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‘The Types and Symbols of Eternity’:

The Poetics of the Sublime in Eighteenth-Century Britain

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Abstract

The following work examines the formation and development of a poetics of the sublime across Britain during the eighteenth century. Engaging with the works of formative eighteenth-century theorists, such as Joseph Addison, Samuel Johnson, and Edmund Burke, I outline the problematic status of the sublime as abstract aesthetic ideal, an ‘impossibility’ which yet prevails in modern aesthetics. Alongside the successive and contested conceptualisation of the sublime as aesthetic, I consider the emergence and interlocution of a distinct mode of poetic praxis centred on, and empowered by, sublimity, a poetics of the sublime, or in the poet’s terms— ‘the types and symbols of Eternity’. The directive of this thesis is to uncover and analyse this typology of sublime poetics realised throughout the work of James Macpherson, Thomas Percy, James Beattie, Robert Burns, and William Wordsworth.

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Finally, to Andrea, my violet by a mossy stone— not in poetry nor in tempests have I known such wonder.

A.M.D.G.

The title of the poem had obviously been written even before the poem itself, and had seemingly been intended as the first line. It had been set down in a large impetuous script, and read: “Transcend!” Later, at some other time, in a different mood and situation, this title as well as the exclamation mark had been crossed out, and in smaller, thinner, more modest letters another title had been written in.

It read: “Stages.”1

[1] Hermann Hesse, *The Glass Bead Game (Magister Ludi)* [1943], trans. by Richard and Clara Winston (London: Vintage Books, 2000), p. 353.

Chapter 1.

‘A Sense Sublime’: Approaching the Summit of Existence

> And I have felt
>
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
>
> Of elevated thoughts; *a sense sublime*
>
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
>
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
>
> And the round ocean, and the living air,
>
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
>
> A motion and a spirit, that impels
>
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
>
> And rolls through all things.[1]

> No one can define, if I may thus speak, that which is at the summit of our existence […] He must be very poor in imagination who thinks himself able to exhaust the contemplation even of the simplest flower; how then could we arrive at the knowledge of all that is comprised in the idea of the sublime?[2]

Both William Wordsworth and Madame de Stael illustrate the epistemological crises at the heart of the notion of the sublime. de Stael’s statement is critical, explicit, apparently objective in stating that the sublime, which stands ‘at the summit of our existence’, is beyond

[1] William Wordsworth, ‘Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye During a Tour, July 13, 1798’, in William Wordsworth & Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads 1798 and 1800*, ed. by Michael Gamer and Dahlia Porter (Canada: Broadview Editions, 2008), pp. 142–147, (p. 145), lines 94–110.

[2] Baroness Anne Louis Germaine de Stael-Holstein [Madame de Stael], *Germany* [1813], trans. by O. W. Wight, 2 vols (Boston, Houghton, Mifflet & Co., 1859) vol II, p. 170.

the powers of definition and indeed knowledge. Wordsworth, however, provides a poetical, implicit, and essentially subjective credo ('*I* have felt'), whose grasping, numinous use of language, (a 'presence, a 'something', a 'motion', and a 'spirit',) eludes a definitive reading and yet somehow attains that summit to which de Stael is alluding, somehow achieves a 'sense' of the sublime to which it accounts for. Such a comparison articulates the distinction made by Peter de Bolla between a discourse 'on the sublime' (de Stael) and a discourse 'of the sublime' (Wordsworth). The discourse on the sublime is theoretical, attempting to explain or analyse the sublime, whilst the discourse of the sublime is practical because it 'produces from within itself sublime experience'.[3] In 1757, the Scottish philosopher David Hume had drawn a comparison which acknowledged the successive, contested nature of theory, whilst promoting the dominancy of this praxis: 'Just expressions of passion and nature are sure, after a little time, to gain public applause, which they maintain forever. Aristotle, and Plato, and Epicurus, and Descartes, may successively yield to each other: but Terence and Virgil maintain a universal, undisputed empire over the minds of men'.[4] This introductory chapter seeks to address both modes of discourse in considering how eighteenth-century British writers attempted to account for this production of sublime experience. This will propel the primary interest of this thesis: how did such experience, the '*ne plus ultra* of experience', manifest in the poetry of the period? Whilst philosophers and theorists attempting to define the ineffable sublime ultimately yield to each other, there emerges around the year of Hume's writing a distinct mode of poetic praxis formulated and conceived as 'expressions of passion and nature' which ultimately produce the period known as 'Romantic'. Indeed, recently Cian Duffy has suggested that the sublime is 'arguably *the* emblem and archetype — of the wider

[3] Peter de Bolla, *The Discourse of the Sublime: Readings in History, Aesthetics and the Subject* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 12.

[4] David Hume, 'Of the Standard of Taste', (1757), in *David Hume: Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. by Eugene F. Miller (Indiana: Liberty Classics, 1985), pp. 226–249, (pp. 242–243).

–In recent decades modern analytical philosophy has considered this distinction further. In 1993, Guy Sircello, connected both modes of discourse under the theme of 'epistemological transcendence' noticing the potential (articulated by de Stael) to 'construct an argument purporting to show that no (true) theory of the sublime is possible', in 'How is a Theory of the Sublime Possible?', in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism,* Autumn, 1993, Vol. 51, No. 4 (Autumn, 1993), pp. 541–550, (p. 545). Subsequently, in 2007, Jane Forsay responded by stating that (somewhat abstrusely) the discourse of the sublime does 'nothing for a purported theory of the sublime', concluding that 'a theory of the sublime such as we have historically driven for is simply out of reach', in 'Is a Theory of the Sublime Possible?' [2007], in *The Sublime Reader*, ed. by Robert R. Clewis (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), pp. 319–328, (p. 327). Then in 2017 a group of philosophers and theorists responded to Forsay with a series of essays exploring the possibility of a theory on the sublime in *The Possibility of The Sublime: Aesthetic Exchanges* ed. by Lars Aagaard Mogensen (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2017). Such arguments highlight the continued and current epistemological crisis of the sublime in which theories of sublimity remain successive and contested since their conception in the eighteenth century.

cultural movement that scholars have called 'Romanticism'.[5] This thesis will attempt to outline the emergence and development of such a typology of what is now recognised as being 'the Romantic sublime', and what Wordsworth as poet understood as 'the types and symbols of eternity'.

What then constitutes sublimity? The model which I propose is based on the following hypothesis by the semiologist Stephen K. Land: 'The sublime is an elusive and fluid concept which cannot be confined to either the word or the mind or the world, but which is somehow realised in the meeting of all three'.[6] Land, like de Stael and Wordsworth, is highlighting that the sublime is both 'elusive' and 'fluid', resisting the bounds of aggregate forms of 'word', 'mind' or 'world', yet paradoxically realised in the coming together of all three. In line with the contexts of the eighteenth century's conception of the sublime, I reverse Land's order to a more pertinent paradigm of 'nature', 'mind', and 'poetry'. For the eighteenth-century poet or philosopher, an encounter with the natural sublime elicits the conscious experience of sublimity which allows for the creative expression of the sublime into poetry. Crucially, this order is not static but circular. Poetry of the sublime subsequently informs the impression of nature which enhances the experience of sublimity then remediated into poetic form and so on, a self-perpetuating, synergetic circle. In simple terms impression leads to expression and continues. The focus of my research will be on how poetry performs within this circle. Wordsworth's friend and collaborator Samuel Taylor Coleridge suggests that such a circular model is in fact the eventual aim of all poetry: 'The common end of all narrative, nay, of all Poems, is to convert a series into a Whole: to make those events, which in real or imagined History move on in a strait line, assume to our Understandings a circular motion — the snake with its tail in the mouth. Hence indeed the almost flattering and yet appropriate term — Poesy — i.e. poiesis= making'.[7] It is from this idea of 'poiesis', from which my proposition of a poetics of the sublime derives; the ultimate iteration of the

[5] Cian Duffy, 'Introduction: The Romantic Sublime, Then and Now', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Romantic Sublime*, ed. by Cian Duffy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), pp. 1–13, (p. 2).
[6] Stephen K. Land, *From Signs to Propositions: The Concepts of Form in Eighteenth Century Semantic Theory*, (London: Longman Linguistics Library, 1974), p. 38.
[7] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Letter 956. To Joseph Cottle' [March 7th, 1815], in *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. by Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), vol. IV, pp. 545–7, (p. 545).

'making' of the sublime.[8] Consequently, that the sublime is at the heart of the making of late eighteenth-century poetry will be the eventual aim of this thesis.

Jonathan Friday asserts that 'the notion of the sublime was first and foremost conceived as a quality of literature' based on the found and founding text on the sublime *Peri Hypsous* attributed to Longinus in the first-century CE.[9] Longinus's text is recognised as 'the fountain-head of all ideas' on the sublime, being the first to attempt to provide 'a clear understanding and appreciation of what constitutes the true sublime'.[10] In *Peri Hypsous,* the author states axiomatically that 'sublimity consists in a certain excellence and distinction in expression', and that it is 'from this source alone' that the experience of the sublime is allowed to 'exert an irresistible force and mastery' in order to 'transport us with wonder'.[11] Longinus's focus on oratory and rhetorical techniques and his popularisation in 1764 by the French 'archetypal "neo-classical" rules critic' Nicolas Boileau gave rise to what is understood as the 'rhetorical sublime', a tradition which animated discourse on the sublime in Britain throughout the eighteenth century.[12] Whilst recognising the importance of the Longinian tradition, the distinction between the rhetorical sublime and the poetics of the sublime can be simply articulated by the functional viewpoint set out by Steven M. Weiss that 'rhetoric persuades (or aims at persuasion), while poetics expresses (or manifests appreciation of an expressive or aesthetic nature)'.[13] This in turn conforms to the rise of the sublime

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[8] I am also entirely indebted to Vincent De Luca's visionary monograph on William Blake from which I rely on his summation that the sublime is a 'unified field, embracing art and nature, subject and object, matter and spirit; hence, it is a concept broad enough to serve as the basis of a sophisticated and serviceable poetics', in Vincent De Luca, *Words of Eternity: Blake and the Poetics of the Sublime* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 4.

[9] Jonathan Friday, *Art and Enlightenment: Scottish Aesthetics in the Eighteenth Century* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2004), p. 9.

[10] Samuel H. Monk, *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in Eighteenth-Century England* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1935, 1960), p. 10.
–Longinus, 'On the Sublime', in *Classical Literary Criticism*, trans. by T. S. Dorsch, (London: Penguin Books, 1965), pp. 97–158, (p. 106).

