Experience, shows how both "sentimental Jacobitism" and the estrangement from the Scottish literary tradition can be attributed to the lost cause of Scotland. Daiches pinpoints the moment when the Scots came over to the Stuart cause as May 26, 1703. This was during the debates over the Union, when the Cavaliers voted in Parliament with the Patriots on an act designed to protect Scottish rights over the succession and other matters. From that time, the Cavaliers became identified in the popular mind with Scottish independence. The irony was that the Stuarts, who had done so much to undermine the cause of Scotland and promote their own interests in the seventeenth century, became, with the Union, the symbol of "a proud free independent Scotland lost in 1707" (15).

Political subordination and rapid industrialization created a nostalgia that affected all aspects of Scottish life and literature. Daiches believes that T. S. Eliot's "dissociation of sensibility" is as appropriate a phrase to use in describing the experience of the eighteenth-century Scot as it is in discussing that of the seventeenth-century

Englishman. "If you talk and, as it were feel in Scots and think and write in standard English, then your Scots is likely to be highly formal and in some degree denatured." On the one hand the formal prose style of the educated Scotsman was readable and clear. "The expository, historical and philosophical prose of eighteenth-century Scotsmen is often very fine, because these are areas of communication in which the formal discipline of a method of expression acquired at school was helpful." On the other hand, Scottish poetry, when written in English, "was often (but not invariably), derivative and stilted, and, when written in Scots, was always in danger of being self-consciously humorous or low or quaint" (21-22).

Daiches's discussion of the literary criticism of the period bears out his theory. This criticism, he points out, is almost entirely concerned with rhetoric, that is, devices to elicit an emotional response, and is "generally quite incapable of dealing with the more subtle and impressive devices of combining rational and emotional appeal to achieve richness of expression, and tends to mistake floridity for eloquence, pathos for tragedy, and sentimental declamation for poetry." He gives two examples. The first is Henry Mackenzie's review of Burns's Kilmarnock volume in The Lounger, which "praised some of the weakest and most sentimental of Burns' stanzas as being

'solemn and sublime with rapt and inspired melancholy.'" The second example is the reception of Macpherson's Ossian (22).

It is easy to see how a society which has been separated from the institutions and language which gave it an identity could have accepted a false account of its origins and ancestral heroes, and categorized the epics in which they figured as "sublime." The many reasons why these poems would offer a sublime experience have already been suggested: the fierce and wild landscapes, the supernatural apparitions, the superhuman magananimity of the heroes, and passion of the love stories; but perhaps the most sublime aspect of the poetry is the suggestion that the reader of these poems was re-experiencing the birth of poetry, that primeval time when feeling found form. If this is so, then the Ossianic reader had a deeper reason for being unable to distinguish between the poetic and practical functions of language. In the historical period when Ossian was created there was no distinction between them.

The critic who best exemplifies the inability to distinguish sentimental declamation from poetry, the true and the false sublime, was, of course, Hugh Blair. Blair's Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian was a major source of information for the Ossianic enthusiast and was

quoted frequently in the literature. Blair's interest in the rhetorical sublime was not confined to the Ossianic texts; he was a professor of Rhetoric at the University of Edinburgh whose Lectures on Rhetoric and Belle Lettres were highly respected during the eighteenth century. (The Critical Dissertation was incorporated into these lectures, which Blair gave for 24 years and which he was writing when the Ossianic poems were generated.)

Blair was also more than a disinterested bystander to the phenomenon that was Ossian. We have already traced the friendship between Macpherson and John Home to the autumn of 1759 when they met at the Scottish resort of Moffat, and Macpherson's association with Blair through Home's sponsorship. As we have seen, Blair and Home were subsequently instrumental in arranging sponsorship for Macpherson's collecting trips to the Highlands in 1760 and 1761 (the second with Home as a companion) which resulted in the publication of Fingal and Temora. And although Blair did not himself alter and embellish the ballad fragments into Ossianic shape, his enthusiasms, intellectual pursuits, and patriotic motivations certainly contributed to the poems in their present form.

It should be noted that this meeting was not the only time that John Home had inspired a work dealing with Scottish culture. William Collins had written his "Ode on

the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland" after spending a day with Home at Winchester about ten years before (Smart 89). However, in the case of Macpherson, the inspiration was reciprocal. Home made the collecting trip to the Highlands in 1761 with Macpherson in order to gather material for a play which he originally entitled Rivine. This play was finally finished in 1769. It was set in Ossianic times and had a characteristically Ossianic plot: a queen is tricked into marrying someone she does not love because she believes that her lover has been killed in battle. The fate of this play with English audiences reveals how much the resentment against the Scots persisted, although Bute had been out of office for six years. Home had to change the name of the play to The Fatal Discovery and conceal his authorship because it was feared that a Scottish author and setting would keep theatregoers away (Gipson 29, 143-48).

A passage in Blair's Critical Dissertation epitomizes the historical moment when in Jauss's words, one of the "familiar works of the literary historical surroundings" is confronted by a new literary phenomenon; and the process by which the old horizon of expectations must accommodate to the change is evident. The old work is an epicedium or funeral song of an eighth-century Danish King, Ragnar Lodbrog, which was preserved by Olaus Wormius in his

Literatura Runica. Like Ossian, Lodbrog was a poet (scald), and a warrior. The epicedium was written when Lodbrog, "having fallen into the hands of one of his enemies, and condemned to be destroyed by serpents, solaced himself by rehearsing all the exploits of his life." Blair reprints an excerpt from one of the stanzas, all of which begin, "Pugnavimus ensibus," "we have fought with our swords."

We have fought with our swords. I was young, when, towards the east, in the bay of Orean, we made torrents of blood flow, to gorge the ravenous beast of prey, and the yellow footed bird. There resounded the hard steel upon the lofty helmets of the men. The whole ocean was one wound. The crow waded in the blood of the slain....When we steered our ships into the mouth of the Vistula we sent the Helsingians to the hall of Odin. Then did the sword bite. The waters were all one stream. The earth was dyed red with the warm stream....(93).

The poem ends, Blair contends, "with sentiments of the highest bravery and contempt of death."

What is more certain to the brave man than death, though amidst the storm of swords he stands always ready to oppose it. He only regrets this life who hath never known distress. The timorous man allures the devouring eagle to the field of battle. The coward, wherever he comes, is useless to himself....Long was this the warrior's highest glory. He who aspires to the love of virgins, ought always to be foremost in the roar of arms. It appears to me, of truth, that we are led by the Fates....But this makes me always rejoice, that in the halls of our father Balder [or Odin] I know there are seats prepared, where, in a short time, we shall be drinking ale out of the skulls of our enemies. In the house of the mighty Odin, no brave man laments death. I come not with the voice of despair to Odin's hall.... (94-95).

This is a far cry from the bard of Cona, whose father, Fingal, was moved to release his enemy from humanitarian and sentimental motivations (he had loved and lost Agandecca, the sister of this king). It would be totally out of character for Fingal to imagine a heaven where he would be privileged to drink out of an enemy's skull. And this is exactly the point. We see in the juxtaposition where the sublimity of the actual "Gothic" (Blair's term) relic yields to the sublimity of sentimental melancholy. Lodbrog's poetry, described by Blair, "is such poetry as we would expect from a barbarous nation. It breathes a most ferocious spirit." He calls this poetry "wild, harsh, and irregular" yet "animated and strong," in the original "full of inversions...highly metaphorical and figured" (96).

The contrast with Ossian could not be more extreme.

But when we open the works of Ossian, a very different scene presents itself. There we find the fire and 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 (96).

This passage comparing Ossian's poetry with that of Lodbrog is comparable to a passage in which Blair compares

Ossian's sublimity with Homer's: "Homer's sublimity is accompanied with more impetuosity and fire; Ossian's with more of a solemn and awful grandeur....In the pathetic, Homer, when he chooses to exert it, has great power; but Ossian exerts that power much oftener, and has the character of tenderness far more deeply imprinted on his works. No poet knew better how to seize and melt the heart" (110). Both are crucial places in the Critical Dissertation because they illustrate the horizon of expectations at a moment of transition when an older form is yielding to a newer mode of thinking and feeling, when "the particular work, at the moment of its production stands out in its singularity from the collective grayness of received ideas and ideologies." One must of course add that the particular work is here filtered through an idiosyncratic consciousness (which, however, provided a pattern for future Ossianic commentary), and that the collective graynesses of Lodbrog and Homer reemerged bright and shining to the readership of future generations, but these cavils are really beside the point. It is this particular horizon of expectations which we are examining here, and Blair's responses, though based on a multitude of false assumptions, are significant in their historical context.

Blair's Critical Dissertation is valuable from the

point of view of the reader-response critic and equally valuable as an illustration of the critic's inability to separate true from false rhetoric.

The eighteenth-century notion of the sublime has an intimate connection with this inability to discriminate true from false expressions of feeling, but before we can look at the relationship we must understand what was meant by the term sublime in this period. In the eighteenth century "sublime" is one of the seminal terms that helps define the mind set of a culture, or as the response critics would have it, an intersubjectivity; and recovering the sublime involves the calling into being of an essential part of the zeitgeist, that spirit and those implications trailing in its wake. The sublime is at the forefront of the shift from a neo-classic, normative criticism to an affective orientation, from a public, male-dominated, rational, prescriptive literature, to an inner-directed, feminized, expressive way of writing. And although the sublime encompasses a wide range of aesthetic and emotional experience: "[the term] could be applied to the natural landscape, to a state of mind, to a literary mode; it could evoke orthodox religious experience or pantheistic rapture, Gothic terror or Doric severity, the grandeur of Michelangelo's sculpture or the factitious pleasures of medievalized romance" (Price 194), the common denominator

uniting this diversity is the psychological.

Martin Price's definition of the sublime helps us to see how the Ossianic enthusiast could, in the transport induced by this "new species of writing," mistake "floridity for eloquence, pathos for tragedy, and sentimental declamation for poetry." Price defines the sublime as:

an experience of transcendence, a surpassing of conventions or reasonable limits, an attempt to come to terms with the unimaginable. The moment of the sublime was a transport of spirit, and at such a moment the visible object was eclipsed or dissolved. The dissolution of the image threw the mind back on itself; typically, the failure of the image was expressed in a figure which played upon words that no longer sufficed. Such moments were fascinating to an age that had lost many of the forms of traditional piety and had diffused the religious experience--the sense of the numinous--over the natural world and over the process of feeling as well (194-5).

