



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

Sulmalla of Lumon

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

ARGUMENT

SUL-MALLA OF LUMON:

Λ

P O E M.



ARGUMENT.

THIS poem, which, properly speaking, is a continuation of the last, opens with an address to Sul-malla, the daughter of the king of Inis-huna, whom Ossian met, at the chase, as he returned from the battle of Rath-col. Sul-malla invites Ossian and Oscar to a feast, at the residence of her father, who was then absent in the wars. Upon hearing their name and family, she relates an expedition of Fingal into Inis-huna. She casually mentioning Cathmor, chief of Atha, (who then assisted her father against his enemies), Ossian introduces the episode of Culgorm and Suran-dronlo, two Scandinavian kings, in whose wars Ossian himself and Cathmor were engaged on opposite sides. The story is imperfect, a part of the original being lost. Ossian, warned in a dream, by the ghost of Trenmor, sets sail from Inis-huna.

SUL-MALLA OF LUMON:

A POEM.

WHO^s moves so stately, on Lumon, at the roar of the foamy waters? Her hair falls upon her heaving breast. White is her arm behind, as slow she bends the bow. Why dost thou

^s The expedition of Ossian to Inis-huna happened a short time before Fingal passed over into Ireland, to dethrone Cair-bar, the son of Borbar-duthal. Cathmor, the brother of Cair-bar, was aiding Connor, king of Inis-huna, in his wars, at the time that Ossian defeated Duth-carmor, in the valley of Rath-col. The poem is more interesting, that it contains so many particulars concerning those personages who make so great a figure in Temora.

The exact correspondence in the manners and customs of Inis-huna, as here described, to those of Caledonia, leaves no room to doubt, that the inhabitants of both were originally the same people. Some may alledge, that Ossian might transfer, in his poetical descriptions, the manners of his own nation to foreigners. This objection is easily answered. Why has he not done this with regard to the inhabitants of Scandinavia? We find the latter very different in their customs and superstitions from the nations of Britain and Ireland. The

wander in deserts, like a light through a cloudy field? The young roes are panting, by their secret rocks. Return, thou daughter of kings! the cloudy night is near! It was the young branch of green Inis-huna, Sul-malla of blue eyes. She sent the bard from her rock, to bid us to her feast. Amidst the song we sat down, in Cluba's echoing hall. White moved the hands of Sul-malla, on the trembling strings. Half-heard amidst the sound, was the name of Atha's king: he that was absent in battle for her own green land. Nor absent from her soul was he; he came midst her thoughts by night. Ton-thena looked in, from the sky, and saw her tossing arms.

The sound of shells had ceased. Amidst long locks, Sul-malla rose. She spoke with bended eyes, and asked of our course through seas; "for of the kings of men are ye, tall riders of the wave."[†] "Not unknown," I said,

Scandinavian manners are remarkably barbarous and fierce, and seem to mark out a nation much less advanced in a state of civilization, than the inhabitants of Britain were in the times of Ossian.

[†] Sul-malla here discovers the quality of Ossian and Oscar from their stature and stately gait. Among nations not far advanced in civilization, a superior beauty and stateliness of person, were inseparable from nobility of blood. It was from these qualities, that those of family were known by strangers,

“at his streams is he, the father of our race. Fingal has been heard of at Cluba, blue-eyed daughter of kings. Nor only, at Cona’s stream, is Ossian and Oscar known. Foes trembled at our voice, and shrunk in other lands.”

“Not unmarked,” said the maid, “by Sul-malla, is the shield of Morven’s king. It hangs high in my father’s hall, in memory of the past; when Fingal came to Cluba, in the days of other years. Loud roared the boar of Culdarnu, in the midst of his rocks and woods. Inis-huna sent her youths, but they failed; and virgins wept over tombs. Careless went Fingal to Culdarnu. On his spear rolled the strength of the woods. He was bright, they said, in his locks, the first of mortal men. Nor at the feast were heard his words. His deeds passed from

not from tawdry trappings of state, injudiciously thrown round them. The cause of this distinguishing property must, in some measure, be ascribed to their unmixed blood. They had no inducement to intermarry with the vulgar: and no low notions of interest made them deviate from their choice, in their own sphere. In states where luxury has been long established, beauty of person is, by no means, the characteristic of antiquity of family. This must be attributed to those enervating vices which are inseparable from luxury and wealth. A great family, (to alter a little the words of the historian,) it is true, like a river, becomes considerable from the length of its course, but, as it rolls on, hereditary distempers, as well as property, flow successively into it.