[11] Ibid., p. 100.

[12] David Hopkins notes that Boileau 'is still often popularly thought of as the archetypal "neo–classical" Rules critic, a "Legislateur du Parnasse" who laid down tyrannical and Procrustean laws for literary composition', in C*onversing with Antiquity: English Poets and the Classics, from Shakespeare to Pope* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 47.
–For the importance of the Longinian tradition see Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla's response to Samuel Holt Monk's 'devaluation of rhetorically centred discussions of the sublime' in which they maintain that 'this Longinian tradition repeatedly informs the *transformational* capacities of the discourse on the sublime', stating that 'without this rhetorical conceptual base […] there would be no means of getting from aesthetics to politics, or from the ethical sublime to the politics of the imagination', in 'Introduction' to *The Sublime: A Reader in British Eighteenth–Century Aesthetic Theory*, ed. by Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 1–16, (pp. 10–11).

[13] Steven M. Weiss, 'Rhetoric and Poetics: A Re–Evaluation of the Aristotelian Distinction', in *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* Vol. 12, No. 1 (Winter, 1982), pp. 21–29, (p. 22).

throughout eighteenth-century Britain from a subject of rhetoric inherited from the French school of Boileau, to the development of the philosophical school of enquiry of aesthetics, with poetics expansively bridging the two.[14]

Such a progression was instigated by the prolific author, poet, and critic, Joseph Addison, whose multi-form and far-reaching influence will be explored throughout this thesis. Whilst his role as arbiter of the ballad revival shall be considered in Chapter 3, Addison is further acknowledged as promoting the 'Milton-mania' that was extant throughout the period.[15] This is largely due to his popular *Spectator* series on *Paradise Lost* in which he rapturised Milton's epic as being both 'wonderfully poetical' and 'truly sublime'.[16] Samuel Johnson, who features prominently in Chapter 2 as James Macpherson's great adversary, recognised the immense influence of his forebear, Addison: 'Had he presented Paradise Lost to the publick with all the pomp of system and severity of science, the criticism would perhaps have been admired, and the poem still have been neglected; but by the blandishments of gentleness and facility he has made Milton an universal favourite, with whom readers of every class think it necessary to be pleased'.[17] What Johnson highlights is the peculiar difference of Addison's strain of criticism which set him apart from the 'pomp of system and

[14] The term aesthetics, based on the Greek word *aisthetikos*, meaning 'sensitive, or 'sentient', was first coined by the German philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten in 1735 but was not widely used as a term until into the nineteenth century. Aesthetics has its origins in Longinus's Greek text but developed as a philosophical school in France and Germany with the greatest developments happening in eighteenth–century Britain often considered under the term used comprehensively by Addison, Hume and others as 'Taste'. See George Dickie, *The Century of Taste: The Philosophical Odyssey of Taste in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), and for a concise account of the development of the sublime under aesthetics see Timothy Costelloe's, 'The Sublime: A Short Introduction to a Long History', in *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present*, ed. by Timothy M. Costelloe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) pp. 1–10, (pp. 2–3), and M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham's entry on 'Aestheticism', in *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 11th edn (Stamford: Cengage Learning, 2015), pp. 5–7.

[15] Addison of course was not alone nor the first to praise Milton's text as sublime, his rival John Dennis had preceded Addison in writing extensively on the sublimity of *Paradise Lost* in works such as *The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry* (1701) and *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* (1704), with Catherine Gimelli Martin rightly describing Dennis as 'undoubtedly Milton's most sympathetic and perceptive early literary promoter', in 'John Dennis, John Locke, and the Sublimation of Revolt: *Samson Agonistes* after the Glorious Revolution', in *Milton in the Long Restoration* ed. by Blair Hoxby, and Ann Baynes Coiro (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) pp. 121–142, (p. 122). However, Addison's distinct mode of criticism achieved him a far more popular and lasting legacy with Michelle Syba noting that Addison's 'influential papers on *Paradise Lost* were republished as a book at least nine times by 1779', in Michelle Syba, 'After Design: Joseph Addison Discovers Beauties', in *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500–1900*, vo. 49, no. 3, (Summer 2009), pp. 615–635, (p. 616).

[16]Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, No's. 303 [Saturday, February 16, 1712], 321 [Saturday, March 8, 1712] in *Critical Essays from The Spectator by Joseph Addison with Four Essays by Richard Steele*, ed. by Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 89–96, 109–116, (pp. 90, 112).

[17] Samuel Johnson, 'Life of Addison' (1779,1781) in *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets; With Critical Observations on their Works*, with an introduction and notes by Roger Lonsdale, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), vol. 3, pp. 1–39, (p. 37).

severity of science' of the neoclassical rhetoricians. This mode of criticism is clearly stated in the introductory paper to his foundational and much lauded *Spectator* series 'The Pleasures of the Imagination' of 1712:

> I must confess that I could wish there were Authors of this kind, who beside the Mechanical Rules which a Man of very little Taste may discourse upon, would enter into the very Spirit and Soul of fine Writing, and shew us the several Sources of that Pleasure which rises in the Mind upon the Perusal of a noble Work. Thus although in Poetry it be absolutely necessary that the Unities of Time, Place and Action, with other Points of the same Nature, should be thoroughly explained and understood; there is still something more essential to the Art, something that elevates and astonishes the Fancy, and gives a Greatness of Mind to the Reader, which few of the Criticks besides Longinus have considered.[18]

Addison's proposal is clearly stated in Longinian terms, to avoid the 'narrowly formalist terms' of French neoclassicists in favour of an exploration of poetry's essential 'something that elevates and astonishes'.[19] Addison then states that the purpose of his ensuing 'Pleasures' essays is to 'suggest to the Reader what it is that gives a Beauty to many Passages of the finest Writers both in Prose and Verse'.[20] In suggesting that something (which he identifies as nature) provides aesthetic stimuli to appreciation of poetic discourse, Addison's work is formative in promoting the synergy of impression and expression which completes the proposed circular model of the poetics of the sublime.

Yet problematically, Addison's 'greatest contribution to the history of criticism' has traditionally been given to his alleged dethroning of poetics in favour of nature.[21] In the 'Pleasures' series Addison sets out a distinction between the 'Works of *Nature* and *Art*, as they are qualified to entertain the Imagination', stating that 'we shall find the last very defective, in Comparison of the former'.[22] For Addison, 'Art' can 'have nothing of that

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[18] Addison, *The Spectator*, No. 409, pp. 172–175, (p. 174).
[19] Leopold Damrosch, Jr, provides a compelling estimation of the importance of Addison's criticism, noting that Addison 'wants to know what readers feel and why they feel that way, not to dictate what their feelings must be or to analyse literary structure in narrowly formalist terms as the French neoclassicists had been doing', whilst also noticing that 'by emphasising the sublime in Milton […] Addison invokes a quality of greatness that transcends the ordinary preoccupations of prescriptive criticism', in 'The Significance of Addison's Criticism', in *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Summer, 1979), pp. 421–430, (p. 428).
[20] Addison, *The Spectator*, No. 409, p. 175.
[21] Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite* (Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 1959), p. 310.
[22] Addison, *The Spectator*, No. 414, pp. 183–186, (p. 183).

Vastness and Immensity [found in nature], which afford so great an Entertainment to the Mind of the Beholder'.[23] The two seminal works of twentieth-century historical criticism on the sublime, Samuel Holt Monk's *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in Eighteenth Century England* (1935), and Marjorie Hope Nicolson's *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite* (1959), both seize upon Addison's separation of the rhetorical sublime as being 'secondary' to the 'primary pleasures' of the natural sublime as signalling the conquest of the newly emerged aesthetic. Whilst Monk praises it as being 'the first effort in the century to build up a real aesthetic', Nicolson offers a more sustained account stating that 'in his vocabulary and in his aesthetic system, [Addison] made a careful distinction between the "rhetorical" and the "natural" sublime', and that he was 'urging upon his contemporaries the necessity of man's looking directly upon Nature and realising that the stimulus that came from painting or poetry was "secondary".[24] However, both Monk and Nicholson fail to address Addison's one caveat towards the end of *The Spectator*, No. 416, in which 'Words' and more significantly, 'the Poet' usurp nature:

> Words, when well chosen, have so great a Force in them, that a Description often gives us more lively Ideas than the Sight of things themselves. The Reader finds a Scene drawn in stronger Colours, and painted more to the life in his Imagination, by the help of Words, than by an actual Survey of the Scene which they describe. In this Case the Poet seems to get the better of Nature; he takes, indeed, the Landskip after her, but gives it more vigorous Touches, heightens its Beauty, and so enlivens the whole Piece, that the Images which flow from the Objects themselves appear weak and faint, in Comparison of those that come from the Expressions.[25]

Whilst Addison notes the primacy of nature: 'he takes, indeed, the Landskip after her', the sight of such scenes 'appear weak and faint, in Comparison of those that come from the *Expressions*'. In other words: expression outdoes or exceeds impression. Nor does this align with rhetoric in so far that Addison assiduously avoids mention of rules, instead providing a simple account of its 'making' with 'vigorous Touches' which 'heightens' and 'enlivens'— a poetic praxis of the sublime.[26]

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[23] Ibid.
[24] Monk, *The Sublime,* p. 57.
–Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*, pp. 311, 310.
[25] Addison, *The Spectator*, No. 416, pp. 190–193, p. 192.
[26] See Neil Saccamano's compelling discussion of the 'sublime force of words' in Addison's criticism, contending that 'Addison's hierarchical inversion of nature and literary art in the "Pleasures" is itself a sublime

If Addison provided the 'first sustained piece of writing on aesthetic in eighteenth-century England', what followed was a deluge, and certainly not from just England, but across Britain and Ireland.[27] De Bolla estimates that 'during the course of the eighteenth century some few thousand works were published in Britain on the general topic of aesthetics',[28] whilst Timothy Costelloe has more recently suggested a larger figure of 'some five thousand'.[29] Modern critics of the sublime have had to contend with the 'mutational nature' and 'tropological migrations' of the aesthetic, as well as the 'dizzying array of discursive and experiential contexts' in which the sublime consumed eighteenth-century thought and discussion.[30] This has resulted in a similarly diverse body of criticism which has attempted to chart the conceptualisation of the sublime as aesthetic through differing and often 'dizzying' modes. Monk and Nicholson's early accounts illustrate the historicist approach, whilst in later years Thomas Weiskel (1976) and Neil Hertz (1985) offered psychoanalytical readings.[31] In recent decades James Kirwan (2005), Philip Shaw (2006), Timothy Costelloe (2013), and Robert Doran (2015) have each produced monographs which explore the sublime's theoretical development, with Cian Duffy also contributing readings of 'Cultures' (2011) and 'Landscapes' of the sublime (2013).[32] Whilst my research is informed by these discussions, my own approach is more in line with that of Angela Leighton (1984) and Vincent de Luca (1991) who each examine the sublime in terms of its mediation within poetry.[33] Whilst Leighton analyses the individual poetic practice of Percy Shelley, and De Luca that of William Blake, I consider a broader collective of poets and their work which

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turn or trope whose strategic interest needs to be analysed', in 'The Sublime Force of Words in Addison's "Pleasures", in *ELH*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (Spring, 1991), pp. 83–106, (p. 85).