For our purposes, the central phrase in this definition is "words that no longer sufficed," for if emotional response precedes and supersedes language, if "feeling is first" and words merely confirm feeling; if the reader, in other words, comes to the work with a series of expectations, a preordered set of feelings, then it doesn't much matter what is on the page. This was the situation with Ossian. For the reasons which have already been provided: the patriotic rationalizations, the primitivistic, conjectural-historical theorizing, the

privatization of literary and emotional life, the prevailing benevolist and sentimental atmosphere, the Ossianic enthusiast anticipated having a sublime experience, and was therefore unable to make distinctions between the literary structures and content which reproduced true feeling and those which did not. The Ossianic reader picked up the cues in the work which for him elicited the response he expected to have.

Johnson's one-man crusade against Ossian and all that Ossian stood for is more comprehensible within the context of the Ossianic sublime. Although Johnson did not go to Scotland in 1773 only to refute Macpherson's claims for the authenticity of the poems, as Anna Seward states in one of her letters (6: 277), this was an important motivation for his trip. /1/ His complaints that anyone can abandon his mind to these poems, that they lack "lucidus ordo," and his statement to Boswell that they could have been written by many men, many women and many children, are familiar to anyone who knows about the controversy. /2/ Johnson's objections are grounded in his belief that Ossian signals a threat to the traditions, values and ideals of the Christian humanism, the values which should (if they sometimes do not) serve as the basis of our civilization. He believed that the elevating of the literature of "Gothic," primitive and barbaric (in both senses)

literature above the literature of Greece and Rome was a major step towards the attrition of the institutions which his civilization had been taught to value. The sublimity of this literature of "fine fabling" (Hurd) was an important reason why Johnson considered it dangerous. Wallace Jackson differentiates between the rhetorical sublime and "that which was identified with emotions of awe and grandeur." This second sublime is associated with "the dangerous prevalence of imagination" (Rasselas), superstition and ignorance, and the religious enthusiasm which confuses and ultimately maddens. So once more we discover that a concept associated with Macpherson's work carries undertones of subversion and dissent.

In an important passage in the Rambler (Number 137), Johnson explains how the awe associated with the sublime is incompatible with reason and judgment.

That wonder is the effect of ignorance has often been observed. The awful stillness of attention, with which the mind is overspread at the first view of an unexpected effect, ceases when we have leisure to disentangle complications and investigate causes. Wonder is a pause of reason, a sudden cessation of the mental progress, which lasts only while the understanding is fixed upon a single idea, and is at an end when it recovers force enough to divide the object into its parts, or mark the intermediate gradations from the first agent to the last consequence (Works 4: 360).

It is an easy transition from the eighteenth-century sublime to reader-response criticism, especially the work

of Wolfgang Iser. Iser's method of placing the reader within the text as a "wandering viewpoint" opens the way for the reader to make connections between seemingly unrelated fragments through "blanks" or from previous to emerging themes through the "vacancies" (See pages 20-21). As with the sublime, the dissolution of the image throws the mind back on itself. Iser is usually concerned with ideation (which seems to preclude the sublime), rather than emotional reaction, but there obviously is room for emotion as the reader makes the text his own. The primitivistic text, especially, lends itself to this process, because the gaps in the text attributable to the depredations of time invite the reader to use his imagination and make his own connections. These gaps signal the eternal loss of a valuable commodity, and possibly for the thoughtful reader, the inevitable losses consequent upon the passage of time. We cannot help recalling the Swiftian gaps in Tale of a Tub made to mock those who attempt to make sense of ancient texts, or the pathos evoked by Clarissa's elliptical writings after the rape.

Loss is an essential feature of the "negativity" which Iser believes is necessary to the building up of meaning of a text through the constitutive acts of the reading process. When negativity refers to the content of a text it involves "misfortunes and failures, wrecked aspirations,

ruined hopes, the negativity of man's efforts and the deformation of his being" (228). The application of this negativity to the Ossianic experience is obvious.

Throughout the Ossianic commentary the extreme situation in which the bard finds himself: blind, "the last of his race," having survived friends, family, his own children, dependent upon his daughter-in-law for comfort and companionship--was considered sublime, as was the extreme benevolence of the protagonists. Iser suggests that these "deformations," the term he uses to refer to these kinds of privations, "stimulate the reader to seek a hidden cause, a cause which ultimately points to a potential remedy;" however, the severity of Ossian's circumstances admits no relief and no potential remedy. The recognition of this fact is, in itself, a kind of sublimity.

I have certainly taken liberties with Iser's text. Negativity in this phase, defined as the "infrastructure of the literary text," a cause of deformation and also a potential remedy, is the structural basis of communication. The sublime, on the other hand, is often signalled by one's inability to communicate the experience.

However, Iser's description of the third feature of negativity would certainly not be out of place, with some substitutions, in an eighteenth-century treatise on the sublime. This feature clarifies the complex interrelations

between the reader, the text, and the world. Iser cites as a given that the text "turns the familiar world into an unfamiliar otherness, drains it of its reality, dislocates its accepted norms." Negativity in relation to this "alternative otherness," is the structure which invalidates "the manifested reality" of the text. Rather than a Utopian complement to an imperfect world, this negativity is said to be "the nonformulation of the "not-yet-comprehended." It offers a way of transcending the world by providing "a cause [which underlies] the question of the world."

We may find a connection between the experience of reading as Iser presents it and the sublime experience in the individual's desire to transcend what he already knows, and his need to make himself anew. A powerful text as well as an overwhelming emotional experience (they can, of course, be the same thing), both dislocate the accepted norms and carry him into the realm of the not-yet-comprehended.

This last statement may be a less meaningful insight than the recognition that the writers who were investigating the sublime, and Iser, are delving, in one way or another, into the ways by which we make meaning, the ways in which we discover truths or create satisfying stories about our world and ourselves.

The return from late twentieth century critical thought to the critical thought of the eighteenth century can be accomplished through the all-important concept of simplicity. Simplicity helps to explain why the pseudo-ancient fantasy Scotland Macpherson created as a alternative way of life can be viewed as an ideal case; why the elemental landscapes of this world and natural passions of its inhabitants offered a sublime experience; why sentimental declamation was confused with the language of natural feeling.

The concept of simplicity, as the eighteenth century understood it, also allows us to discount the dichotomy between the rhetorical and "natural" sublime. This distinction was made long ago by R. S. Crane in a review in the Philological Quarterly when Samuel Holt Monk's book, The Sublime, first appeared. /3/ A major concern of The Sublime is to trace the ways by which a term which was, at first, primarily rhetorical became a focus of psychological investigation as the century progressed. However, as eighteenth-century criticism did not recognize a distinction between the rhetorical and "natural" sublime, other classifications which were made deserve more attention in this study. And although Hugh Blair's two sources of the sublime, "lofty description" and "sentiment" are fundamental aspects of the sublime (we will come to

them, in due course), even more central is the relationship between simplicity and sublimity.

What is the connection between sublimity and simplicity? According to commentators like Gerard and Priestley, who were influenced by the Hartleian system (Hartley's Observations on Man, published in 1749, bases all thought processes on the principle of the association of ideas), the sublime involves an effort which is both pleasurable and painful as the mind "enlarges itself to conceive a great object" and then recognizes the feat it has accomplished. "Simplicity," then, "is an indispensable quality of sublime objects because the mind must be capable of taking in objects as a whole." When applied to feelings rather than things, feelings can also be sublime "if they relate to great objects, suppose extensive views of things, require great effort of the mind to conceive them, and produce great effects" (Priestley, A Course of Lectures on Oratory and Criticism 154, qtd. in Monk 118).

It is clear that the language which attempts to come to terms with an experience that carries one beyond language must itself be simple. This is in keeping with the primitivistic notions of language, although Blair's comments are more directly indebted to Bishop Lowth's treatise on Hebrew poetry. "Simplicity and conciseness are never-failing characteristics of the style of a sublime

writer," Blair tells us. "He rests on the majesty of his sentiments, not on the pomp of his expressions....The main secret of being sublime is to say great things in few, and 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....Hence, the concise and simple style of Ossian gives great advantage to his sublime conceptions, and assists them in seizing the imagination with full power" (Critical Dissertation 173).

The two sources of Ossianic sublime Blair differentiates, "lofty description" and "sentiment," have already been noted. Lofty description covers incident as well as landscape. Sentiment is that benevolism and emotionalism with which we have by now become very familiar. How are these sublime? Generally a scene, incident, or expression stimulates a simple emotion, whether it is admiration or pathos in the case of the "sentimental" sublime (the term "sentimental sublime" refers to the emotions evoked by human actions similar to those stimulated by external nature), or terror from a frightening prospect.

The sublime of sentiment induces admiration. /4/

Sublimity, as belonging to sentiment, coincides, in a great measure, with magnanimity, heroism, and generosity of sentiment. Whatever discovers human nature in its greatest elevation; whatever

bespeaks a high effort of soul, or shows a mind superior to pleasures, to dangers and to death, form what may be called the moral of sentimental sublime. No poet maintains a higher tone of virtuous and noble sentiment throughout all his works. Particularly in all the sentiments of Fingal there is a grandeur and loftiness, proper to swell the mind with the highest ideas of human perfection. Wherever he appears, we behold the hero....(173-74).

However, Blair contends, poetry would have a hard and stiff air, if admiration were the only emotion it inspired. Softening is necessary, too. "Admiration is a cold feeling, in comparison of that deep interest which the heart takes in tender and pathetic scenes; where, by a mysterious attachment to the objects of compassion, we are pleased and delighted, even whilst we mourn." Ossian abounds in these tender scenes," and his high merit in these is incontestable."

He may be blamed for drawing tears too often from our eyes; but he has the power of commanding them, I believe no man, who has the least sensibility, will question. The general character of his poetry is the heroic mixed with the elegiac strain; admiration tempered with pity. Ever fond of giving, as he expresses it, "the joy of grief," it is visible that, on all moving subjects, he delights to exert his genius; and, accordingly, never were there finer pathetic situations that what his works present. His great art in managing them lies in giving vent to the simple and natural emotions of the heart. We meet with no exaggerated declamation; no subtle refinements on sorrow; no substitution of description in place of passion. Ossian felt strongly himself; and the heart, when uttering its native language, never fails by powerful sympathy, to affect the heart (174-75).