his soul of fire, like the rolling of vapours from the face of the wandering sun. Not careless looked the blue eyes of Cluba on his stately steps. In white bosoms rose the king of Selma, in the midst of their thoughts by night. But the winds bore the stranger to the echoing vales of his roes. Nor lost to other lands was he, like a meteor that sinks in a cloud. He came forth, at times, in his brightness, to the distant dwelling of foes. His fame came, like the sound of winds, to Cluba's woody vale."

" Too partial to our own times, we are ready to mark out remote antiquity, as the region of ignorance and barbarism. This, perhaps, is extending our prejudices too far. It has been long remarked, that knowledge, in a great measure, is founded on a free intercourse between mankind; and that the mind is enlarged in proportion to the observations it has made upon the manners of different men and nations. If we look, with attention, into the history of Fingal, as delivered by Ossian, we shall find that he was not altogether a poor ignorant hunter, confined to the narrow corner of an island. His expeditions to all parts of Scandinavia, to the north of Germany, and the different states of Great Britain and Ireland, were very numerous, and performed under such a character, and at such times, as gave him an opportunity to mark the undisguised manners of mankind. War and an active life, as they call forth, by turns, all the powers of the soul, present to us the different characters of men: in times of peace and quiet, for want of objects to exert them, the powers of the mind lie concealed, in a great measure, and we see only artificial passions and manners. It is from this consideration I conclude,

“Darkness dwells in Cluba of harps: the race of kings is distant far; in battle is my father Conmor; and Lormar^x my brother, king of streams. Nor darkening alone are they; a beam from other lands is nigh; the friend of strangers^y in Atha, the troubler of the field. High from their misty hills, look forth the blue eyes of Erin; for he is far away, young dweller of their souls! Nor, harmless, white hands of Erin! is Cathmor in the skirts of war; he rolls ten thousand before him, in his distant field.”

“Not unseen by Ossian,” I said, “rushed Cathmor from his streams, when he poured his strength on I-thorno,^z isle of many waves! In

that a traveller of penetration could gather more genuine knowledge from a tour of ancient Gaul, than from the minutest observation of all the artificial manners and elegant refinements of modern France.

^x Lormar was the son of Conmor, and the brother of Sul-malla. After the death of Conmor, Lormar succeeded him in the throne.

^y Cathmor, the son of Borbar-duthal. It would appear from the partiality with which Sul-malla speaks of that hero, that she had seen him previous to his joining her father's army; though tradition positively asserts, that it was after his return that she fell in love with him.

^z I-thorno, says tradition, was an island of Scandinavia. In it, at a hunting party, met Culgorm and Suran-dronlo, the kings of two neighbouring isles. They differed about the honour of killing a boar; and a war was kindled between them. From this episode we may learn, that the manners of the

strife met two kings in I-thorno, Culgorm and Suran-dronlo: each from his echoing isle, stern hunters of the boar!

“They met a boar, at a foamy stream: each pierced him with his spear. They strove for the fame of the deed; and gloomy battle rose. From isle to isle they sent a spear, broken and stained with blood, to call the friends of their fathers, in their sounding arms. Cathmor came from Erin, to Culgorm, red-eyed king: I aided Suran-dronlo, in his land of boars.

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

“Heedless^a I stood, with my people, where

Scandinavians were much more savage and cruel than those of Britain. It is remarkable, that the names introduced in this story are not of Galic original, which circumstance affords room to suppose, that it had its foundation in true history.

^a From the circumstance of Ossian not being present at the rites described in the preceding paragraph, we may suppose that he held them in contempt. This difference of sen-

fell the foamy stream from rocks. The moon moved red from the mountain. My song, at times, arose. Dark, on the other side, young Cathmor heard my voice; for he lay, beneath the oak, in all his gleaming arms. Morning came; we rushed to fight: from wing to wing is the rolling of strife. They fell like the thistle's head, beneath autumnal winds.

“In armour came a stately form: I mixed my strokes with the chief. By turns our shields are pierced: loud rung our steelly mails. His helmet fell to the ground. In brightness shone the foe. His eyes, two pleasant flames, rolled between his wandering locks. I knew Cathmor of Atha, and threw my spear on earth. Dark, we turned, and silent passed to mix with other foes.