[27] Monk, *The Sublime*, p. 57.

[28] Peter de Bolla, *The Discourse of the Sublime*, p. 27.

[29] Timothy M. Costelloe, *The British Aesthetic Tradition from Shaftesbury to Wittgenstein* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. ix.

[30] Ashfield and d Bolla, *The Sublime: A Reader*, p. 10.
–see also Cian Duffy who discusses how 'The remarkably broad scope and no less remarkably porous discursive boundaries of the investigation of sublimity explain why it became such a ubiquitous component of English, Irish, and Scottish philosophy during the eighteenth century: simply put, myriad discursive threads led to and from it', in 'The Sublime in Eighteenth–Century English, Irish and Scottish Philosophy', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Romantic Sublime*, pp. 41–52, p. 44.

[31] Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence*, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1976), Neil Hertz, *The End of the Line: Essays on Psychoanalysis and the Sublime* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

[32] James Kirwan, *Sublimity: The Non-Rational and the Irrational in the History of Aesthetics* (New York: Routledge, 2005), Philip Shaw, *The Sublime* (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), Costelloe, *The British Aesthetic Tradition*, Robert Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime from Longinus to Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), Cian Duffy, *Cultures of the Sublime: Selected Readings 1750–1830*, ed. by Cian Duffy and Peter Howell (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), Cian Duffy, *The Landscapes of the Sublime, 1700–1830* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

[33] Angela Leighton, *Shelley and the Sublime: An Interpretation of the Major Poems*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), De Luca, *Words of Eternity*.

charts a genealogy of sublime poetics not yet mapped. Such a lineage ultimately stems from around the mid-eighteenth century with the continuation of Addison's project by the young Irishman, Edmund Burke.

In response to what he viewed as the 'inaccurate and inconclusive […] confusion of ideas' surrounding theories of the sublime, Edmund Burke published in 1757 *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Very much in the mode of Addison, Burke's *Enquiry* attempts to avoid 'the false lights' of abstract philosophical doctrines in favour of 'an easy observation of the most common, sometimes of the meanest things in nature'.[34] The *Enquiry*'s leading tenet is that the sublime is 'the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling' and that terror is 'the ruling principle of the sublime'.[35] Whilst Burke provides an impressive and influential codex of powers that elicit the natural sublime (ranging from serpents to the darkness of night), he illustrates such desiderata throughout with extensive reference to poetry. Echoing Addison, Burke states that:

> Words affect us in a manner very different from that in which we are affected by natural objects, or by painting or architecture; yet words have as considerable a share in exciting ideas of beauty and of the sublime as any of those, and sometimes a much greater than any of them.[36]

The impression of nature is exceeded by the expression of poetry with Burke reiterating that 'eloquence and poetry are as capable, nay indeed much more capable of making deep and lively impression than any other arts, and even than nature itself in very many cases'.[37] Despite the distinct inheritance from Addison, Thomas Weiskel acknowledges that the seminal achievement of the *Enquiry* is that Burke 'establishes a connection between scenes of terror and the "true sublime" in the poets'.[38] Indeed, in coining the term 'the Romantic sublime', Weiskel bases his structural model upon 'the hypothesis that the encounter with literary greatness […] is structurally cognate with the transcendence, gentle or terrible,

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[34] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. with introduction and notes by James T. Boulton [1958], (London: Routledge Classics, 2008), p. 54.
[35] Ibid. pp. 57–8.
[36] Ibid. p. 61.
–Frances Ferguson notes that 'the very efficacy of language for Burke resides in its obscurity, and poetry assumes the highest place in his ordering of the arts because it is distanced from nature and defined precisely in terms of its not being an imitation of reality', in *Solitude and the Sublime: The Romantic Aesthetics of Individuation* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 43.
[37] Burke, *Enquiry*, p. 171.
[38] Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence*, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 11.

excited in the encounter with landscape, the "natural sublime"'.[39] It is therefore possible to surmise that the synergy between nature, mind, and poetry emerges in the 'the most popular treatise of the century', marking a watershed moment in which a poetics of the sublime was successfully theorised and popularly received.[40]

In her luminous discussion of Burke's *Enquiry*, Frances Ferguson notes that 'the sublime at moments resembles a null set, or a category of experience that can only be spoken of elegiacally'.[41] The elegiac reliance on classical exemplars of the sublime is somewhat abated by Burke's favouring of Milton, the foremost poet of the sublime: 'No person seems better to have understood the secret of heightening, or of setting terrible things […] in their strongest light by the force of a judicious obscurity, than Milton'.[42] Dustin Griffin observes that 'unlike earlier classics and national poets, Milton for the eighteenth century was a giant of the *recent* past'.[43] Yet, however recent, there existed no 'giants' of sublime poetry at the time of Burke's *Enquiry*, with Shaun Irlim describing the period as 'that black hole of English poetry between neoclassicism and romanticism'.[44] Whilst James Thomson's *The Seasons* (1730) provided an influential poetic study of the natural sublime promoted by Addison, from this 'black hole' emerged nothing which could match the requisite 'giant' stature of sublime poetics— the epic.[45] This is not to say there were not attempts. Alexander Pope, who was popularly regarded as being 'form'd to fill the Epic throne', produced a successful mock-epic, *The Dunciad* (1728), which satirised the principal feature of the form, the sublime.[46] Yet Pope never fulfilled his promise, leaving his 'throne' unoccupied and his planned 'great epic' *Brutus* unfinished. Furthermore, the period maintained a lively critical discussion of the form

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[39] Ibid.

[40] As first suggested by Monk who states that Burke's *Enquiry* 'passed on to the preromantic period, where it helps prepare the way for the overthrow of what Wordsworth calls "the meddling intellect" and Keats, "the dull brain", in *The Sublime*, p. 93

[41] Ferguson, *Solitude and the Sublime*, p. 47.

[42] Burke, *Enquiry*, p. 59.

[43] Dustin Griffin, *Regaining Paradise: Milton and the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 3.

[44]Shaun Irlam, *Elations: The Poetics of Enthusiasm in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 11.

[45] For Addison's influence on the nature poets who followed see Nicolson who states, 'Later poets, like Thomson, who went back to Addison as to a master, learned many things from him, but perhaps none more important than the necessity of developing the imagination by looking at and seeing those objects in the natural world that most stimulated the imagination [the sublime]', in Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*, p. 309.

[46]A leading poet and writer of the time, William Hayley had commiserated in verse Pope's decision to favour satire over the 'visionary realm' of the epic: 'See him, tho' form'd to fill the Epic throne, / Decline the sceptre of that wide domain, / To bear a Lictor's rod in Satire's train; / And, shrouded in a mist of moral spleen, / Behold him close the visionary scene!', in William Hayley, 'Epistle the Third', in *An Essay on Epic Poetry: in Five Epistles to the Revd. Mr. Mason. With notes. By William Hayley, Esq.* (London: J. Dodsley, 1782), p. 67.

summarised by Johnson's eulogium in 1779, 'by the general consent of criticks the first praise of genius is due to the writer of an epick poem, as it requires an assemblage of all the powers which are singularly sufficient for other compositions'.[47] However, as Griffin surmises, 'the plain fact remains that, as contemporaries themselves recognised, no great epic poems were written in the period'.[48] I therefore begin my exploration of the poetics of the sublime in eighteenth century Britain at this nexus in which the elegiac bent of theorists typified by Burke, and articulated famously by Thomas Blackwell's lament 'we may never be a proper subject of an heroic [epic] poem' was countered by the appearance of what can faithfully be described as a supernova event.[49] This phenomenon shall be the subject of Chapter 2's discussion on James Macpherson's epochal collection of poetry *The Poems of Ossian* (1765). In this chapter I consider the intermedial exchange between Burke's contemporaneous theory of the sublime and the iconic poetics of the Ossianic sublime. Macpherson's conscription of the typology of the bardic tradition will be evidenced by examination of the matriculation of Ossian into a lineage of blind bards celebrated for the sublimity of their poetry. This chapter in turn provides an extensive exploration of the poetic praxis of Macpherson's first collection *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* (1760), and the ensuing epics *Fingal* (1762), and the critically dismissed *Temora* (1763), assessing the formal qualities of fragment and epic whilst analysing the imitative and instigative production of the Ossianic sublime.

Throughout the next two chapters I address the succession of the Ossianic bard by the poetic figure of the minstrel as initiated by Thomas Percy. Chapter 3 reconsiders the significance of Addison's ballad papers against the backdrop of the eighteenth century's 'ballad-revival', contending that they represent a still unrecognised and foundational discourse on the sublime. Whereas Macpherson's and Blair's project was one of legitimation, elevating ballad poetics to heroic proportions, I examine Addison's proposal as a direct inversion of this process in synthesising the epic to the ballad. I also consider how Percy (as with Macpherson with Burke), relies on the precepts set out by Addison to promote the ballad against critical ostracism, whilst also achieving his own project of providing a successor to the Ossianic bard in his instituting of the minstrel. The remainder of the chapter provides a

[47] Samuel Johnson, 'Life of Milton', in, *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*, vol. I. pp. 242–295, (p. 282).
[48] Griffin, *Regaining Paradise*, p. 47.
[49] Thomas Blackwell, *An Enquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer*, (1735), 2nd Ed. Reprint (Hildesheim and New York: Georg Olms, 1976), p. 28.

comparative study of the ballads published by Percy in his influential collection *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765), analysing how sublimity is rendered within the ballad poetic. Chapter 4 continues the discussion of the minstrelsy of the sublime with a reading of James Beattie's *The Minstrel* (1771, 1774). I offer a revisionary examination of Beattie's overlooked essay 'Illustrations of Sublimity' whilst discussing the aesthetic investiture from his 'hero' Addison. In doing so I contend that Beattie's *Minstrel* was inspired by the same poetic principles as Percy's *Reliques*, a significant claim which draws attention to an undercurrent of sublime poetics yet unnoticed. Considering how Beattie reinvigorates such poetics with his use of the neo-Spenserian stanza, I discuss the confluence of ideas between Edmund Spenser's *The Faery Queen* (1590) and the traditional ballad codex, noting again the inheritance of such ideas from Addison. A close textual analysis of Beattie's poem then follows, focusing on the first Canto's 21st stanza as the apogee of the minstrel, Edwin's, experience of sublimity, observing how poetic epiphany becomes entelechy. My reading contends that the positioning of Edwin 'standing sublime' is a tectonic instance in literary history in which the Romantic sublime emerges and that whilst Beattie effectively completes the ascendency of minstrel from bard, he also provides the Romantic archetype of the 'poet sublime'.