The source of Blair's exposition of the sublime of natural description is clearly Edmund Burke's famous Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful (1757). In the first section of the second part of the Enquiry Burke identifies "the passion caused by the great and sublime in nature" with astonishment," defining astonishment as "that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended with some degree of horror." The power of the sublime results from "the mind [being] so entirely filled with its object that it cannot entertain any other" so that "it anticipates our reasonings and hurries us on by an irresistible force" (Burke 57).

A chain of causal relationships is established between the natural environment and the human mind in the following section, "Terror." Burke explains that terror or fear is the most effectual of all the passions in its ability to rob the mind of all its powers because it represents "an apprehension of pain or death," and, therefore, "operates in a manner that resembles actual pain. Whatever is terrible, with regard to sight, is sublime too, whether this cause of terror be endued with greatness or not; for it is impossible to look on anything as trifling or contemptible that may be dangerous." His comparison between a level plain and the ocean illustrates his point.

The plain is certainly "as extensive as a prospect of the ocean," but is not as sublime. "Can it ever fill the mind with anything so great as the ocean itself?" This is because "the ocean is an object of no small terror," the terror which "either more openly or latently [is] the ruling principle of the sublime" (57-58).

The echoes of Burke are unmistakable in Blair's evocation of the sublimity of Ossian's landscapes.

The gay and the beautiful will appear to more advantage in the midst of smiling scenery and pleasurable themes; but amidst the rude scenes of nature, amidst rocks and torrents, and whirlwinds and battles, dwells the sublime. It is the thunder and lightning of genius. It is the offspring of nature, not of art. It is negligent of all the lesser graces, and perfectly consistent with a certain noble disorder I associate naturally with that grave and solemn spirit which distinguishes our author. For the sublime is an awful and serious emotion; and is heightened by all the images of trouble and terror and darkness (173-4).

This aspect of the Ossianic sublime, the sublime of natural description, though it contained reminiscences of the "Gothic" landscapes of the past, was new, and was recognized as such by the commentators of the period. One could cite influences such as the landscapes of Pope's "Eloisa," Collins's "Ode to Fear," Gray's "Bard," or Warton's "Ode to Fancy;" however, it was the Ossianic landscapes which fully established the association between sublimity and scenery. There is certainly present in them

the diffusion of religious experience over the natural world which often substituted in an increasingly secular age for traditional piety, as Price has suggested (195), and they were enormously important for future writers. An obvious example would be Wordsworth, who was critical of the vagueness of Ossianic imagery, although his own work was obviously indebted to the Ossianic sublime. /5/

The ways in which Ossianic poetry encouraged its readers to reassess the Scottish landscape, and the association between the concept of simplicity and these sublime settings are set forth in a book with the lengthy title, "Observations relative chiefly to Picturesque Beauty made in the year 1776, on several parts of Great Britain; particularly the High-Lands of Scotland" by William Gilpin. Gilpin is responding to Johnson's disparagement of Scottish scenery in his Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland (1775).

It is true indeed, that an eye, like Dr. Johnson's, which is accustomed to see the beauties of landscape only in flowery pastures, and waving harvests, cannot be attracted to the great and sublime in nature....Dr. Johnson says, the Scotch mountain has the appearance of matter incapable of form or usefulness....as for it's being incapable of form, he can only mean that it cannot be formed into cornfields, and meadows. Its form as a mountain is unquestionably grand and sublime in the highest degree. For that poverty in objects, or simplicity, as it may be called, which no doubt injures the beauty of a Scottish landscape, is certainly at the same time the source of sublimity (qtd. in Leneman 359).

This enthusiasm for the "natural sublime" was a result of a combination of current interests. Monk lists "the prominence of the sublime in philosophical inquiry, its unrivalled position as the ultimate emotional and aesthetic experience, its popularity as a catchword, as a bit of prevailing critical jargon" as all contributing to this spread of the cult of nature and the recognition that nature in its wilder aspects offered a new outlet for feeling. The Augustan poets carried Newton into their gardens; Thomson had the physico-theologists to provide a philosophical basis for his depictions of the natural world, and "was sedulous to compose his scenes with a view to their pictorial merit" (Monk 126).

Ossian's landscapes were literally of another world. Monk points to the essential influence of Blair's Critical Dissertation on the response to these landscapes.

It is certainly true that Blair was not the first person to see sublimity in natural objects. But until 1760, except with a relatively small number of people, the idea had not "taken." Then Ossian came, was seen, and conquered. The consensus of opinion was favorable to the poems. Their wide-spread popularity helped to make general a taste that was slowly coming into existence and that had already been prepared for by a multitude of forces that were silently at work. Ossian was a sublime, original genius. As such, he would be read and valued, and as such he would become a guide to the beauties of storms and mountains and the wild, uncultivated heath. Everyone who read, read Ossian; nothing could have been more on a level with the taste of the age. Most readers

found there what they sought--sentiment, and a new and mysterious kind of beauty. "Does he make his readers glow, and tremble and weep?" asks Hugh Blair rhetorically. The general answer was emphatically affirmative. And so, imperceptibly, the Ossianic poems contributed toward converting Britons, nay Europeans, into enthusiastic admirers of nature in her wilder moments (126).

Anna Seward testifies to the reaction to these landscapes in Macpherson's own time. The descriptive sublime, for Miss Seward, combines both an aesthetic and a personal response: she associates them to her earliest memories of Derbyshire and to the paintings of Salvator Rosa. She recognizes current critical theories of the sublime, particularly Burke's Enquiry, in her comment that these associations involved some degree of pain, for she notes that "the imagination will not bear the protractions of unrelieved sublimity."

The Swan was sixteen when she first read the works of Ossian. "If I did not dance for joy...I wept for joy...[and] could not proceed with it long at a sitting; for the imagination will not bear the protraction of unrelieved sublimity." Sublimity came with the territory. "Born amidst the highest of the Peak mountains, and passing the first seven years of my life surrounded by the wild grandeur of that scenery, it seized my first affection. Hence the landscapes of Ossian charm me more than those of more cultivated, more luxurious countries." She displays a

cultivated sublimity, however, at several removes from the power and threat of the terrible sublime. The very characteristic phrasing: "infant glance," and "dews of pensive transport" suggests that Miss Seward is confusing sublimity with sentimental melancholy.

The first objects that met my infant glance, and impressed me with their lonely and romantic grandeur were the mountains, the rocks and the vales of Derbyshire....Poetic descriptions and pencilled resemblances please me best when they take the Salvatorian style. This early established predilection steeps my eyes in the dews of pensive transport when they stray over the pages of Ossian....We should look attentively at his landscapes but not consider them for a much longer time than we could without weariness gaze at a landscape of Claude's or Salvator's (qtd. in Manwaring 176-77).

As powerful as the Ossianic landscapes were the Ossianic ghosts. Indeed, the two were almost synonymous, for the sublimity of unseen presences contributed to the impressions of "trouble and terror and darkness" created by these settings. The ghosts and supernatural beings attested to the fact that Ossian had a religion (an important issue for the Ossianic advocate), but also helped to settle an old debate about the "marvellous" in literature. The neo-classic critics were uncomfortable with any manifestation of the supernatural because it fell outside the bounds of nature and truth, besides the association it had with a private realm of feeling and a primitive religious expression. These exhibited tendencies

towards individualism and dissent which were threatening to the established order.

If what Dryden called "the faerie way of writing" were to be accepted into serious literature, the definition of "nature" had to change. That it was changing in this period and that a new horizon of expectations was emerging is demonstrated by Richard Hurd in his On the Idea of Universal Poetry. For Hurd, poetry does not have to conform to an a priori concept of nature because poetry is not meant to imitate nature alone. Its purpose is "not to delineate truth simply but to present it in the most taking forms; not to reflect the real face of things but to illustrate it and adorn it;...nay, to outstrip nature, and to address itself to our wildest fancy, rather than to our judgment and cooler sense." This is because there is something "sublime and elevated" in the mind of man which overlooks the obvious and familiar appearances of things, and "[feigns] to itself other and more extraordinary; such as correspond to the extent of its own powers, and fill out all the faculties and capacities of our souls" (Works 2: 8-9).

Hurd's title suggests both a primitivist orientation and a utopian aim of a poetry that will appeal to the most basic human impulses. His discussion of the subject matter of a universal poetry conforms with the sublime of

mid-century and the allegoric and descriptive odes of the Collins-Warton school:

Hence it comes to pass, that it deals in apostrophes and invocations; that it impersonates the virtues and vices; peoples all creation with new and living forms; calls up infernal spectres to terrify, or brings down celestial natures to astonish, the imagination; assembles, combines, or connects its ideas, at pleasure; in short, prefers not only the agreeable, and the graceful, but on occasion calls upon her, the vast, the incredible, I had almost said, the impossible, to the obvious truth and nature of things (9).

In his more famous Letters on Chivalry and Romance (1762) Hurd extends the "nature" with which the poet concerns himself to the realm of imaginative truth. There is a poetry which deals with the "known and experienced course of affairs in this world," but there is also a higher kind of poetry, where the poet has "a world of his own, where experience has less to do, than consistent imagination." This world, which includes the appealing spectres and celestial natures of "Gothic superstition" "has no need to observe those cautious rules of credibility so necessary to be followed by him, who would touch the affections and animate the heart."

The last, as at least the favorable reaction to the Ossianic poetry reveals, is a false dichotomy, because the world of imagination which is now acknowledged is also the realm of feeling, not only the more comfortable and

socially acceptable emotions accompanying public behavior, but also the more extreme expressions of feeling which had been rejected by polite society as unacceptable. The critical position which elevated the poetry of sublimity and imagination to the highest rank carried consequences that Hurd himself could not have foreseen. The sublime, which had originally been a style that ravishes and transports, and a category for "those elements in the art of their day that pleased despite their being somewhat unorthodox" (Monk 106) became a means by which the orthodox could be overturned. It became a channel for the legitimatization of the extreme emotional states represented in the gothic novel, a rallying point for the free expression of thoughts and feelings which developed into Romanticism. Monk places the Ossianic poems along with Hurd's Letters in the forefront of these new developments. "The sublime," Monk states, "was strongly entrenched in mid-century theory. It could now become the vantage point from which to carry on the critique of the older order. With the Letters on Chivalry and Romance and the advent of Ossian, so far as taste goes, the sublime had, according to Monk, "become a powerful factor in pre-romanticism" (106).

