



UNIVERSITÄTS-
BIBLIOTHEK
PADERBORN

The poems of Ossian

in two volumes ; to which are prefixed dissertations on the æra and
poems of Ossian

Macpherson, James

London, 1807

Oithona

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-63313](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-63313)

OITHONA:

A

POEM.

ARGUMENT.

Gaul, the son of Morni, attended Lathmon into his own country, after his being defeated in Morven, as related in the preceding poem. He was kindly entertained by Nuáth, the father of Lathmon, and fell in love with his daughter Oithona. The lady was no less enamoured of Gaul, and a day was fixed for their marriage. In the mean time, Fingal, preparing for an expedition into the country of the Britons, sent for Gaul. He obeyed, and went; but not without promising to Oithona to return, if he survived the war, by a certain day. Lathmon too was obliged to attend his father Nuáth in his wars, and Oithona was left alone at Dunlathmon, the seat of the family. Dunrommath, lord of Uthal, supposed to be one of the Orkneys, taking advantage of the absence of her friends, came, and carried off, by force, Oithona, who had formerly rejected his love, into Tromáthon, a desert island, where he concealed her in a cave.

Gaul returned on the day appointed; heard of the rape, and sailed to Tromáthon, to revenge himself on Dunrommath. When he landed, he found Oithona disconsolate, and resolved not to survive the loss of her honour. She told him the story of her misfortunes, and she scarce ended, when Dunrommath, with his followers, appeared at the further end of the island. Gaul prepared to attack him, recommending to Oithona to retire, till the battle was over. She seemingly obeyed; but she secretly armed herself, rushed into the thickest of the battle, and was mortally wounded. Gaul pursuing the flying enemy, found her just expiring on the field: he mourned over her, raised her tomb, and returned to Morven. Thus is the story handed down by tradition; nor is it given with any material difference in the poem, which opens with Gaul's return to Dunlathmon, after the rape of Oithona.

OITHONA:

A POEM.

DARKNESS dwells around Dunlathmon, though the moon shews half her face on the hill. The daughter of night turns her eyes away; she beholds the approaching grief. The son of Morni is on the plain: There is no sound in the hall. No long-streaming beam of light comes trembling through the gloom. The voice of ^kOithona is not heard amidst the noise of the streams of Duvranna. "Whither art thou gone in thy beauty, dark-haired daughter of Nuäth? Lathmon is in the field of the valiant, but thou didst promise to remain in the hall till the son of Morni returned. Till he returned from Strumon, to the maid of his love! The tear was on thy cheek at his departure; the sigh rose in secret in thy breast. But thou dost not come forth with songs, with the lightly-trembling sound of the harp!"

^k Oi-thóna, *the virgin of the wave.*

Such were the words of Gaul, when he came to Dunlathmon's towers. The gates were open and dark. The winds were blustering in the hall. The trees strowed the threshold with leaves; the murmur of night was abroad. Sad and silent, at a rock, the son of Morni sat: his soul trembled for the maid; but he knew not whither to turn his course! The son¹ of Leth stood at a distance, and heard the winds of his bushy hair. But he did not raise his voice, for he saw the sorrow of Gaul!

Sleep descended on the chiefs. The visions of night arose. Oithona stood, in a dream, before the eyes of Morni's son. Her hair was loose and disordered: her lovely eye rolled deep in tears. Blood stained her snowy arm. The robe half hid the wound of her breast. She stood over the chief, and her voice was feebly heard. "Sleeps the son of Morni, he that was lovely in the eyes of Oithona? Sleeps Gaul at the distant rock, and the daughter of Nuáth low? The sea rolls round the dark isle of Tromáthon. I sit in my tears in the cave! Nor do I sit alone, O Gaul! the dark chief of Cuthal is there. He is there in the rage of his love. What can Oithona do?"

¹ Morlo, the son of Leth, is one of Fingal's most famous heroes. He and three other men attended Gaul on his expedition to Tromáthon.

A rougher blast rushed through the oak.
 The dream of night departed. Gaul took his
 aspen spear. He stood in the rage of his soul.
 Often did his eyes turn to the east. He ac-
 cused the lagging light. At length the morn-
 ing came forth. The hero lifted up the sail.
 The winds came rustling from the hill; he
 bounded on the waves of the deep. On the
 third day arose Tromáthon,^m like a blue shield
 in the midst of the sea. The white wave roared
 against its rocks; sad Oithona sat on the coast!
 She looked on the rolling waters, and her tears
 came down. But when she saw Gaul in his
 arms, she started, and turned her eyes away.
 Her lovely cheek is bent and red; her white
 arm trembles by her side. Thrice she strove to
 fly from his presence; thrice her steps failed as
 she went!

“ Daughter of Nuáth,” said the hero, “ why
 dost thou fly from Gaul? Do my eyes send forth
 the flame of death? Darkens hatred in my soul?
 Thou art to me the beam of the east, rising in
 a land unknown. But thou coverest thy face
 with sadness, daughter of car-borne Nuáth! Is
 the foe of Oithona near? My soul burns to meet
 him in fight. The sword trembles by the side
 of Gaul, and longs to glitter in his hand. Speak,

^m Tróm-thón, *heavy, or deep-sounding wave.*

daughter of Nuäth! Dost thou not behold my tears?"

"Young chief of Strumon," replied the maid, "why comest thou over the dark-blue wave, to Nuäth's mournful daughter? Why did I not pass away in secret, like the flower of the rock, that lifts its fair head unseen, and strows its withered leaves on the blast? Why didst thou come, O Gaul! to hear my departing sigh? I vanish in my youth; my name shall not be heard. Or it will be heard with grief; the tears of Nuäth must fall. Thou wilt be sad, son of Morni! for the departed fame of Oithona. But she shall sleep in the narrow tomb, far from the voice of the mourner. Why didst thou come, chief of Strumon! to the sea-beat rocks of Tromáthon?"