The final two chapters detail the early-Romantic idealisation of this persona of poet standing on high as the apotheosis of the sublime poet. Chapter 5 addresses the critical oversight of Robert Burns's rendering of sublimity through discussion of the hegemonic whitewashing of the sublime in favour of the sentimental (largely promoted by Carol McGuirk's influential study *Robert Burns and the Sentimental Era* (1997)), by providing a revisionary reading of Henry Mackenzie's contentious review in which he ordained the labouring-class poet as 'heaven-taught ploughman'. A reconsideration of Burns's commonplace book which highlights the poet's reverence of the natural and poetic sublime alongside a reading of his Highland poem 'Lines on the Fall of Foyers, near Loch Ness' (1787) show that Burns promoted himself as Macpherson's successor in fulfilling the proposed circular model of the sublime. An examination of Burns's most prolific rendering of sublimity, 'The Vision', reveals the intertextual transmission from *The Minstrel's* supreme stanza, in which Burns positions his speaker as Edwin standing sublime. The chapter's primary claim is that Burns aligns his self-fashioned persona as 'rustic bard' with his conscription of the standard habbie stanza, (an unfamiliar vehicle for the expression of sublimity), and his use of Scots language to produce his own localised form of sublime poetry. In the final chapter I identify

the consummation of the period's developing poetics of the sublime in the work of William Wordsworth. With analysis of Wordsworth's early locodescriptive poem *The Vale of Esthwaite*, I contend that the young poet relies on Macpherson's *Temora* to render a distinctly Ossianic sense of sublimity. In discussing the mature Wordsworth's subsequent disavowal of Macpherson, this chapter illustrates how Wordsworth still projects a reverence for the bardic tradition of the sublime throughout his career. With analysis of two canonical 'spots of time' from *The Prelude* (1805), I show how Wordsworth develops scenes from his formative poetry to evoke his own conception of visionary power, the 'sense sublime' which is attended to by nature yet empowered by poetry. I then consider the two most acclaimed instances of Wordsworth's capturing of the sublime at the Simplon pass and atop Snowdon. With comparative analysis of the sublimity of both passages I contend that whilst the Simplon episode may be considered a summit for both Romantic and sublime poetics, for Wordsworth it was not. Instead, this chapter aims to highlight how Wordsworth draws upon *The Minstrel*'s archetype to generate the unity necessary for the consummation of the sublime atop Snowdon, achieving the conclusive portrait of the poet sublime. This chapter then charts Wordsworth's inheritance of such a consummation back to his formative poetry in the locodescriptive mode. I consider how Beattie's formation of the sublime poet informs Wordsworth's juvenilia, examining the early poems of 1793, *An Evening Walk*, and *Descriptive Sketches*, whilst drawing yet unnoticed parallels with Burns. My study of Wordsworth concludes with a reading of 'Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798', in which I discuss the profound interchange of the younger poet of his formative work, the poet then, and the poet to be of *The Prelude*, a prescient 'interfusion' of sublime poetics.

Each chapter represents a stage in the development of a genealogy of sublime poets which has yet to be fully recognised. The primary intervention of this thesis is a remodelling of the Anglocentric periodising parameters which has occluded Scottish texts such as *Ossian* and *The Minstrel* from inclusion into the Romantic tradition of poetry. By tracing exchanges both aesthetic and poetic between canonical works of English poetry (from Percy's *Reliques* to Wordsworth's *Prelude*) and Scottish texts which have conventionally been disdained (*Ossian*), dismissed (*The Minstrel*), or overlooked (*The Vision*) I aim to show the seminal and influential role Scottish poets played in producing the Romantic sublime. The methodology will be of close textual analysis sensitive to formal and generic conventions from epic and ballad, through to the neo-Spenserian and standard habbie stanzas, closing with the ranging locodescriptive

mode favoured by Wordsworth. Expanding upon De Luca's exemplary study of the sublime poetics of Blake, I aim to show how each poet's rendering of sublime verse was 'as a response to an *immediate* aesthetic context- that is, as the response of a conscious practitioner in a living, developing mode'.[50] Whilst the preeminent interest will be on how this poetic mode, or praxis, develops in connection with the genealogical and intertextual inheritance from others, I also examine a wide range of paratextual materials from essays, prefaces, letters and commonplace books which inform this context. What becomes apparent throughout this study is the increasing succession of the 'making' of sublime poetry to its 'maker'. Beginning with Macpherson's instituting of a provocative bardship which would lead to Burns's global and present-day status as Scotland's national bard, the evolution and eventual apotheosis of bard to minstrel to Romantic and sublime poet is revealed.

[50] De Luca, *Words of Eternity*, p. 8.

Chapter 2.

‘Am I forgot in the folds of darkness?’: The Ossianic Sublime.

> There is no great merit in telling how many plays have ghosts in them, and how this ghost is better than that. You must show how terrour is impressed on the human heart[1].
>
> The two great characteristics of Ossian’s poetry are, tenderness and sublimity. […] His poetry, more perhaps than that of any other writer, deserves to be stiled, *The Poetry of the Heart*. It is a heart penetrated with noble sentiments, and with the sublime and tender passions; a heart that glows, and kindles the fancy; a heart that is full, and pours itself forth. Ossian did not write, like modern poets, to please readers and critics. He sung from the love of poetry and song.[2]

In 1769, England's famed lexicographer and literary critic, Samuel Johnson, had spoken of Burke's *Enquiry* as being 'an example of true criticism'.[3] For him, as for many, it went beyond a well-surveyed taxonomy of the sublime in not just telling 'how many plays have ghosts in them' or 'how this ghost is better than that', but by decisively showing 'how terrour is impressed on the human heart'. For both Addison and Burke, it is the sublime 'expression' of poetry which can most powerfully achieve the 'impression' of sublimity 'on the human heart'. This poetics of the sublime may therefore be styled, in concert with Hugh Blair, 'The Poetry of the Heart'. For Blair, writing in 1765, there was no greater poetry than that of *Ossian*. The poetry referred to collectively as *Ossian* comprises the three collections of poems compiled by James Macpherson; *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* (1760), *Fingal: An Ancient Epic Poem in Six Books* (1762), and *Temora: An Epic Poem in Eight Books* (1763). It is the 'sublime and tender passions' at the heart of the poetry of *Ossian*, what Blair hailed as the 'true poetical sublime', which will be the subject of this next chapter.[4]

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[1] Samuel Johnson, in James Boswell, *Life of Johnson* [1791], ed. by Ernest Rhys, 2 vols (London: J. M. Dent & Co., 1906) vol. 2, p. 90.
[2] Hugh Blair, 'Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian' [1765], in *The Poems of Ossian and Related Works*, ed. by Howard Gaskill (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988), pp. 342–399, (p. 356).
[3] Johnson, in Boswell, *Life of Johnson,* vol. 2, p. 90.
[4] Blair, 'Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian', p. 394.

Despite Blair's zealous acclamation that heedless Ossian ‘sung from the love of poetry and song’ alone, he did more than modern or ancient poet alike in his unprecedented ability to ‘please readers and critics’. The phenomenal appeal of *Ossian* is difficult to articulate without risk of hyperbole. Today, critics refer to the sensational success of the poems as the ‘Ossian phenomenon’ following Frank Brady’s description of it as ‘the most startling phenomenon in the history of British literature’.[5] The immediacy and pervasiveness of the popularity of *Ossian* was unparalleled and it quickly exceeded the bounds of British Literature, with Eric Gidal listing fourteen different languages, from French to Classical Greek, in which it was translated.[6] In 1805, the year George Chalmers had detailed *Ossian's* commercial accomplishment: ‘Except the Bible and Shakespeare, there is not any book that sells better than *Ossian*',[7] Macpherson’s successor, Walter Scott, had written of the unlikely, yet permeating impact of the Ossianic:

> our national vanity may be equally flattered by the fact, that a remote, and almost barbarous corner of Scotland, produced, in the 18th century, a bard, capable not only of making an enthusiastic impression on every mind susceptible of poetical beauty, but of giving a new tone to poetry throughout all Europe.[8]

The 'enthusiastic impression' Scott speaks of is the now familiar impression of sublimity which Burke’s *Enquiry* had purported, and which the opening quotation from Johnson commends. Therefore, while *Ossian* provided ‘a new tone to poetry’ in Britain and ‘throughout all Europe’, of elegy, melancholy, ghosts, and the vast, obscure power of nature, all of which are endemic to the sublime, it was very much the success of Burke’s *Enquiry* which had set this tone. The dialectical synchrony between Burke’s theory of sublimity and the poetics of *Ossian* needs further explication to make distinct the importance of the

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[5] Frank Brady, *James Boswell: The Later Years 1769–1795*, (London: Heinemann, 1984), p. 71.
—For the definitive account of the ‘Ossian phenomenon’ see Howard Gaskill’s *The Reception of Ossian in Europe* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), and James Porter who offers a more concise account in ‘“Bring Me the Head of James Macpherson”: The Execution of Ossian and the Wellsprings of Folkloristic Discourse.’, in *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 114, no. 454 (University of Illinois Press, 2001), pp. 396–435.
– See also Paul J Degategno’s exemplary account of the influence *Ossian* on Thomas Jefferson and 'the vogue of Ossian in America' during the 18th and 19th centuries, in ‘“The Source of Daily and Exalted Pleasure”: Jefferson Reads the Poems of Ossian’, in *Ossian Revisited*, ed. by Howard Gaskill (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), pp. 94–108.
[6] Gidal lists the following languages in which *Ossian* was translated: 'French, Dutch, German, Swedish, Finnish, Italian, Russian, Danish, Hungarian, Spanish, Polish, Czech, Latin, and Classical Greek', in Eric Gidal, *Ossianic Unconformities: Bardic Poetry in the Industrial Age* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015), p. 3.
[7] George Chalmers, [17 July 1805], quoted in Fiona Stafford, *The Sublime Savage: A Study of James Macpherson and The Poems of Ossian* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988), p. 171.
[8] Walter Scott, in *The Edinburgh Review* [July 1805], vol. vi (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable & Co, 1805), p. 462.