While the sublime was in the forefront of critical developments, it is not accurate to describe Hurd's Letters

as launching "a frontal attack upon the whole system" of contemporary critical theory, a "concise and searching attack on the neo-classic creed," as J. W. H. Atkins claims (Trowbridge, intro. to Letters iii). Hurd's purpose in writing the Letters was not to defend the medieval romances nor to attack any prevailing critical principles. His specific stated intention was to defend the romance element in Renaissance literature as conducive to the sublime (iii). Our own historical perspective has taken us beyond the habit of mind which views the middle years of the eighteenth century as merely a preparation for all of those more interesting romantic developments to come. The Letters exemplify certain aspects of the horizon of expectations which have been identified with the Ossianic phenomenon and therefore can be treated in the context of their own period, and as very characteristic of critical, historical and philosophical developments in that period. Hurd gives status to the literature of a time which had been treated as barbaric, and to the sublime and imaginative elements of that literature which had been distrusted. He recognizes with the conjectural historians that different conditions operate in different historical eras, that it is absurd to apply the critical criteria of one's own period to the literature of an earlier age. The Letters are in the philosophical tradition which is

involved with the investigation of consciousness, that revolution begun in the seventeenth century which "shifted the emphasis in philosophy from things to mind."

We have strayed from the Ossianic supernatural, but not too far. For the Ossianic ghosts were a superb manifestation of the beliefs of a remote age, and therefore permitted access to a realm of imagination hitherto unknown.

It was, of course, his own concern for the world of imagination which led Gray to acclaim the Fragments (which were originally sent to him in manuscript for comment).

/6/ The most striking of all of Gray's remarks about Ossian occurs in a letter to his friend Brown, dated February, 1763. "Neither Count Algarotti, nor Mr. Howe (I believe) have heard of Ossian, the Son of Fingal," Gray asserts. "If Mr. H. were not upon the wing, & on his way homewards, I would send it to him in Italy. He would there see, that Imagination dwelt many hundred years agoe in all her pomp on the cold and barren mountains of Scotland." His following remarks, often quoted, place Gray among the primitivists. "The truth (I believe) is that without any respect of climates she [imagination] reigns in all nascent societies of Men, where the necessities of life force every one to think and act much for himself."

If you have seen Stenhewer he has probably told you of my old Scotch (or rather Irish) Poetry. I

am gone mad about them. they are said to be translations (literal and in prose) from the Erse-tongue, done by one Macpherson, a young Clergyman in the Highlands. he means to publish a collection he has of these specimens of antiquity, if it be antiquity: but what plagues me is, I can not come at any certainty on that head. I was so struck, so extasié, with their infinite beauty, that I have writ into Scotland to make a thousand enquiries. the letters I have in return are ill-wrote, ill-reason'd, unsatisfactory, calculated (one would imagine) to deceive one, & yet not cunning enough to do it cleverly. in short, the whole external evidence would make one believe these fragments (for so he calls them, tho' nothing can be more entire) counterfeit: but the internal is so strong on the other side, that I am resolved to believe them genuine, spite of the Devil & the Kirk. it is impossible to convince me that they were invented by the same man, that writes these letters. on the other hand it is almost as hard to suppose, if they are original that he should be able to translate them so admirably. what can one do?...in short this man is the very Demon of Poetry, or he has lighted on a treasure hid for ages (3: 679-80).

One of the two passages which Blair singles out in the Critical Dissertation as being particularly sublime involves Fingal's encounter with the spirit of Loda (Odin) in the fragment "Carric-thura." The other is the address to the Sun in the fragment "Carthon." If these and the similes founded on ghosts and spirits of the night are not sublime, Blair states, "I confess myself entirely ignorant of this quality in writing."

Blair categorizes the address to the sun in "Carthon" as well as Fingal's encounter with the Spirit of Loda as belonging to the sublime of description, although the

first, in which the blind Ossian compares his helplessness to the power of the sun, is clearly pathetic. It is also one of the instances where Macpherson's source is most blatant--the passage combines a memory of Milton's invocation to the sun with Satan's address to the sun in the third and fourth books of Paradise Lost. /7/

The sun, for Milton, in one of the most moving of his meditations on his blindness, is a physical manifestation of the "Celestial light" which has provided him with the power of poetic prophecy. His blindness is a sign of the spiritual illumination which gives evidence of the bardic gift.

...but thou
 Revisit'st not these eyes, that roll in vain
 To find thy piercing ray, and find no dawn;
 So thick a drop serene hath quencht thir Orbs,
 Of dim suffusion veil'd....
 But cloud instead, and ever-during dark
 Surrounds me, from the cheerful ways of men
 Cut off, and for the Book of Knowledge fair
 Presented with a universal Blanc
 Of Nature's works to me expung'd and ras'd
 And wisdom at one entrance quite shut out.
 So much the rather thou Celestial Light
 Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
 Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence
 Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
 Of things invisible to mortal sight (3.21-25,
 45-55).

In contrast, Satan's blindness is of the spiritual variety, and he finds the sun's glory to reflect negatively on his own condition.

O thou that with surpassing Glory crown'd,
Look'st from thy sole Dominion like the God
Of this new World; at whose sight all the Stars
Hide thir diminisht heads; to thee I call,
But with no friendly voice, and add thy name
O Sun, to tell thee how I hate thy beams
That bring to my remembrance from what state
I fell, how glorious once above thy Sphere;
Till Pride and worse Ambition threw me down
Warring in Heav'n against Heav'n's matchless King;
(4.32-41).

Macpherson found inspiration from both speeches for Ossian's soliloquy in "Carthon." He evokes the image of the blind bard who searches the heavens in vain. He employs the Satanic contrast between past and present glories, ephemeral and eternal phenomena, but he also adds some characteristic touches of his own. When Ossian commiserates with a sun who will also grow old, a mood of sentimentalized self-pity is created which is nowhere to be found in Milton.

O thou that rollest above, round as the shield of my fathers! Whence are thy beams, O sun! thy everlasting light! Thou comest forth in thy awful beauty; the stars hide themselves in the sky; the moon, cold and pale, sinks in the western wave; but thou thyself movest alone. Who can be a companion of thy course? The oaks of the mountains fall; the mountains themselves decay with years; the ocean shrinks and grows again; the moon herself is lost in heaven: but thou art for ever the same, rejoicing in the brightness of thy course. When the world is dark with tempests, when thunder rolls and lightning flies, thou lookest in thy beauty from the clouds and laughest at the storm. But to Ossian thou lookest in vain for he beholds thy beams no more: whether thy yellow hair flows on the eastern clouds, or thou tremblest at the gates of the west. But thou art, perhaps, for a season; thy years will have an

end. Thou shalt sleep in thy clouds, careless of the voice of the morning. Exult then, O sun, in the strength of thy youth! 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. (233-34).

The second passage, Fingal's encounter with the most powerful of the Scandinavian gods, has associations which resonate far beyond the ostensible narrative purpose of the passage. To explain its sublimity we must recognize a manner of thinking of more modern vintage than Blair's Critical Dissertation. From the point of view of the reader-response critics the fight between Fingal and the spirit of Loda (Odin) can be seen as a symbolic representation of the moment when an old horizon of expectations must accommodate to a new phenomenon; in Freudian terms it is the Oedipal struggle of the son to supersede the father. Thomas Weiskel's definition of the sublime helps us to make this psychological leap. He calls the sublime experience "the sublime or original moment in which a burden (of the past, but not exclusively) is lifted and there is an influx of power." He speculates that "the encounter with literary greatness--the so-called rhetorical sublime--is structurally cognate with the transcendence, gentle or terrible, excited in the encounter with landscape, the natural sublime" (11).

One of the most extraordinary aspects of Fingal's encounter with the spirit of Loda is the way in which the terror inspired by the Burkean landscape is transformed into an elemental human conflict, assuming the configurations of the oedipal fantasy and the family romance. Harold Bloom has made us familiar with the ways in which the "Anxiety of Influence" is also oedipal anxiety, and Weiskel, following a similar line of thought, connects the positive resolution of oedipal anxiety in this phase with the basis of culture itself (94).

If the sublime substituted for a more traditional religious experience in the minds of many of Macpherson's contemporaries, this particular passage has another kind of oedipal component for Macpherson, as it afforded him another way to pronounce against established systems. Within the fantasy culture he had created, he not only is able to create his own eternal father: he is able to overturn him. Macpherson's introduction to "Carric-thura" even creates another level of opposition. "It appears, from tradition," Macpherson tells us, "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" (Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian 18).

In the fragment "Carric-thura" Fingal encounters Loda because they are supporting opposing kings. Loda favors Frothal, the king of Sora, who is besieging Cathulla, king of Inistore. Fingal is fighting in the defense of Cathulla. Carric-thura, the title of the fragment, is the name of Cathulla's palace, which the Scandinavians have placed under siege.

Loda appears to be a fearsome antagonist.

A blast came from the mountain, on its wings was the spirit of Loda. He came to his place in his terrors, and shook his dusky spear. His eyes appear like flames in his dark face; his voice is like distant thunder....

The initial skirmish is verbal, as Fingal insults Loda and Loda tries to terrorize the king.

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, spirit of dismal Loda! Weak is thy shield of clouds; feeble is that meteor thy sword! the blast rolls them together; and thou thyself art lost. 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 brave. I look on the nations and they vanish: my nostrils pour the blasts 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.

However, the king is fearless, and after a few more heated exchanges, the hostility becomes physical.

[Loda] lifted high his shadowy spear! He bent forward his dreadful height. Fingal, advancing, drew his sword; the blade of dark-brown Luno. The gleaming path of the steel winds through the gloomy ghost.

In the end, the ghost is no match for the warrior.

The form fell shapeless into the 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 in the deep....(213-214).

This passage may have Freudian implications for twentieth-century readers, but in the eighteenth century it was considered sublime because it was thought to reveal primitive attitudes towards religion or, more precisely, towards the supernatural. Macpherson eliminated references to an organized religion from his poems for his own reasons. He claimed that the Druids were in opposition to the Fingalian monarchy (a position which again suggests a conflict with authority as well as a political dimension), and that Gallic poetry traditionally avoids religious reference. This explanation seemed to satisfy Macpherson, but not the Ossianic advocates. Morris points out that the poems' failure to mention a supreme being taxed their ingenuity because primitive poetry was believed to originate in the worship of God, so that Ossian's neglect

of religious matters calls into question the antiquity of the poems (167). This is one explanation for the fact that Ossian's lack of religious reference is a constantly recurring theme in Ossianic commentary. However, Blair calls attention to the ghosts and supernatural spirits as objects of worship--literary equivalents to the machinery of the pagans and to the Christian marvellous. He finds the passages in which the ghosts appear "among the most sublime passages of Ossian's poetry" (126), surpassing comparable passages in Homer and competitive with similar ones in the Bible.