“Not so passed the striving kings.^b They mixed in echoing fray: like the meeting of ghosts, in the dark wing of winds. Through

timent with regard to religion, is a sort of argument, that the Caledonians were not originally a colony of Scandinavians, as some have imagined. Concerning so remote a period, mere conjecture must supply the place of argument and positive proofs.

^b Cùlgorm and Suran-dronlo. The combat of the kings, and their attitude in death, are highly picturesque, and expressive of that ferocity of manners which distinguished the northern nations.

either breast rushed the spears; nor yet lay the foes on earth! A rock received their fall; half-reclined they lay in death. Each held the lock of his foe; each grimly seemed to roll his eyes. The stream of the rock leapt on their shields, and mixed below with blood.

“ The battle ceased in I-thorno. The strangers met in peace: Cathmor, from Atha of streams, and Ossian, king of harps. We placed the dead in earth. Our steps were by Runar’s bay. With the bounding boat, afar, advanced a ridgy wave. Dark was the rider of seas, but a beam of light was there, like the ray of the sun, in Stromlo’s rolling smoak. It was the daughter^c of Suran-dronlo, wild in brightened

^c Tradition has handed down the name of this princess. The bards call her Runo-forlo, which has no other sort of title for being genuine, but its not being of Galic original; a distinction which the bards had not the art to preserve, when they feigned names for foreigners. The highland senachies, who very often endeavoured to supply the deficiency they thought they found in the tales of Ossian, have given us the continuation of the story of the daughter of Suran-dronlo. The catastrophe is so unnatural, and the circumstances of it so ridiculously pompous, that, for the sake of the inventors, I shall conceal them.

The wildly beautiful appearance of Runo-forlo made a deep impression on a chief, some ages ago, who was himself no contemptible poet. The story is romantic, but not incredible, if we make allowances for the lively imagination of a

looks. Her eyes were wandering flames, amidst disordered locks. Forward is her white arm, with the spear; her high heaving breast is seen, white as foamy waves that rise, by turns, amidst rocks. They are beautiful, but terrible, and mariners call the winds!"

"Come, ye dwellers of Loda!" she said, "come, Carchar, pale in the midst of clouds! Sluthmor that stridest in airy halls! Corchtur, terrible in winds! Receive, from his daughter's spear, the foes of Suran-dronlo. No shadow, at his roaring streams; no mildly-looking form was he! When he took up his spear, the hawks shook their sounding wings: for blood was

man of genius. Our chief sailing, in a storm, along one of the islands of Orkney, saw a woman in a boat near the shore, whom he thought, as he expresses it himself, *as beautiful as a sudden ray of the sun, on the dark heaving deep*. The verses of Ossian, on the attitude of Runo-forlo, which was so similar to that of the woman in the boat, wrought so much on his fancy, that he fell desperately in love. The winds, however, drove him from the coast, and, after a few days, he arrived at his residence in Scotland. There his passion increased to such a degree, that two of his friends, fearing the consequence, sailed to the Orkneys, to carry to him the object of his desire. Upon inquiry they soon found the nymph, and carried her to the enamoured chief; but mark his surprize, when, instead of *a ray of the sun*, he saw a skinny fisherwoman, more than middle aged, appearing before him. Tradition here ends the story: but it may be easily supposed that the passion of the chief soon subsided.

poured around the steps of dark-eyed Suran-dronlo. He lighted me, no harmless beam, to glitter on his streams. Like meteors, I was bright, but I blasted the foes of Suran-dronlo."

* * * * *

Nor unconcerned heard Sul-malla the praise of Cathmor of shields. He was within her soul, like a fire in secret heath, which awakes at the voice of the blast, and sends its beam abroad. Amidst the song removed the daughter of kings, like the voice of a summer breeze, when it lifts the heads of flowers, and curls the lakes and streams. The rustling sound gently spreads o'er the vale, softly-pleasing as it saddens the soul.

By night came a dream to Ossian; formless stood the shadow of Trenmor. He seemed to strike the dim shield, on Selma's streamy rock. I rose, in my rattling steel; I knew that war was near, before the winds our sails were spread; when Lumon shewed its streams to the morn.

Come, from the watching of night, Malvina,
lonely beam!