Ossianic sublime as contemporary poetic practice, in Samuel Monk's terms; the 'actuality', and fulfilment of aesthetic theory.[9]

Amongst the innumerable list of encomia written for *Ossian* during the late eighteenth century, a review appearing in the *Annual Register* in 1762 of Macpherson's *Fingal* is of particular significance.[10] At this time Burke was editor of the *Annual Register*, and whilst the review is published anonymously, the Burkean scholar James T. Boulton, as well as critics of *Ossian*, Dafydd Moore and Howard Gaskill, all concur that it was most certainly Burke himself who had penned the review.[11] Boulton reasons that during Burke's time as editor of the *Annual Register,* his 'aesthetic values remained unchanged' since the time of his writing the *Enquiry*, and that it was the 'policy of the *Register* to review only such books as it was disposed to praise'.[12] That Burke found in *Ossian* a fulfilment of the 'aesthetic values' inherent to his *Enquiry* is readily seen in the elaborate 'praise' and 'literary applause' shown throughout his review*:*

> From the publication of these extraordinary poems, the ingenious editor [James Macpherson] has a double claim to literary applause. One, as having with equal industry and taste recovered from the obscurity of barbarism, the rust of fifteen hundred years, and the last breath of a dying language, these inestimable relicks of the genuine spirit of poetry; and the other, for presenting them to the world in an English translation, whose expressive singularity evidently retains the majestic air, and the native simplicity of a sublime original. The venerable author, and his elegant translator, thus have mutually conferred immortality on each other.[13]

Whilst Burke's panegyric appears exaggerated in detailing the origins of *Fingal*, his emphatic, even, poetic use of language is itself infused with the sublimity formalised by his

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[9] Monk, *The Sublime*, p. 133.

[10] Parts of this chapter are developed from and draw upon the same sources (such as this) as my MPhil dissertation which also considered the sublime poetics of Macpherson's *Ossian*. However, these points of contact are few and the direction, shape, and substance of this chapter are substantially developed and progressed from my earlier work.

[11] Boulton quotes Thomas M. Copeland, in *Our Eminent Friend Edmund Burke* [1945], stating that 'up to 1766 there is "no reason to doubt that Burke was writing the entire [*Annual Register*] single handed"', and so Burke is very likely to have written the review of *Fingal* in 1762. See Boulton, 'Editor's Introduction' to Burke's *Enquiry* pp. xxi–xxiii.
–Dafydd Moore, *Enlightenment and Romance in James Macpherson's The Poems of Ossian: Myth, Genre and Cultural Change*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003) p. 114.
–Gaskill, *The Reception of Ossian in Europe*, p. 25.

[12] Boulton, 'Editor's Introduction' to Burke's *Enquiry* p. xxii.

[13] Anon [Widely assumed to be Edmund Burke] 'Review of *Fingal: An Ancient Epic Poem'*, in *The Annual Register for the Year 1761*, 4: 267–282, in *Ossian and Ossianism*, ed. by Dafydd Moore, 4 vols. (London: Routledge, 2004), vol. 3, pp. 50–56, (p. 50).

Enquiry. The ‘obscurity of barbarism, the rust of fifteen hundred years, and the last breath of a dying language’, figuratively connote the three key areas of the recovery of *Ossian*. Firstly, its alleged genesis in the ‘obscurity of barbarism’ of Celtic antiquity, as well as its unlikely preservation from the ‘rust of fifteen hundred years’. Perhaps most poetically, is 'the last breath of a dying language', alluding to both *Ossian’s* original vernacular of Gaelic, and the oral tradition from which it was passed down, both considered at risk of ‘dying’ amidst the post Culloden transformation of the Highlands. By such use of obscure metaphor and synecdoche which reach towards the poetic, Burke is appraising the sublime quality of *Ossian* by drawing on his own theory of sublimity which contends that obscurity is a fundamental condition of the sublime: ‘to make any thing very terrible [sublime], obscurity, seems in general to be necessary’.[14] Furthermore, in praising the ‘majestic air’ and ‘native simplicity’ of Macpherson’s translations of the ‘sublime original’, Burke is commending both Macpherson and Ossian to the Longinian tradition of ‘immortality’ attained through sublimity: ‘from that source [the sublime], the greatest poets and historians have acquired their pre-eminence and won for themselves an eternity of fame’.[15]

Today, critics concur that Burke was but one of many who found the poetry of *Ossian* to be that of the sublime with Monk stating ‘the Ossianic poems merged with the sublime as soon as they appeared’, which Stafford supports: ‘sublimity was a word constantly associated with *Ossian*’.[16] However, John Vladimir Price has suggested that Burke’s review was itself instrumental in popularising *Ossian* by its ‘association of Ossian’s poems with the idea of the sublime’.[17] There is therefore irony in Burke’s reading of *Ossian* helping in its own way to ‘[confer] immortality’ on text and translator. Consequently, we can surmise that in Macpherson’s *Ossian*, Burke found the poetic expression of the aesthetic principles set out in his *Enquiry*, and by commending and promoting the sublimity of *Ossian,* was in some way responsible for its ensuing success.

In discussing this inter-medial synchrony between the ‘concrete terms’ of Macpherson’s poetry, and the ‘abstract discussion’ of Burke’s theory, Price advances:

> Intellectual history could be nicely codified if one were able to prove that Macpherson had read Burke and had then reconstructed his source material in

[14] Burke, *Enquiry*, p. 59.
[15] Longinus, ‘On the Sublime’, p. 100.
[16] Stafford, *Sublime Savage*, p. 174.
[17] John Vladimir Price, ‘Ossian and the Canon in the Scottish Enlightenment’, in *Ossian Revisited*, pp. 109–128, (p. 126).

> a way that would make the *Fragments of Ancient Poetry, Fingal,* and *Temora* appeal in concrete terms to those readers who had responded enthusiastically to Burke's abstract discussion of the sublime.[18]

Nevertheless, whilst there is 'no evidence to prove that Macpherson did read Burke', there are notable factors that indicate his familiarity with Burke's *Enquiry*.[19] Most conspicuous is the acknowledgement given to Burke by Macpherson's mentor, Hugh Blair. In his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783), Blair discusses in length his own theory on the sublime whilst crucially acknowledging his debt to the 'very properly illustrated […] formal theory' of Burke: 'to whom we are indebted for several ingenious and original thoughts […] many of whose sentiments on that head I have adopted'. [20] Therefore, given the close relationship between Blair and Macpherson, and Blair's significant involvement with the 'Ossian production' (which will be detailed later), Macpherson must have been familiar with the aesthetic principles outlined in the *Enquiry*, at the very least through proximity.

Correlative to this, is the intertextual resonance between Burke's abstract theory of sublimity and Macpherson's poetics of the sublime which Burke, as discussed, commended in his review of *Fingal*. A prefatory example from *Ossian* that portrays this intermedial vibrancy between theory and poetics is shown in what Blair described as 'one of Ossian's remarkable expressions', and which Eleanor M. Sickels has recognised as 'the most famous phrase of all' in *Ossian*: namely, 'the joy of grief'.[21] Appearing several times throughout the Ossianic corpus, this seemingly oxymoronic utterance, is, as Blair contends, a 'natural and just expression' of the sublime 'Poetry of the Heart' that is Ossian's, in so far as it 'conveys a clear idea of that gratification which a virtuous heart often feels in the indulgence of a tender melancholy'. Whilst Blair cites Homer's synonymous expression 'the delight of grief' as a justifiable 'precedent' (in doing so deliberately placing Ossian within the genealogy of sublime poetics that begins with Homer), the critic Larry L. Stewart has pointed to a more immediate precedent in Burke: 'the idea that joy arises from grief is found in eighteenth-century aesthetic theory, specifically in Edmund Burke's *Enquiry*'. [22] In the first part of the

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[18] Ibid., pp. 112–113.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* [1783], 3 vols. (Edinburgh: Bell & Bradfute, et al, 1813), vol. I., p. 63.
[21] Eleanor M. Sickels, *The Gloomy Egoist: Moods and Themes of Melancholy from Gray to Keats* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1923), p. 111.
[22] Stewart notices that 'Macpherson uses the phrase almost precisely as Burke defines the relationship between joy and grief; and the poems as a whole appeal to the emotion designated by that relationship', in Larry L. Stewart, 'Ossian, Burke and "The Joy of Grief"', in *English Language Notes*, no. 15. (1977), pp. 29–32, (p. 30).

Enquiry, Burke writes of grief as the 'passion which arises in the mind' when an 'object be so totally lost that there is no chance of enjoying it again'. From this absolute absence comes a 'pleasure', a sublime 'joy in grief' which exceeds the pain of loss by way of 'melancholy reflections' that 'keep its object perpetually in its eye, to present it in its most pleasurable views […] to find a thousand new perfections in all, that were not sufficiently understood before'.[23] Significantly, just as Blair later does, Burke cites Homer to qualify this theory:

> Still in short intervals of *pleasing woe*,
>
> Regardful of the friendly dues I owe,
>
> I to the glorious dead, for ever dear,
>
> *Indulge* the tribute of a *grateful* tear'.[24]

Thus, the 'indulgence of a tender melancholy' that Blair describes in Ossian's 'joy of grief' is clearly appropriated from Burke's 'melancholy reflections' of the 'joy in grief'. Furthermore, both theorists' reliance on Homeric poetry and the sublime configuration of 'the delight of grief' or 'pleasing woe' reveals the direct intertextual transposition of sublime poetic instrument into theoretical instruction which in a cyclical manner resurfaces in the poetics of *Ossian*. Therefore, whilst Homer is seen as progenitor, and Burke theoriser, the instant and enduring appeal of *Ossian* ordains it as distinct successor and so proves Ossian's claim augury when he states: 'the joy of grief, belongs to Ossian'.[25] This instance is but one of many which illustrates how *Ossian* becomes inheritor of the poetic tradition and practice of the sublime, whilst simultaneously aligning itself with the aesthetic assumptions of the 18th Century which Burke had best articulated.