One would think that the critic who valued imaginative poetry above all other kinds would be a strong advocate of Ossian, and, indeed, Thomas Warton defended the authenticity of the poems in his History of English Poetry, basing his defense in part on the similarity between the Ossianic and Scandinavian supernatural (possibly echoing Kames's defense in his Sketches).

"Notwithstanding the difference between the Gothic and Celtic rituals," Warton discerns "many visible vestiges of Scandinavian superstition" in Ossian, listing the spirits "who preside over...and direct the various operations of nature, who send storms over the deep, and rejoice in the shrieks of the shipwrecked mariner, who call down the lightning to blast the forest or cleave the rock, and

diffuse irresistible pestilence among the people." The supernatural incident which surpasses these, however, which Warton calls "the most EXTRAVAGANT in all Ossian's poems," is, of course, Fingal's encounter with the spirit of Loda. Warton claims that the possibility of such an encounter constituted "an essential article of Runic belief," and exhibited "the most daring act of courage" (Warton, History liv).

When Warton turns to the familiar issue of Ossian's lack of religion (a logical leap from the spectral and the marvelous), it is clear that Warton identifies sublimity with the horrors of the new Gothicism as opposed to the old.

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 more stronger and more characteristic evidences would have appeared of his knowledge of the imagery of the Scandinavian poets (liv).

The ghosts were commented upon by almost every lover of Ossian. Gray, who, as we have seen, received manuscripts of the Fragments of Ancient Poetry... before they were published, describes the poems in a letter to Stonhewer (June 29, 1760), as being "full of nature and noble wild imagination." What is so startling to him is how in this

primeval place and time these are one: the powers of the imagination are rooted in the phenomena of nature, and supernatural and natural, probable and marvelous are inseparable. The tale he singles out from the "Scotch packet" he has received tells of five bards who are passing the night at the castle of a chief, who is himself a principal bard. "Each goes out in his turn to observe the face of things, returns with an extempore picture of the changes he has seen (it is an October night, the harvest-month of the Highlands)." While each of the bards sees a ghost, the most "striking and surprising" idea is the expressed in one bard's description of "a storm of wind and rain."

Ghosts ride on the tempest to-night:
Sweet is their voice between the gusts of wind;
Their songs are of other worlds!

Gray's comment on this passage is noteworthy because it combines a range of response from the scientific to the visionary, indicating the range of appeal these poems had for a particularly sympathetic reader.

Did you never observe (while rocking winds are piping loud) that pause, as the gust is recollecting itself, and rising upon the ear in a shrill and plaintive note, like the swell of an Aeolian harp? I do assure you there is nothing in the world so like the voice of a spirit. Thomson had an ear sometimes: he was not deaf to this; and has described it gloriously, but given it another turn, and of more horror. I cannot repeat these lines: it is in his Winter (3: 686).

The supernatural sublime leads us to a consideration of that literature which was thought intrinsically sublime, that is, Biblical literature. When Blair compares Ossian to the Bible he is being neither irreverent nor incongruous. Because primitive poetry was considered inherently religious, a work which examined the historical circumstances and stylistic peculiarities of sacred literature would no doubt have some relation to Ossian. This work, groundbreaking in its own time, and one of those which created the climate for the Ossianic poems, or what Jauss would call one of the "familiar works of the literary historical surroundings," is Bishop Robert Lowth's Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews (published in Latin in 1753 and in English in 1787). Macpherson had developed a plausible theory for the absence of religious content in the poems, but he also, with some audacity, claimed that they were stylistically comparable to the Bible. Lowth's treatise stands behind his ability to make this claim. And behind Lowth were the conjectural historians, who treated the literature of primitive nations as reflections of the spirit of the times in which they were composed.

As both The Poems of Ossian and the Bible were thought to be composed during the first stages of human culture, they would logically be similar, sharing those characteristics which Lowth isolated as especially

primitive: passion and naturalness. It is no accident that those qualities in the Bible which Lowth found to be especially sublime were those qualities most valued by the writers of the Age of Sensibility.

Lowth was the first to relate Biblical imagery specifically to Hebrew culture and to examine in detail the sources of the sublime image in the everyday lives of the Hebrew people. A notable instance is the passage from Kings:

And I will wipe Jerusalem,
As a man wipeth a dish:
He wipeth it, and turneth it upside down.
(2 Kings 21:13)

The importance of this simile, which Lowth acknowledged as "mean," is that "meanness" is not incompatible with sublimity. (Associations with that other focal term for producing the sublime, simplicity, are implicit in Lowth's notion of "meanness.") The natural poet, from the impulses of his passionate nature, seizes upon that which is closest and most familiar. (We are also reminded of the age's fascination with "manners" and social history.) Lowth, in recognizing the connection between strong feeling and passionate imagery, enlarged the possibilities of the sublime. In David B. Morris's words, "[Lowth] insisted that readers not attribute to art the sublimity of the Hebrews, "which above all things is due to nature alone,"

and by stressing the relationship between sublimity and natural passion, he in effect "expanded the sublime to include figures not only great and ennobling (like Addison's angel in The Campaign) but also 'natural' to the passionate imagination of the primitive poet" (163).

Hugh Blair's indebtedness to Lowth is evident throughout the Critical Dissertation. Where Blair differs from Lowth, according to Morris, is that Lowth attributes sublimity to primitive cultures, whereas Blair declares that the greatest sublimity will, invariably, be found in the literature of early man (Morris 164).

Blair's emphasis on the natural simplicity of Ossian's images comes directly from Lowth. "A resemblance may be sometimes be observed between Ossian's comparisons and those employed by the sacred writers," Blair tells us. "They abound much in this figure and they use it with the utmost propriety." Both Biblical and Ossianic similes are "generally short, touching on one point of resemblance, rather than spread out into little episodes," (as, presumably, in Homer) (166). The hallmarks of the sublime style in the passage quoted earlier, simplicity and conciseness, come directly from Lowth, as do Blair's remarks on Ossianic hyperbole, personification, apostrophe, allegory and epithets (Morris 165).

Just as Lowth's Lectures enlarged the sublime to

include whole new categories of poetry, so Burke extended sublimity further by applying psychological criteria. Burke's sublime was destined to overthrow the dependency upon the visual imagination which derived ultimately from the theories of Locke, the "tyranny of the eye," as Coleridge called it. For both Lowth and Burke sublimity is an emotional response; Burke refers to it as "the strongest emotion that the mind is capable of receiving." The obscurity or suggestiveness which triggers the terror of the Burkean sublime is the antithesis of Lockean sensationalism. It shakes the very foundations of the self. Beautiful things in Burke's system inspire affection, sexual feelings and the desire for self-perpetuation. Sublime things stimulate fears for our self-preservation. The terror is of self-annihilation.

The most Burkean passage in Blair's Critical Dissertation has already been quoted: "...amidst the rude scenes of nature...dwells the sublime....It associates naturally with that grave and solemn spirit which distinguishes our author....an awful and serious emotion....images of trouble and terror and darkness."

But we do not have to go to Blair to find Burke second hand. Burke's explanation for Ossianic sublimity can be found in his review of Fingal in the Annual Register's "Account of Books" for 1761. /8/ Perhaps the most

significant aspect of this review is that Burke demonstrates David Daiches' insight that the criticism of the period "[tended] to mistake floridity for eloquence, pathos for tragedy, and sentimental declamation for poetry." Burke's sublime in this review is not Burkean, it is sentimental (in the modern sense of the term), for he exhibits little concern for the terrible and places a good deal of emphasis on the softer emotions. What makes Ossian "a sublime species of writing" for Burke is that it reveals the manners of early man, and it would lose all value if proven to be of modern vintage. Burke takes an evenminded approach to the the controversy, glancing at the detractors and considering the objections. He notes that Ferdinand Warner, a historian of Ireland, gives the poems an Irish provenance and demonstrates their inaccuracy of chronology. He mentions the silence in the poem with regard to the grosser parts of the druidical religion while retaining the purer and more poetical spirits, which "[induces] a suspicion of more art than simplicity in the poem." He recognizes the striking similarities between Ossian and Homer and Ossian and Milton: "Many striking resemblances there are however between them; so many indeed, as to induce a suspicion among scrupulous critics that Ossian understood the Grecian as well as the Gaulic language; and, which is more extraordinary, there may be

some reason to think, he was not wholly unacquainted with our modern Milton" (280).

The objections are answered by taking account of the disadvantages attributable to "an ignorant and barbarous age." Ossian is like Homer (and Burke prefers Homer), because great geniuses "on similar grand occasions will often excite the like sublime conceptions and call forth the same enthusiastic expressions."

However, if we look for Burke's reaction to the passage which describes Fingal's encounter with Loda, or anything else that might be considered terrible in the Burkean sense of the word, there is little in the review. He emphasizes benevolence, simplicity, sentiment.

Here let it be observed in favor of poetry, that at a time and among a people, involved in the profoundest ignorance, we find these illustrious barbarians so more than humanized by the songs of their bards, that their noble and elevated sentiments, which they so eminently display, would do honour to the regular education, and elegant manners of the most polished age (280).

Burke later changed his mind about Ossian. Boulton's edition of the Enquiry... into the Sublime and the Beautiful quotes an anonymous letter written in 1783 which Boulton attributes to Burke. The writer of the letter, commenting on Barry's Account of a Series of Pictures in the Great Room of the Society of the Arts, complains of the "erroneous" principle "widely prevalent" which confuses

"greatness of size with greatness of manner and imagining that extent of canvass or weight of marble can contribute towards making a picture or a statue sublime." Burke's emphasis on "magnitude" as one of the elements of the sublime may have contributed to the contemporary fashion for oversized paintings (cxii-xiii).

While condemning "this taste for false sublime" among painters, the writer of the letter also takes on Ossian. "Those miserable rhapsodies... have been received by many as standards of true taste and sublimity.... The consequence of this was the corrupting all true taste and introducing gigantic and extravagant tinsel, for easy dignity and natural sublimity."