"I came to meet thy foes, daughter of carborne Nuäth! The death of Cuthal's chief darkens before me; or Morni's son shall fall! Oithona! when Gaul is low, raise my tomb on that oozy rock. When the dark-bounding ship shall pass, call the sons of the sea! call them, and give this sword, to bear it hence to Morni's hall. The grey-haired chief will then cease to look towards the desert for the return of his son!"

"Shall the daughter of Nuäth live?" she replied, with a bursting sigh. "Shall I live in Tromáthon, and the son of Morni low? My heart is not of that rock; nor my soul careless

as that sea, which lifts its blue waves to every wind, and rolls beneath the storm! The blast which shall lay thee low, shall spread the branches of Oithona on earth. We shall wither together, son of car-borne Morni! The narrow house is pleasant to me, and the grey stone of the dead: for never more will I leave thy rocks, O sea-surrounded Tromáthor! Nightⁿ came on with her clouds, after the departure of Lathmon, when he went to the wars of his fathers, to the moss-covered rock of Duthórmoth. Night came on. I sat in the hall, at the beam of the oak! The wind was abroad in the trees. I heard the sound of arms. Joy rose in my face. I thought of thy return. It was the chief of Cuthal, the red-haired strength of Dunrommath. His eyes rolled in fire: the blood of my people was on his sword. They who defended Oithona fell by the gloomy chief! What could I do? My arm was weak. I could not lift the spear. He took me in my grief, amidst my tears; he raised the sail. He feared the returning Lathmon, the brother of unhappy Oithona! But behold he comes with his people! the dark wave is divided before him! Whither wilt thou turn thy steps, son of Morni? Many are the warriors of thy foe!"

ⁿ Oithona relates how she was carried away by Dunrommath.

“ My steps never turned from battle,” Gaul said, and unsheathed his sword. “ Shall I then begin to fear, Oithona! when thy foes are near? Go to thy cave, my love, till our battle cease on the field. Son of Leth, bring the bows of our fathers! the sounding quiver of Morni! Let our three warriors bend the yew. Ourselves will lift the spear. They are an host on the rock! our souls are strong in war!”

Oithona went to the cave. A troubled joy rose on her mind, like the red path of lightning on a stormy cloud! Her soul was resolved; the tear was dried from her wildly-looking eye. Dunrommath slowly approached. He saw the son of Morni. Contempt contracted his face, a smile is on his dark-brown cheek; his red eye rolled, half-concealed beneath his shaggy brows!

“ Whence are the sons of the sea?” began the gloomy chief. “ Have the winds driven you on the rocks of Tromáthon? Or come you in search of the white-handed maid? The sons of the unhappy, ye feeble men, come to the hand of Dunrommath! His eye spares not the weak; he delights in the blood of strangers. Oithona is a beam of light, and the chief of Cuthal enjoys it in secret; wouldst thou come on its loveliness, like a cloud, son of the feeble hand! Thou mayst come, but shalt thou return to the halls of thy fathers?” “ Dost thou not

know me," said Gaul, "red-haired chief of Cuthal? Thy feet were swift on the heath, in the battle of car-borne Lathmon; when the sword of Morni's son pursued his host, in Morven's woody land. Dunrommath! thy words are mighty, for thy warriors gather behind thee. But do I fear them, son of pride? I am not of the race of the feeble!"

Gaul advanced in his arms; Dunrommath shrunk behind his people. But the spear of Gaul pierced the gloomy chief; his sword lopped off his head, as it bended in death. The son of Morni shook it thrice by the lock; the warriors of Dunrommath fled. The arrows of Morven pursued them: ten fell on the mossy rocks. The rest lift the sounding sail, and bound on the troubled deep. Gaul advanced towards the cave of Oithona. He beheld a youth leaning on a rock. An arrow had pierced his side; his eye rolled faintly beneath his helmet. The soul of Morni's son was sad, he came and spoke the words of peace.

"Can the hand of Gaul heal thee, youth of the mournful brow? I have searched for the herbs of the mountains; I have gathered them on the secret banks of their streams. My hand has closed the wound of the brave; their eyes have blessed the son of Morni. Where dwelt

thy fathers, warrior? Were they of the sons of the mighty? Sadness shall come, like night, on thy native streams. Thou art fallen in thy youth!"

"My fathers," replied the stranger, "were of the race of the mighty; but they shall not be sad; for my fame is departed like morning mist. High walls rise on the banks of Duvranna, and see their mossy towers in the stream; a rock ascends behind them with its bending pines. Thou mayst behold it far distant. There my brother dwells. He is renowned in battle: give him this glittering helm."

The helmet fell from the hand of Gaul. It was the wounded Oithona! She had armed herself in the cave, and came in search of death. Her heavy eyes are half closed; the blood pours from her heaving side. "Son of Morni!" she said, "prepare the narrow tomb. Sleep grows, like darkness, on my soul. The eyes of Oithona are dim! O had I dwelt at Duvranna, in the bright beam of my fame! then had my years come on with joy; the virgins would then bless my steps. But I fall in youth, son of Morni! my father shall blush in his hall!"

She fell pale on the rock of Tromáthon. The mournful warrior raised her tomb. He came to Morven; we saw the darkness of his

soul. Ossian took the harp in the praise of Oithona. The brightness of the face of Gaul returned. But his sigh rose, at times, in the midst of his friends; like blasts that shake their unfrequent wings, after the stormy winds are laid!