Despite such immediate recognition of the sublime quality of *Ossian*, the controversy surrounding the authenticity of Macpherson's claims to have discovered, compiled, and translated 'faithful to the original' Gaelic poetry from the third century, has, since the poems' publication, frustrated and entangled clear critical engagement with the Ossianic corpus as poetic texts. This 'long shadow cast over *Ossian* studies by the "authenticity issue"' continues to disrupt objective scholarship, and to provoke vituperative attacks on Macpherson and his

[23] Burke, *Enquiry*, p. 37.
[24] Homer, *The Odyssey*, IV, 100–103, quoted in Burke, *Enquiry*, p. 38.
[25] Macpherson, 'Temora: An Ancient Epic poem in Eight Books', in *The Poems of Ossian and Related Works*, pp. 225–292, (p. 268).

poetic legacy. [26] In 1993, Howard D. Wienbrot judged Macpherson in such contemptuous terms as 'almost certainly a fabricator, plagiarist,' and therefore 'a scoundrel', whilst in 2002, Jack Lynch launched a similar invective in denigrating Macpherson as 'the surly and petulant Scot'. [27] Such opprobrium which still appears in recent decades ultimately generate from Macpherson's greatest literary adversary during the late eighteenth century, Samuel Johnson, whose prolonged attempt at peremptory interdiction of *Ossian* and its alleged origins has proven itself fruitful, if ineffectual, as the debate between whether Macpherson translated, or 'fabricated' *Ossian* remains almost as contested as it did in both Macpherson's and Johnson's day.

Following the publication and success of *Ossian*, Johnson in 1773 had travelled to Scotland accompanied by his friend and biographer, James Boswell, to undertake a tour of the Highlands and Hebrides. Johnson, writing in his tour journal*, A Journey to the Western Isles of Scotland* (1775) gives a conspicuously ambiguous reasoning for his decision to head north: 'I had desired to visit the Hebrides, or Western Islands of Scotland, so long, that I scarcely remember how the wish was originally excited'.[28] This was duly noticed by his commentator Donald McNicol in 1779, who instead relates Johnson's interest in debunking *Ossian* as the true reason: 'from the first appearance of Ossian's poems in public, we may date the origin of Dr Johnson's intended tour to Scotland, whatever he may pretend to tell us in the beginning of his tour'.[29] Indeed, Johnson's *Journey* is punctuated throughout with accusatory slights at Macpherson and *Ossian*'s alleged origins in Gaelic manuscripts:

> Where the chiefs of the Highlands have found the histories of their descent is difficult to tell; for no Earse genealogy was ever written[…] Thus, hopeless are all attempts to find any traces of Highland learning. Nor are their primitive customs and ancient manner of life otherwise than very faintly and uncertainly remembered by the present race[…] I believe there cannot be recovered, in the whole Earse language, five hundred lines of which there is any evidence to

[26] Dafydd Moore, 'The Critical Response to Ossian's Romantic Bequest', in *English Romanticism and the Celtic World*, ed. by Gerard Carruthers and Alan Rawes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 38–53, (p. 39).
[27] Howard D. Weinbrot, *Britannia's Issue: The Rise of British Literature from Dryden to Ossian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 478,
– Jack Lynch, 'Samuel Johnson's "Love of Truth" and Literary Fraud', in *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, vol. 42, no. 3, (2002), pp. 601–18, p. 603.
[28] Samuel Johnson 'A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland' (1775), in *Samuel Johnson and James Boswell: A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland and The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*, ed. by Peter Levi, (London: Penguin, 1984), pp. 33–154, (p. 34).
[29] Donald McNicol, *Remarks on Dr Samuel Johnson's Journey to the Hebrides* (London: T. Cadell, 1779), p. 10.

> prove them a hundred years old. Yet I hear the father of Ossian boasts two chests more of ancient poetry, which he suppresses, because they are too good for the English.[30]

Johnson's account of the Highland people is distastefully marked by his bigoted attitude towards their heritage and Gaelic tongue: 'it is the rude speech of a barbarous people, who had few thoughts to express, and were content, as they conceived grossly, to be grossly understood'.[31] Significantly, Johnson's ethnographic derision of Highland culture is matched by his pugnacious refusal to acknowledge the sublimity of Scotland's topography which *Ossian* had by then made famous: 'this wide extent of hopeless sterility […] It will readily occur, that this uniformity of barrenness can afford little amusement to the traveller'.[32] Indeed, his companion, Boswell, observes Johnson to be seemingly insensate towards the sublime spectacle of the Scottish landscape: 'I could not help thinking, that Mr Johnson showed a want of taste in laughing at the wild grandeur of nature, which to a mind undebauched by art conveys the most awful, sublime ideas'.[33] Elsewhere, Johnson goes so far as to dismiss the Burkean requisite of sublime experience: 'terrour without danger', as being 'only one of the sports of the fancy, a voluntary agitation of the mind that is permitted no longer than it pleases'.[34] Therefore, it is possible to surmise from Johnson and Boswell's respective accounts of their travels north that Johnson's antagonism towards Macpherson and the sublime poetics of *Ossian* is in some way linked to his inane attitude towards natural sublimity and the sublime experience provoked by such landscapes.[35] However, such a summation overlooks Johnson's extensive writing on sublimity throughout his literary career which shows a familiarity with, and indeed, an appreciation of the developing concept that is vital to a comprehensive understanding of Johnson's quarry with *Ossian*.

In his pioneering dictionary of 1755, Johnson includes definitions of the sublime and sublimity based on Longinian rhetorical theory and exampled by the work of both sublime

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[30] Johnson, 'A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland', pp. 114, 117.
[31] Ibid., p. 116. It is worth noting that this was not a common opinion of the Gaelic language during this period and was thus a singularly bigoted attitude of Johnson's. See Francis Wise's 1758 antiquarian text that considered Gaelic as 'the first known language in Europe' and 'the Universal Language of the postdiluvian world', in Francis Wise, *Some Enquiries Concerning the First Inhabitants, Language, Religion, Learning and Letters of Europe* (Oxford: J. Fletcher, S. Parker, D. Prince, 1758), p. 31.
[32] Ibid., p. 60.
[33] James Boswell, 'July 6, 1763', in *The Journals of James Boswell: 1762–1795*, ed. by John Wain (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 75.
[34] Johnson, 'A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland', p. 46.
[35] McNicol comments on Johnson's lack of 'vision', stating he 'came to Scotland without eyes to see the objects that lay in his way… [we are left] trusting to a *blind* guide', quoted by Nigel Leask, in *Stepping Westward: Writing the Highland Tour c. 1720–1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 145–146.

poets- with Milton being the most prominent exemplar, and theorists of sublimity- with Addison being primarily consulted. In his entry on the 'Sublime' as noun, Johnson defines it as 'The grand or lofty stile', illustrated first by the poetry of Pope: 'Longinus strengthens all his laws, / And is himself the great *Sublime* he draws', and then by Addison's theory: 'The *Sublime* rises from the nobleness of thoughts, the magnificence of the words, or the harmonious and lively turn of the phrase; the perfect *Sublime* arises from all three together'.[36] Correspondingly, under his definition of 'Sublimity', Johnson writes it as 'Loftiness of style or sentiment', before quoting Addison once more- this time on the sublime poetics of Milton: 'Milton's distinguishing excellence lies in the *sublimity* of his thoughts, in the greatness of which he triumphs over all the poets, modern and ancient, Homer only excepted'.[37] Therefore, Johnson's conception of the sublime and sublimity in 1755 shows itself to be one based on the rhetorical 'laws' of Longinus, with a shared emphasis on poetics that is articulated by Addison and illustrated by Milton.

Contra to the critic J. H. Hagstrum's statement that 'Johnson continued to use the word [sublime] to refer to this kind of rhetorical elevation from the very beginning of his literary career to its end', there are instead notable moments posited throughout the rest of Johnson's impressive oeuvre that show a development in line with the turn in the century's concept of sublimity that was achieved by Burke's *Enquiry* of 1757.[38] This chapter opened with a quotation from Johnson commending the *Enquiry* as 'an example of true criticism', from which Frans De Bruyn has stipulated that Johnson considered Burke 'an authority on the subject of sublimity and beauty'. [39] Indeed, some two years after the *Enquiry*, Johnson published his moral fable, *The History of Rasselas*, *Prince of Abissinia* (1759), which is marked by a noticeably Burkean presence of sublimity. Throughout *Rasselas*, there are found configurations of natural sublimity which Burke had ordinated as sublime- vast, impregnable mountains, unfathomable caves, and a stream 'which entered a dark cleft of the mountain on the northern side, and fell with dreadful noise from precipice to precipice till it was heard no more'.[40] Burke's influence is felt most distinctly, however, with the poet Imlac's first voyage

[36] Samuel Johnson, *Johnson's English Dictionary* [1755] ed. by Todd, Chalmers, and Walker (Philadelphia, Kimber & Sharpless, 1841), p. 891.
[37] Ibid.
[38] J. H. Hagstrum, 'Johnson's Conception of the Beautiful, the Pathetic, and the Sublime', in *Modern Language Association*, vol. 64, no. 1, (Mar. 1949), pp. 134–157, p. 149.
[39] Frans De Bruyn, 'Hooking the Leviathan: The Eclipse of the Heroic and the Emergence of the Sublime in Eighteenth–Century British Literature', in *The Eighteenth Century*, vol. 28, no. 3, (1987), pp. 195–215, p. 209.
[40]Samuel Johnson, *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia* [1759], ed. with notes and introduction by J. P. Hardy (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 1999), p. 2.

on the sea, and his description of the subjective experience of 'pleasing terrour' that is the hallmark of the Burkean sublime: 'I looked around me with pleasing terrour, and thinking my soul enlarged by the boundless prospect, imagined that I could gaze round for ever without satiety'.[41] Correspondingly, as late as 1779, Johnson includes a definition of sublimity in his 'Life of Cowley' that is distinctly altered from that of his dictionary, as being: 'that comprehension and expanse of thought which, at once, fills the whole mind, and of which, the first effect is sudden astonishment, and the second, rational admiration'.[42] This is then a noteworthy progression from his limited, rhetorical definition of sublimity to a more perceptive conception focused towards the 'comprehension and expanse of thought' that characterises the subjective experience of sublimity provoked through poetry and poetics. Hereby, Johnson, at the end of his career is seen to be still very much commensurate with contemporary theory of the sublime, with a sustained and developing interest in sublimity readily apparent from his first great work of 1755 until his final years and magnum opus, *The Lives of the Poets* (1779-1781).