In summary, our attempts to recover the horizon of expectations which helped to create the Ossianic phenomenon led us to Ossian as an "ideal case," which, in turn, led to a consideration of the Ossianic sublime. Ossian we saw to be an "ideal case" not because it parodied works on the contemporary scene, but because it offered an implicit criticism of the structures and conventions of Macpherson's culture, with the sublime playing an active role in that criticism. Macpherson's poems "merged with the sublime as soon as they appeared" because they offered access to a realm of elemental feeling. Ossian's world was a world without organized religious expression, but which was

inherently religious, for worship was unmediated by the accretions of culture and came directly from the heart. The ghosts and spirits, which seemed particularly sublime to the eighteenth-century reader, were natural inhabitants of that world because they were embodiments of the beliefs of the people. Instead of being relegated to that limbo of the irrational reserved for all creatures of the "imagination," these beings were both marvelous and natural, otherworldly and yet logical, within the universe Macpherson had developed. Similarly, the wild, mountainous, and stormy landscapes of third-century Scotland, the natural environment of these ghosts and spirits, offered the terror Burke saw as the major cause of the sublime and brought his theory to life.

Along with Burke's Enquiry the major work of the literary historical surroundings of the Ossianic texts was Lowth's treatise on the sacred poetry of the Hebrews. Lowth paved the way for the reception of Ossianic texts because he studied a literature which was created during a comparable primitive period in human history. His association of passion with poetic expression is familiar from the conjectural historians who preceded him, but his awareness of the natural basis of Biblical imagery was new, influential, and ultimately a component of the Ossianic style.

The sublime represented one eighteenth-century attempt to account for emotional experiences which could not be explained by other means--foreshadowing what would later come to be known as the unconscious. Monk has emphasized how the concept of the sublime took on more and more psychological coloration as the century progressed. Burke's interest in the sublime is fundamentally psychological; he is concerned not with sublime objects but with their effects on the mind, specifically the effect he identifies as terror. Lowth, while his focus is on style, explains how Biblical style is a consequence of an emotional response to the environment.

The recognition that there were forces governing behavior which could not be explained by rational means is congruent with one theme of this study: Macpherson's subversive purposes in writing *Ossian*. We have seen how Ossianic sublimity helps to explain Johnson's extremely negative reaction to the poems, since he believed that their championing the cause of the irrational was reason enough to fear them. And finally, in the crucial encounter between Fingal and the spirit of Loda, Macpherson retells the oldest, most sublime and most subversive story of all.

Notes

1. Seward's reference to Johnson's trip occurs in her letter to Walter Scott dated June 20, 1806. After stating that she believes either that Ossian is wholly ancient, or "in a great measure inspiration in the mind of its ostensible translator," she goes on to say that Dr. Johnson's scornful assertions on the subject (of Ossianic authenticity) have no weight with her. This is because "his impatient jealousy of a new classic, of such high antiquity, emerging from the mists of time, and in the land of his detestation, was the motive for his journey to Scotland; ...he went thither for the express purpose of giving weight and credence to his verdict in a cause which he had long prejudged, long before he pretended to examine the evidence. A good portion of the rest of the letter defends Ossian on the basis that Macpherson's weak translation of the Iliad is an argument against his having produced "some of the noblest poetry which has been since the world began." She mentions the resemblance to the Bible as probably coincidental. On the other side: "the graceful urbanity of the sentiments and manners, at a period when England was in a state so rude and barbarous; --how might that be?" And here is also where she wonders what happened to the wolves (6: 277-280).

2. The "many men, many women, many children" remark was made to Hugh Blair before Johnson knew that he was Macpherson's champion. As Boswell tells the story, Dr. Fordyce introduced the subject of Ossian while Blair was visiting Johnson with Boswell. Dr. Fordyce was obviously provoking Johnson to make a negative comment about the poems because, not only had he consistently denied their authenticity, but, "what was still more provoking to their admirers, [also] maintained that they had no merit." As the subject had been introduced Blair naturally asked Johnson "whether any man of modern age could have written such poems," and got the famous reply, "Yes Sir, many men, many women, many children." Boswell continues:

Johnson, at this time, did not know that Dr. Blair had just published a Dissertation, not only defending their authenticity, but seriously ranking them with the poems of Homer and Virgil; and when he was afterwards informed of this circumstance, he expressed some displeasure at Dr. Fordyce's having suggested the topic, and said, "I

am not sorry they got thus much for their pains.
 Sir, it was like leading one to talk of a book,
 when the authour is concealed behind the door
 (Life 1: 396).

According to a recent article by Thomas M. Curley called "Johnson's Last Word on Ossian: Ghostwriting for William Shaw," Johnson was involved in uncovering the truth about the Ossianic poems until the end of his life. He died in 1784. During the late 70s and early 80s his involvement took the form of the sponsorship of an ambitious Scot named William Shaw. Johnson helped Shaw to find a publisher and sponsors for his Gaelic grammar, An Analysis of the Galic Language (London, 1778), and took an active role in the preparation of Shaw's Gaelic dictionary in 1780. Shaw's 1778 collecting trip to the Highlands had a twofold purpose; he was looking for "songs, old sayings, the voice of the people, ...manuscripts, ...and vocables for the dictionary," and, like Johnson and Boswell who had gone to Scotland five years before, the originals of Macpherson's Ossianic poems. He was unable to find anything other than "a few fabulous and marvellous verses; or stories concerning Fionn MacCumhal, alias Fingal, and his Fiona or followers chasing each other from island to island, striding from mountain to mountain, or crossing a frith at a hop with the help of his spear." After pursuing Gaelic poetry to Ireland and Trinity college library, Shaw concluded that there was no such poetry as Macpherson's (383).

This conviction resulted in two pamphlets: An Enquiry into the Authenticity of the Poems Ascribed to Ossian (London, 1781), and A Reply to Mr. Clark (1782). Johnson helped Shaw organize the evidence of the first but he composed more than half of the second pamphlet, and improved the remainder (Curley 386-89). Johnson's participation in A Reply to Mr. Clark is significant because it represents the last sustained prose Johnson wrote before he died.

The most complete account of the Johnson-Macpherson feud is in Larry Leroy Stewart's unpublished dissertation: "Ossian in the Polished Age: The Critical Reception of James Macpherson's Ossian." Stewart demonstrates that the controversy over Ossianic authenticity did not heat up until after Macpherson published his translation of the Iliad in 1773.

3. Modern critics still do not agree about the eighteenth-century sublime, and how to sort out the variety of its manifestations. R. S. Crane stimulated discussion

in his famous 1936 PQ review of Samuel Monk's Sublime when he pointed out that Monk failed to recognize two main divisions of the sublime in eighteenth-century critical thought: the "rhetorical" and "psychological" sublime. However, Thomas Weiskel believes that Crane's two categories, "a properly rhetorical criticism directly inspired by Longinus and a nascent psychological aesthetic concerned with the pleasures of the imagination," cannot be justified in light of actual eighteenth-century critical practice. Weiskel describes aesthetic speculation during the course of the century as "enthusiastically eclectic" and finds that there is no clear separation between the rhetorical critics like Dennis, the Wartons, and "originalist" Young and the psychological critics like Addison, Burke, and Reid. Weiskel claims that contemporary critics, because they were unable to find Locke's philosophy helpful in the distinction between natural and aesthetic pleasures, fell back on Addison who described the "secondary" pleasures of the imagination as dependent upon the primary impressions conveyed by the senses (13-14).

An examination of Crane's article reveals that the two types of the sublime overlap, even as he attempts to separate them. In his discussion of the Longinian, "rhetorical" sublime, he finds two offshoots: "the tendency of the first type of criticism was to subject the work to the audience through an insistence on the need of conformity to good taste, rules, traditions as a condition of pleasing; that of the second was to subordinate the audience to the artist as an exalted being whom not to admire is to confess oneself lacking in taste and sensitivity." The first is characterized by Boileau's assertion that "the poet achieves greatness by expressing justly the thoughts already possessed by the majority of his readers; the second by the conviction stated by an anonymous essayist in Dodsley's Museum of 1747 that the greatness of the major English poets, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton lies precisely in the immense superiority to the times in which they lived." Crane believes that the history of English criticism from 1600 and 1800 can be understood "as a gradual shift from one of these rhetorical poles to the other." However, the discussion of the psychology of the individual genius, and his relationship to his historical period involves a good deal more than just rhetorical criticism as the eighteenth-century contributions to the disciplines of psychology, conjectural history, sociology, and anthropology surely demonstrate. Crane himself recognizes this when, at the end of this review, he admits that "the eighteenth-century Longinians themselves did not escape the contagion of the new psychological aesthetics" (Crane 165-67).

4. It should be noted that the term "admiration" meant "astonishment" or "wonder" in the eighteenth century. Johnson's Dictionary (1755) defines "admiration" as "wonder; the act of admiring or wondering." "Admire" is defined as "to regard with wonder, generally in a good sense."

5. Wordsworth's "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface" (1815) is a reproach to the critics who failed to appreciate his work by demonstrating the often inverse correlation between poetic worth and poetic fame. Obviously, the contemporary reaction to Ossian is brought in to exemplify critical misjudgment. "All hail Macpherson! hail to thee, Sire of Ossian!" Wordsworth begins. "The Phantom was begotten by the snug embrace of an impudent Highlander upon a cloud of tradition--it travelled southward, where it was greeted with acclamation, and the thin Consistence took its course through Europe, upon the breath of popular applause."

Wordsworth's main objection to Macpherson's poetry illuminates his own grounding in the real. "Having had the good fortune to be born and reared in a mountainous Country, from my very childhood I have felt the falsehood that pervades the volumes imposed upon the world under the name of Ossian." He justifies calling the imagery spurious because while everything in nature is distinct, "yet nothing [in Ossian is] defined into absolute independent singleness." "Every thing (that is not stolen) is in this manner defined, insulated, dislocated, deadened--yet nothing distinct. This will always be so when words are substituted for things." Along with characters that could never exist, manners which are impossible, a dream with more substance than his whole society, Wordsworth singles out the implausibility of the "Car-borne heroes," pointing out that Morven, "if one may judge from its appearance at the distance of a few miles, contains scarcely an acre of ground sufficiently accomodating for a sledge to be trailed along its surface" (Zall, Wordsworth's Criticism 178-79).

6. Appendix L of the Toynbee and Whibley edition of the Correspondence (2: 1223-29.) contains all of Gray's known letters on the matter of Ossian. Gray was sent copies of the Fragments in January, 1760 from Horace Walpole, who had received them from David Dalrymple. He was delighted with these examples of early poetry, but he also held out the possibility that they were not really as old as claimed, and that "one now living in Scotland had written them to divert himself, and laugh at the credulity of the world" (Letter 310).

The letter that Gray wrote to his friend Brown, in which he finds himself unable to believe that the Macpherson who corresponded with him could be the same man who created Ossian, has already been quoted (see pages 292-93).

Whibley (who wrote Appendix L) finds it significant that Gray's last reference to Macpherson occurs in a letter to Brown written about February, 1763. This is the famous assertion quoted above that with "Ossian the son of Fingal ...Imagination dwelt many years agoe in all her pomp on the cold and barren mountains of Scotland..." (Letter 367).

Whibley believes that, although Gray was "from first to last consistent in his sincere admiration of the poems," his doubts became more positive before his death. Proof of this is that he failed to mention Ossian in the letters that he wrote after his trip to Scotland in 1765, "although he talks of the Highlanders at Glamis 'singing Erse-songs all day long'" (Letter 412).

7. The Address to the Sun in "Carthon" is perhaps the most famous of all Ossianic passages. It is mentioned in almost every defense of Ossian and was a major issue in an early article questioning Ossianic authenticity. The French Journal des Scavans of November, 1762, pointed out that not only did the description of Balclutha resemble certain passages in Isaiah but the Address to the Sun in "Carthon" was surprisingly similar to Satan's speech to the sun in Paradise Lost. Also, Ossian's laments over his blindness were not unlike Milton's on the same subject (Smart 132).

8. According to Bertram D. Sarason, Burke was writing the Annual Register until July, 1765, and was therefore responsible for the review of Fingal in 1761. See "Edmund Burke and the Two Annual Registers," PMLA 68 (1953), 496-508.

The Impostor and his Audience

The purpose of this chapter is to trace the connections between imposture and reader-response in order to suggest reasons other than the ones already given, for the tremendous audience enthusiasm Ossian generated. My thesis is that Macpherson's supporters unconsciously collaborated in the deception of the imposture because the poems reflected back an image of themselves which was both reassuring and self-confirming.

It is important to note that the term "impostor" as it is usually understood is not quite appropriate for Macpherson's role in the Ossianic deception if an impostor is seen as one who repetitively assumes a series of prestigious roles or professions for which he has no formal training. Macpherson's deceit, like Chatterton's with whom he is often linked, or Fritz Kreisler's, is actually a "reverse" imposture, that is, a claim that another composed works which were actually created by the claimant himself. (Kreisler's case is relevant because when he was a young man he composed a series of short musical pieces which he attributed to very well-known composers (Gediman 927).)

However, the "reverse" impostors do share personality traits with the more familiar, "classic" impostor. Both types share what all investigators who write on the subject

mention: an inadequate, incomplete sense of self. Greenacre speaks of an incompleteness, anxiety, and fearfulness the impostor feels when not involved in acts of imposture. She speaks of the impostor's "ego hunger" and his need for completion, in a particular way, through identification. Gediman discusses the feeling these individuals have that there is "nothing there," even when they are doing well, objectively speaking (925).

Deutsch's description of the pathological impostor's actions when confronted with his false position is strangely reminiscent of Macpherson's rage when David Hume refused to accept his version of Ossian's creation (see pages 45-46). "The pathological impostor," according to Deutsch, "endeavors to eliminate the friction between his pathologically exaggerated ego ideal and the other, devaluated, inferior, guilt-laden part of his ego, in a manner which is characteristic for him: he behaves as if his ego ideal were identical with himself; and he expects everyone else to acknowledge this status." When this identity is in jeopardy, threatened either by the inner voice of his devalued ego or the reactions of the outside world, he "still clings to this narcissistic position." Deutsch emphasizes that the need to cling to this ego ideal and force it on the outside world even if it involves deception and assumption of another's name is a desperate

one. (Neuroses 337).

This shoring up of one's identity through the appropriation of the character of a strong, well-established personality results from incomplete ego development accompanied by an unresolved oedipal rivalry. This oedipal conflict is, perhaps, the strongest link between the career and the "reverse" impostor. It was the motivation behind the young Fritz Kreisler's claim that other more famous composers had composed his compositions, and it can be assumed that it was a force behind Macpherson's behavior, as well. A relevant passage in Greenacre's article, "The Relation of the Impostor to the Artist," discusses this oedipal rivalry.

The nature of the oedipal conflict appears very characteristic and conspicuous. Ego defects derived from strong pregenital fixations cause a thin but dramatic enactment of the oedipal conflict, which is constantly re-enacted in each imposture. It is conspicuous that the imposture is most often the assumption of the identity of a father or older brother, on the scale of the family romance; a distinguished noble or famous person, who is symbolically killed by the imposture and robbed of his greatest treasures--his fame, his wealth, his achievements. Further scrutiny shows, however, how much this extraordinary struggle is devoid of any true libidinal investments, and consists rather of an over-throwing of the king-father and an assumption of his mantle in a real or illusory assumption of power....It can readily be seen that the libidinal development of the impostor is always infantile and rarely reaches a true genital and heterosexual level, although in some few instances a pseudo-genitality with singularly little pleasure takes the place of a truer genital relationship.... (537-38).

Although the impostor and the sentimentalist would appear to have little in common, they do have significant similarities in personality structure. Both impostors and sentimental protagonists fear personal commitment and are unable to take responsibility for their actions in the long term. This takes the extreme form, in the case of the impostor, of the incapacity for assuming any responsibility under his own name, but the sentimental hero is caught in his own negation of adult autonomy, shrinking from significant active participation in the world. As in the case of the impostor, the most meaningful adult action to be avoided is the sexual commitment, and it is a given that the passivity of the sentimental hero precludes any adult partnering. This avoidance takes extreme form in a quintessential sentimental novel such as Henry Mackenzie's Man of Feeling but it is present, as we have seen, in the Ossianic poems. In Mackenzie's novel when Harley's beloved Miss Walton finally breaks a long silence and confesses her feelings for him, he does the only thing possible under the circumstances--he expires. Yorick's liaisons are notoriously unsatisfied. And Macpherson's lovers are, almost without exception, lost to each other in a variety of tragic circumstances.

The voyage of recovery which G. A. Starr speaks of as the sentimental hero's mission is not a voyage of

self-discovery--the form in which the hero comes to recognize and assume his adult destiny--but rather a voyage of return to an earlier, less demanding environment in which infantile needs are met without conditions. This pattern, (an anti-Bildungsroman, so to speak), Starr finds to be especially present in Crusoe as well as in Defoe's novels of the five years after Crusoe. Moll Flanders, Colonel Jack, and Roxana "all dream of finding themselves in a relationship like Crusoe's with Friday--that is as the adoptive parent of an absolutely dependent, docile, and grateful child" (511). Starr believes this fantasy parent-child relationship to be characteristic of the sentimental novel in general: "...the establishment of emotional bonds between people is an insistent theme, but proves an impossibility unless the sentimental hero is in one way or another palpably dominant or submissive. He must be shielded by age, economic or social distance from the demands posed by sustained mutual dependence, and he finds such demands especially threatening in their emotional and sexual manifestations" (12).

Macpherson himself provides the emblem for this fantasized parent-child relationship. Ossian's recital of "the tales of the times of old" to his widowed daughter-in-law, Malvina, frames his poems.

The psychoanalytic perspective offers a new way of

explaining aspects of sentimentality which were never adequately accounted for. The fragmentary nature of sentimental writing, for example, takes on significance when it is recognized as one manifestation of the sentimentalist's fear of the passing of time and its inevitable consequences.

Time, instead of being celebrated, becomes "a major enemy, the agent of feared or despised changes." Starr attributes those strategies we have come to identify with process writing: "the breakdown of the linear, causal, sequential flow of narrative," the absence of chronology (Sterne), the digressive episodes (Sterne and Mackenzie), the lost chapters (Mackenzie), and we can add the spasmodic dream fragments which comprise Ossian's narratives, to the attempts to arrest time in its flowing, or redeem moments outside of time (502).

With this in mind we can see primitivism as a further refinement of the regression sentimentalism encompasses. Going back in time, the mission of recovery is expanded from the infancy of the individual to the infancy of the race. From the fantasizing of an ideal parent-child relationship, the idealization is extended to include a noble race of men who existed before the corrupting effects of "civilization." Maturity, in either manifestation, represents a terrifying phenomenon.

The gaps in the sentimental narrative are perfectly congruent with primitivism. An ancient manuscript would, of necessity, be incomplete, difficult to decipher and transcribe. While Sterne mocks both the associationist philosophers and the process novelists in his lacunae, Macpherson uses his to authenticate his manuscript and underscore his sincerity.

The idealization of the inarticulate and the mute, those whose proverbial actions speak louder than words, is another realization of the sentimental impulse. Language acquisition is one consequence of an individual's achievement of a new level of development. As a culture progresses, so does its language's capacity to exploit and corrupt. (We have seen the primitivist conviction that early languages were superior, closer to elemental feeling.)

The sentimental hero, however, denies the desirability as well as the necessity of mastering language. Shunning forbidden language--and to him there is no other kind--he naturally repudiates the word, which is its key. He is disturbed less by the arbitrariness or artificiality of verbal signs, which he finds equally in other social institutions, than by the enormities of adulthood to which language learning is a kind of forced initiation. What makes his project of escape from the word so desperate and pathetic is that far from trying to conjurer son propre néant, he welcomes it with open arms (Starr 504).

A significant passage in one of Mrs. Elizabeth

Montagu's letters to her friend, Mrs. Carter, confirms this sentimental distrust of language. The same Mrs. Montagu who was a friend of Lord Kames and a great supporter of Ossianic poetry, in this important letter, associates the awareness of feelings with the recognition that the language that she has available to her is inadequate to express those feelings. She discovers that the possibility of finding a way of interpreting her emotions would exist only in a state of natural religion, that is, in a more primitive state of being.