The question then arises that for all Johnson's extensive and marked interest in the sublime, why would he so aggressively oppose *Ossian* which from its outset proved to be literary history's most popular and promising poetry of the sublime since Milton? Compare, for example, Johnson's appreciation of *Paradise Lost*, beside Monk's assessment of *Ossian*. In his 'Life of Milton', Johnson states that 'before the greatness displayed in Milton's poem, all other greatness shrinks away'.[43] He then gives this comprehensive account of the sublime as found in *Paradise Lost*:

> The characteristick quality of the poem is sublimity. He sometimes descends to the elegant, but his element is the great. He can occasionally invest himself with grace; but his natural port is gigantick loftiness. He can please when pleasure is required; but it is his peculiar power to astonish. He seems to have been well acquainted with his own genius, and to know what it was that Nature had bestowed upon him more bountifully than upon others: the power

[41] Ibid., p. 22.
[42] It is important to note that this definition is given in his attack on the metaphysical poets. In stating that 'nor was the sublime within their reach' and then providing the definition quoted, Johnson is hereby defining sublimity as integral to poetics.
Samuel Johnson, 'Life of Cowley' [1779–81], in *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets; With Critical Observations on their Works*, ed. with an introduction and notes by Roger Lonsdale, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), vol. 1, pp. 191–234, (p. 201).
[43] Johnson, 'Life of Milton' in *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*, vol. 1. pp. 242–295, (p. 283).

> of displaying the vast, illuminating the splendid, enforcing the awful, darkening the gloomy, and aggravating the dreadful.[44]

Here, Johnson can be seen to retain his rhetorical definition of 'loftiness', yet the extent of the passage is a tissue of Burkean desiderata for sublimity: 'vast', 'awful', 'gloomy', and 'dreadful' are each directly mentioned in the *Enquiry* whilst the verbs preceding such mimic Milton's 'power' to enact the sublime poetically, something which Burke himself performed in his review of *Fingal*. Furthermore, Johnson's juxtaposition of terms synonymous with beauty; 'elegant', 'grace', 'pleasure', with those of sublimity; 'great', 'gigantick loftiness', 'peculiar power', conscribe to Burke's antithesis between the two concepts set out in the *Enquiry*, which Hagstrum highlights: 'it was doubtless under the influence of Burke that Johnson came to separate the two concepts of sublimity and beauty from one another and to make a more careful association of each term'.[45] Therefore Johnson's account of the sublimity of Milton's epic reveals his ability as critic to discern and appraise sublimity within a text in the manner set out by Addison and Burke some decades before.

Compare now, the words of Monk, whose work remains the foundational authority on sublimity during *Ossian*'s age:

> For if the sublime is terror, what can be 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 and roar through Ossian's lays and epics, what more intense and energetic than the expression of passion in the dark words and bright deeds of the ancient heroes? If sublimity resides in words, what can be more lofty than the diction and style of the poems.[46]

Monk, like Johnson, gestures to the rhetorical sublime of 'loftiness' of 'diction and style', yet centuries later his appraisal of the Ossianic sublime parallels that of Johnson's on Milton in its reliance on Burkean requisites for sublimity. Such a comparison of two authoritative critics writing on the sublimity of two respective poetic works is too close to dismiss Johnson's conception of sublimity as purely rhetorical however much his *Journey* suggests a

[44] Ibid., p. 286.
[45] Hagstrum contends Johnson's conception of both beauty and sublimity was 'to change after the appearance in 1757 of Burke's' *Enquiry*', in 'Johnson's Conception of the Beautiful, the Pathetic, and the Sublime', p. 152,
[46] Monk, *The Sublime*, p. 120.

cold, critical view of sublimity that would not entertain the idea of a ‘true’ sublime arising from a real culture and language.

The question, thus remains, as to why Johnson felt provoked into action against *Ossian*? Whereas Johnsonian critics such as Jack Lynch and Thomas Curley argue that it was a matter of ‘truth’ and the apparent falsehood of Macpherson’s claims which directed Johnson’s ire, Tim Fulford is alone in suggesting that it was the very sublimity of *Ossian* that acted as a personal affront and 'threat' to Johnson, who ‘suspected it of being a poor copy of poetry he had himself endorsed’.[47] This notion of ‘copy’ is crucial and Fulford protracts his entire argument with synonymous lexicon; contending that to Johnson, *Ossian* ‘seemed a poor *mimicry* of the Miltonic and biblical sublime’, whilst also appearing 'a *parody* of the great writing in English by criticising which Johnson had established his own authority'. [48] He then concludes that Johnson's intention as critic and lexicographer of the English language was 'challenged' by Ossian's 'demonstration that there is a native oral culture which can be rendered into English in a *mock sublime'*.[49] In suggesting that Johnson’s dispute with Ossian was based on it being a ‘poor copy’, ‘mimicry’, ‘parody’, or ‘mock sublime’, Fulford raises the Johnsonian dispute above any speculative reasoning based on apparent bigotry or aesthetic conceptions, to that of poetics, and the fundamental poetic practice of mimesis or ‘imitation’, from which, Ossianic poetics becomes of the sublime.

The poetics of imitation and that of the sublime are inextricably entwined, sharing the same genesis in formative classical thought. The ‘father of criticism’, Aristotle, theorised that the basis of all poetry and poetics is rooted in imitation, stating that ‘the creation of poetry generally is due to two causes’; the ‘instinct for imitation’ and the ‘instinct to enjoy works of imitation’.[50] Correspondingly, in *Peri Hypsous*, Longinus propounds in length of a ‘way which leads to the true sublime', that is ‘the imitation and emulation of the great historians and poets of the past’.[51] Commentating on the subsequent development of the poetics of imitation during the eighteenth century, Weinbrot draws an important distinction between the ‘pure translator and Imitator’ and the ‘Independent Imitator’. The former is ‘generally faithful

[47] Tim Fulford, *Landscape, Liberty and Authority: Poetry, Criticism and Politics from Thomson to Wordsworth*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 111.
[48] Ibid., p. 110.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Aristotle, ‘On the Art of Poetry’, in *Classical Literary Criticism*, pp. 29–76, (p. 35).
– Johnson acknowledges Aristotle's enduring authority within eighteenth century thought when he states: 'the father of criticism [Aristotle] has rightly denominated poetry *an imitative art*', in 'Life of Cowley', p. 200.
[51] Longinus, ‘On the Sublime’, p. 119.

to his author's sense and meaning, but modernises allusions, places, and names' which aligns with Johnson's definition of 1755 where he defines the practice as being ''a method of translating looser than paraphrase, in which modern examples and illustrations are used for ancient, or domestick for foreign'.[52] However, the 'Independent Imitator', as described by Weinbrot; 'depending upon his aims, may either parallel or differ from an acknowledged model *which he subordinates to a new poetic intention*'.[53] That Macpherson both paralleled and differed from 'acknowledged models' of sublimity through imitation is at the centre of the 'authenticity issue', and at the very heart of the Ossianic poems' 'fabrication' of the sublime.[54]

Far from attempting to exculpate Macpherson, this thesis acknowledges Derick S. Thomson's (1952), and subsequently Howard Gaskill's (1994) exhaustive research into the authenticity matter, acknowledging their conclusions that a legitimate amount of the composition of *Ossian* derived from 'conventional translation' or 'free adaptation' of genuine Gaelic ballads. [55] However, rather than wholly concur with Thomson and Gaskill's (and the many disputants of Macpherson's) eventual summation that the extent of the Ossian poems was largely 'complete fabrication', this thesis instead contends that the Ossianic was indeed 'fabricated', but deliberately fabricated of past models of sublimity through imitation which Macpherson as 'independent Imitator' successfully 'subordinates to a new poetic intention' in the Ossianic sublime. Macpherson, himself, can be seen to admit to this practice of imitation in his responses to the attacks made against him. He closes his preface to the 1773 edition of *The Poems of Ossian* with the equivocal statement that 'a translator, who cannot equal his originals, is incapable of expressing its beauties'.[56] More explicitly, however, in a note to

[52] Johnson, *Dictionary*, p. 487. This definition, as is that of Weinbrot's and Longinian imitation, is distinct from the Augustan poetic mode or genre of Imitation popularised by Pope which Johnson adhered to successfully in his own poems such as *London* [1738].
[53] Howard D. Weinbrot, *The Formal Strain: Studies in Augustan Imitation and Satire* (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1969) pp. 14–16. Weinbrot also comments on the levity given to Longinus and his theory of the sublime by poets of the Augustan period (he examples from Dryden and Pope), noting that following of Boileau's translation [1674] '[Longinus] was soon coupled with Aristotle and Horace as one of the foremost ancient critics' (p. 9). Furthermore, he goes on to state that 'Any form of imitation, whether borrowing, modernization, use of genre, or Longinian emulation, ultimately depends upon a respect for ancient thought and literature' (p. 12).
[54] Nick Groom surmises poetry and 'Literature' more generally as being 'that most monumental fabrication', in *The Forger's Shadow: How Forgery Changed the Course of Literature* (London: Picador, 2002), p. 2.
[55] Gaskill, 'Ossian in Europe', p. 646.
–See also Derick S. Thomson, *The Gaelic Sources of Macpherson's 'Ossian'* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1952).
[56] Macpherson, 'Preface to *The Poems of Ossian*' [1773], p. 412.

Blair's 'Dissertation' included in the 1773 edition, Macpherson directly gestures that imitation is at play:

> Those who have doubted my veracity have paid a compliment to my genius; and were even the allegations true, my self-denial might atone for my fault. Without vanity I say it, I think I could write tolerable poetry; and I assure my antagonists, that I should not translate what I could not imitate.[57]

Writing on the fabrication or 'forgery' of *Ossian,* Nick Groom makes the important observation that Macpherson's artistic 'freedom' in fabricating *Ossian* is 'typical of the bardic tradition itself'.[58] The poetic tradition of the bard and the poetic practice of the sublime are coetaneous and Macpherson's reliance on imitation is nowhere more pronounced than with the eponymous figure of Ossian, the blind bard whose narratorial presence unites all three collections of *Ossian* poems. In Macpherson's first collection, *Fragments of Ancient Poetry*, Ossian is repeatedly depicted as aged, alone, and blind: 'By the side of the rock on the hill, beneath the aged trees, old Oscian sat on the moss; the last of the race of Fingal. Sightless are his aged eyes'.[59] Ossian's old age and his solitude conscribe with his status throughout the narrative as 'last of the race' of Celtic warriors, the lonely bard who is left in oppressive solitude to recount his tales of past glories to ghosts heard on the wind: 'Cease a little while, O wind! Stream, be thou silent a while! Let my voice be heard over the heath; let my wanderer hear me. Shalgar!'.[60] Whilst his solitude and agedness actively function within the narrative, Ossian's 'sightless eyes' do not. Instead, they relate to the typology of the 'blind bard' that stems from antiquity, and which deliberately places Ossian within a genealogy of poets significant for both their blindness and poetic powers of sublimity.