How much I felt your kind disposition to turn back when you were on the stairs, I cannot express to you in words; there started a tear on reading that paragraph which declared the sentiment better. Words serve well for common occasions, but there are so many on which they cannot explain the movements of the heart, and the delicate feelings of the soul, that in a state of natural religion only it would have helped to have convinced me of our being to exist in another life, in which we should not use an inadequate interpreter of our thoughts as language is. Thought is of the soul, language belongs to body; we shall leave it in the grave with our other rags of mortality (Montagu 4: 358-59).

The Montagu passage suggests that language is an inadequate vehicle to express feeling. It also seems to propose a return to more authentic realm of being, that "state of natural religion [which] would have convinced me of our being to exist in another life" that is at the core of the sentimentalist creed.

The sympathetic readers of Ossian were, I believe, such ardent advocates because the poetry permitted them this fantasized return. It launched them on their own mission of recovery.

With this in mind, the characteristic passivity of the sentimental hero is not adventitious, but an interpsychic necessity. It reproduces the period in the infant's development when its needs are met empathically, that period before the beginnings of language.

The sentimental predisposition of Macpherson's readers would make them all the more open to Macpherson's imposture because he offered his audience a very similar fantasy. When Gediman shifted her focus from the psychopathology of impostors to the audience, she found that the audience was receptive to the deception because of "a universal wish to be duped by a charmer, a hunger to believe in the fraud." The secret of his appeal lies in the longing to return to that happy state of omnipotence that adults have to relinquish. The audience provides the sense of integration and reality the impostor needs by confirming his "false self" in assuming the role of the idealizing mother. The fascination of the narcissistic personality lies in the lure of participating in another's illusions, particularly those of omnipotence that one has renounced oneself (932).

However the return in the case of the Ossianic collaboration between impostor and his audience takes on another, more than personal, dimension. Macpherson offered his Scottish readers the fantasy that their nation had experienced a golden age when all its neighbors were barbarians, thus providing a "false self" with omnipotent overtones for an entire people. With this fiction he united primitivistic and sentimental impulses in a pastoral fantasy of a great, good place where men empathically respond to one another's feelings, where good men prevail over evil ones, and where words and things are in exact correspondence. The name which this fantasy assumes in the Ossianic poems, "Scotland," is only one of its many names.

Notes

1. Of course, many difficulties result when a psychoanalytic formula is invoked to explain the reactions of an eighteenth-century audience, far removed in time and spirit from the insights of twentieth-century psychoanalysis. It could be argued that the imposition of such a schema to explain the motivations of a large group of highly diverse individuals is methodologically questionable--as unsound as the speculations of the conjectural historians previously examined in this study. The response to this argument is that Macpherson's audience was "duped," and while the psychoanalytic explanation for this audience receptivity to the deception should not be the only explanation offered (and the many aspects of the "horizon of expectations" presented in this study offer others), it should be, at the least, considered.

In conclusion, psychoanalytic theory, however reductive and inadequate it may be in explaining all aspects of human behavior, is surely a valuable contribution to the "Science of Man." And, as it was the "Science of Man" which so fascinated the thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment, this all-encompassing term can provide a link between the various aspects of the Ossianic problem which have been discussed in this study.

Ossian presents a fraudulent society with a falsified history, sociology, and literature. When the poetry was new, authenticity was obviously at issue because Macpherson and his friends were attempting to pass off a fantasized Scotland as real, thereby creating a national myth. This myth, presenting a society whose members were both heroic and benevolent, had the additional benefit of providing evidence for the belief in the natural goodness of man which is the basis of eighteenth-century sentimentality.

However, with the hindsight provided by the intervening two centuries, we can recognize that the inauthenticity of the Ossianic poems is symptomatic of an underlying reality--the reality not of the society which the poems depict, but of a unique society and the special circumstances within which these poems were created. We have seen how much the poems came about in great part

because of the efforts of a very special group of men who not only were major contributors to Scottish intellectual life, but also active in the political movements, notably the agitation for a Scottish militia, which Ossian also designed to promote in disguised form.

A thread which runs throughout this study is the notion that Macpherson's poetry has several subversive purposes. The agitation for a Scottish militia is only one example of the hidden agenda that underlies Macpherson's "translations." Recounting the glories of an imaginary Scotland in epics from the earliest days of human civilization, in order to stimulate the nationalism and patriotic spirit of his contemporaries, is one way Macpherson found to counter the domination of England over his native land. Scotland, in the middle years of the eighteenth century, as we have seen again and again in these pages, was a conquered nation.

Freudian psychologists understand subversion in its most elemental manifestation: the desire of a young man to supplant his father, and this is certainly the motivation behind one of Macpherson's most extraordinary inspirations: the episode in which Fingal battles with the spirit of Loda. We have seen how the young Macpherson (he was only 25 when Fingal was published) was hypersensitive, unsure of himself, volatile, and a collector of injustices. Surely

his youth, his poverty, and background (the Highlanders were misunderstood and despised by even the Lowlanders of their own nation) go some way towards explaining the arrogance which disguised an extreme insecurity. His delight in upending established values is evident in the elaborate rationale he developed for the absence of religion among Ossian's people.

While one focus of the study concentrated on Ossianic genesis: Macpherson's personality and collected grievances, the nature of the "cabal," and the Scottish political and intellectual background, the other major area of focus was on Ossianic response. We saw earlier in the chapter on reader-response theory how the important concept of the "horizon of expectations" is useful as a metaphor for focusing on both the various societal forces out of which the text emerges, and the ways in which its readers have been primed to accept that text. Out of the former comes the notion that a text is new precisely because it contrasts with "the collective grayness of received ideas and ideologies" of the past, a foregrounded otherness emerging from a neutral background. In the latter sense, the readers of a text, in aggregate, make up an "intersubjective system or structure of expectations" which affects their response. We investigated various aspects of the "received ideologies" of the Ossianic poems,

particularly the conjectural historians' investigations into the earliest human societies, as well as the theory which postulates four major stages of cultural development. In the realm of literary developments which led to Ossian, we singled out the melancholy poem of the Collins-Gray-Warton school.

Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser both recognize that a text becomes influential because it reflects back on its culture; Iser speaks about this text as revealing a "penumbra of excluded possibilities," possibilities neutralized or negated by the institutions which comprise its culture. This is also another point which has been emphasized in this study. Obviously, the idealized heroism and exaggerated chivalrous behavior of the Ossianic protagonists reflect negatively on the increasingly materialistic behavior Macpherson identified with his "polished age." Hans Jauss's "ideal case" is also relevant in this context. While Jauss conceived of the "ideal case" as a parody of existing literature which asked its readers to question fundamental assumptions and structures of their culture, Ossian is an "ideal case" in an even more basic way because it presents an ideal society. Certainly there are moments (using the word in George Poulet's sense) in every advanced culture when nostalgia for a simpler past seizes the imagination. Often such longing takes a

pastoral shape and pastoral is, like Ossian, employed to conceal political messages, as in Edmund Spenser's Shepherd's Calendar.

However, Ossian emerged not only from a specific political situation, but also in an age of sensibility when new definitions of consciousness and individuality were developing, along with an increased awareness of cultural relativity and the existence of cultures in different places, different (perhaps even better in some ways) from one's own. The ideal society revealed in the Ossianic poems was ideal because its members lived according to nature, in harmony with the natural settings around them, and with their own feelings. The true Ossianic enthusiast, like Anna Seward, was not concerned with the authenticity of the poetry. This poetry was "sublime" to her because it empowered her to look at nature anew, and to become newly aware of her emotions.

Enlightenment science turned outward to investigate how human beings behaved in groups and the nature of human institutions. It also turned inward on the human psyche. An irony of Ossianic response is that a group of poems which are so amorphous and vague as to be nearly unreadable for a twentieth-century reader should, in the eighteenth century, have been a contribution to the "Science of Man." The Ossianic poems were enormously influential, however,

because they stimulated the reader to focus on his feelings. The vagueness of this poetry permitted the reader to shape it in his own personal ways, and make of it what he needed it to be.

As Wolfgang Iser would explain it, the "blanks" and "vacancies" in a text advance the reader's "ideation." And while this understanding of the process by which the reader creates meaning is applicable to any text, it is even more useful in understanding the reading of the sentimental work whose amorphousness and intentional gaps put even more burden on the reader. The requirements made by such a text are different from the demands exacted by the carefully crafted, rational, normative texts of earlier generations, those of Alexander Pope, for example.

Samuel Johnson's self-appointed role as chief spokesperson for Ossianic opposition is understandable in this context. While Johnson had a good deal of resentment toward the Scots, in the case of Macpherson, Johnson was objecting to much more than his nationality. Johnson feared the kind of literature Macpherson produced. He didn't believe that it was old, but he also disliked its "kind," that subversive type of text which left the natural world for the world of imagination. He associated those who indulge in "the dangerous prevalence of imagination" with madmen, revolutionaries, and religious fanatics, those

who, in one way or another, set about to destroy the "civilized" values he revered.

Of course, with respect to Macpherson's ultimate aims, Johnson was right. He was right (if appreciation over many generations is any indication of literary quality) about the literary merit of Macpherson's poetry. But he was wrong about its importance. The Ossianic poems illustrate, in textbook fashion, Hans Jauss's insight that literature can be a "socially formative" force. In a passage quoted earlier, Jauss wrote:

The experience of reading can liberate one from adaptations, prejudices of a lived praxis in that it can compel one to a new perception of things. The horizon of expectations of literature distinguishes itself before the horizon of expectations of historical lived praxis in that it not only preserves actual experience, but also anticipates unrealized possibility, broadens the limited space of social behavior for new desires, aims and goals, and thereby opens paths of future experience (Aesthetic of Reception 41).

From the testimony of those who lived in the period we can recognize that this poetry compelled them to "a new perception of things." Whether it provoked an understanding of the fragility and uniqueness of their social institutions, stimulated a new assessment of human nature, helped its readers to develop an inner dialogue, or inspired them to look at nature with different eyes, the horizon was forever altered after Ossian.

The twentieth-century reader can also gain something from the study of Ossianic genesis. It is refreshing to return to a period when the humanistic and scientific disciplines were not so strictly and dangerously dichotomized--when the "Science of Man" included room for a species of imaginative thinking which was banished from science in times closer to our own. This is perhaps the most important lesson we can draw from the study of Ossian. If we cannot appreciate merits of his literature, we can at least recognize the genius of a writer who was able to incorporate Enlightenment science into his work, while gaining a new respectability for the poetry of imagination.

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