The typology of the 'blind bard' originates in Greek mythology with the Thracian poet, Thamyris, blinded by the Muses for competing against them in song. The two blind prophets Phineus and Tiresias also feature in Greek myth, whilst Homer, the sublime poet who '[bridges] the borders of legend and history', is also 'conventionally understood to be a blind bard'.[61] Homer's successor in sublime poetics, Milton, composed his great epic *Paradise Lost* whilst blind, and situates himself within this poetic tradition of blind bards:

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[57] Macpherson, note to Blair's 'A Critical Dissertation on The Poems of Ossian', p. 477.
[58] Groom, *The Forger's Shadow*, p. 111.
[59] Macpherson, 'Fragment VIII.', from 'Fragments of Ancient Poetry' [1760], in *The Poems of Ossian and Related Works*, pp. 1–34, p. 18.
[60] Macpherson, 'Fragment X.', p. 21.
[61] Catherine Maxwell, *The Female Sublime from Milton to Swinburne* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 12.

'Blind Thamyris and blind Maeonides, [Homer] / And Tiresias and Phineus prophets old'.[62] Critics Angela Leighton, and Catherine Maxwell both collate Milton's blindness with his sublime poetic vision which cements him in his 'unfailing' status as 'great prototype of the sublime bard': '[Milton] founds the poetic tradition of the sublime in modern English poetry, a mode of vision in which normal perception is disturbed and distorted to reveal the presence of a greater power'.[63] Therefore, Macpherson's decision to depict Ossian as blind is a clear form of poetic imitation which signals to his readership that Ossian stands amidst the ranks of the blind bards and that his poetic vision, like Milton's, is of 'a greater power'; that of the sublime.

In his discussion of a 'Sublime method', George B. Walsh notes that 'literary mimesis', or imitation; 'repairs the short fall, although it has farther to reach: the model author's own sublimity helps his imitator to leap the space between them.[64] Therefore, Macpherson's induction of the blind bard into the poems achieves a synchronisation of the Ossianic with the sublimity of the visionary poetics of Milton and Homer. The Homeric then feeds into the Ossianic just as the Miltonic is subsumed into *Ossian*'s own sublimity. Yet, as the Homeric is distinct from the Miltonic, Macpherson's poems for all their encapsulating imitation remain apart, and vivid in his own rendering of a sublime that is uniquely identifiable as Ossianic. Subsequently, this chapter shall now examine the texts that comprise *The Poems of Ossian* in order to analyse the distinct qualities and techniques of the poetics which render the texts sublime, acknowledging Macpherson's use of imitation whilst also explicating the innovatory, and indeed, iconic, sublimity of the Ossianic.

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[62] John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, (1667), ed by John Leonard (London: Penguin, 2003), III: lines 35–36, p. 53.
[63] Leighton links sublimity with blindness in her discussion of Milton's influence on Romanticism and the poetry of Shelley, she writes 'to be a sublime poet is to approach the rapture of the seer, to see imaginatively and intensely, is to risk a kind of blindness' and that 'for this reason […] studies of the sublime return with unfailing pertinacity to the example of Milton, the great prototype of the sublime bard', in Leighton, *Shelley and the Sublime*, p. 18.
–Correspondingly, Maxwell builds on Leighton's approach in emphasising the significance of blindness to sublimity and further tracing the influence of Milton to the Romantic poets: 'in the dazzled eyes of those who follow him, Milton — that is the blind Milton of *Paradise Lost* — becomes identified with the sublime', whilst describing how such poets 'imitate Milton so that one gains his access to the sublime', in Maxwell, *The Female Sublime*, pp. 14, 47.
[64] George B. Walsh, 'Sublime Method: Longinus on Language and Imitation', in *Classical Antiquity*, vol. 7, no. 2, (1988), pp. 252–69, (p. 268).

Fragments of Ancient Poetry

'Ignorance and doubt' wrote Maria Edgeworth, 'are the great parents of the sublime', and suitably *Ossian*'s birth was, and is still, surrounded by such.[65] During the 1980s, critics such as Richard B. Sher (1985), and Fiona Stafford (1988) provided foundational and enduring accounts of the genesis of *Ossian*, noting the biographical importance of Macpherson's upbringing in the dramatic landscape of a post-Culloden *Gàidhealtachd*, his education at Marischal College during the 'Aberdonian Enlightenment', and the 'cabal' of Edinburgh literati who were instigative in supporting and directing the Ossianic project.[66] Whilst each of these bio-critical elements continue to provide fresh readings which are, as Dafydd Moore highlights, 'fine and valuable', they also continue to be 'strangely unsatisfactory' in approaching *Ossian* contextually.[67] John Dwyer surmises that 'there is nothing intrinsically invalid about such approaches, but they do tend to relieve scholars from the task of actually reading and analysing the textual source'.[68] As such, the directive over the remainder of this chapter will be to focus on each collection of *Ossian* poems, as texts read simply as poetic constructs. Whilst yet remaining sensitive to the biographical nuances evident from Macpherson's history, and the interlocution of developing aesthetic theory, I will examine them as works of poetic practice which are deliberately and effectively constructed to achieve sublimity. In such a vein, Macpherson's presentation of the first collection of *Ossian* poems, *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* in fragment form is one motivated by looking back to the literary-historical significance of the poetic fragment, whilst also precipitating the Ossianic's eventual apotheosis into sublime epic.

As with the sublime, the fragment dates to antiquity. It is, as Marjorie Levinson notes, 'a historically specific and therefore structurally distinct form', and surviving fragments from

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[65] Maria Edgeworth, *Letters for Literary Ladies to Which is Added an Essay on the Noble Science of Self–Justification* [1795], ed. by Claire Connolly (London, Everyman, 1993), p. 77.

[66] In the decade following, Howard Gaskill emerges as the preeminent scholar of *Ossian* with his prolific 1996 edition of *The Poems of Ossian* which remains the standard text for critical engagement and which consequently this thesis references as primary text throughout.
–Richard B. Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985).
–Stafford, *The Sublime Savage*.

[67] Dafydd Moore, 'James Macpherson and Adam Ferguson: An Enlightenment Encounter', in *The Scottish Literary Journal* vol. 24, iss. 2 (1997), pp. 5–23, p. 5.

[68] John Dwyer, 'The Melancholy Savage: Text and Context in the Poems of Ossian', in *Ossian Revisited*, ed. by Howard Gaskill (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991) pp. 164–207, p. 165.

classical poets such as Sappho, alongside Longinus's own fragmented *Peri Hypsous*, evoke, through their fragmented nature, an aura of ancientness, mutability, and indeed, loss, each of which became essential thematic strains representative of the Ossianic.[69] Critics such as Stafford have noted that the choice of fragment bolsters Macpherson's claims of found-texts from a 'distant age'.[70] However, as with the tradition of the blind bard, Macpherson's decision in utilising the fragment can be seen to be primarily one of imitation, deliberately tapping into the conventions of poetic form, the quiddity of which is the sublime. This can be read in Macpherson's arrangement of poems in *Fragments* as 'detached pieces' which appears at first dissonant, if not entirely disjunctive.[71] Fragments I and II introduce the characters Shilric and Vinvela, who then have no reference elsewhere in the collection. However, the stichomythic dialogue between Shilric and Vinvela of fragment I is mirrored by that of Ryno and Alpin in XII, whilst conversely, Alpin and his son are referenced in fragments VI, VII, and XII. Furthermore, different personages are throughout referred to by the same epithets such as Shilric (I) and Shalgar (X) both denoted as 'son of the hill'. There is also a notable seriatim of anagrammatic nomenclature which unites the final five fragments of the collection. In 'Fragment XI' the character of 'Armor' is mentioned, followed by 'Morar' in XII, 'Muirnin' in XIII, and then 'Moran' in XIV, proceeded by a perfect anagram with 'Morna' in XV. Northrop Frye notes that the 'mysterious resonant names and the fixed epithets [in *The Poems of Ossian*] are part of a deliberate and well-unified scheme'.[72] Such a unity is achieved by this philological melange of homogenous nomenclature which weaves throughout the disparate narrative, creating a semblance of something intricately imbricated yet evasive of full comprehension because of its entropic, fragmented form.

Burke in his *Enquiry* theorised that such fragmentation achieves sublimity through provocation of the imagination: 'the imagination is entertained with the promise of something more […] In unfinished drawings, I have often seen something which pleased me beyond the best finishing'.[73] The fragmentary nature of the poetic form which yet pertains a semblance of something complete provokes a sublime response from its reader.[74] Levinson offers a

[69] Marjorie Levinson, *The Romantic Fragment Poem*: *A Critique of a Form* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986), p. 14.
[70] Stafford observes that 'the fragmentary form suggests glimpses of a distant age, which the writer is catching before it disappears completely', in *The Sublime Savage*, p. 103.
[71] Macpherson, 'Preface' to *Fragments of Ancient Poetry*, pp. 5–6, p. 5.
[72] Northrop Frye, *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963), p. 134.
[73] Burke, *Enquiry*, p. 77.
[74] See Dwyer who states, 'the fragmentary form of the Ossianic poems allowed them to maximise the sublime experiences of the reader', in 'The Melancholy Savage: Text and Context in the Poems of Ossian', p. 184.

comprehensive analysis when she states: 'By displaying [the poet's] materials only partially "sublimed" into aesthetic form […] he identifies the transformational *act* (his own and the reader's), as opposed to *product*, as the essential literary fact'.[75] Hereby, the fragment achieves for both poet and reader the third *'*transformational *act'* of the sublime, what Weiskel terms 'the sublime moment'.[76] Therefore, the formal properties of the fragment informs, bolsters, and completes the sublimity contained within the poems themselves, creating a unity of substance and structure that is synchronously sublime.

> The other shape
> If shape it might be call'd that shape had none
> Distinguishable in member, joynt, or limb,
> Or substance might be call'd that shadow seem'd
> For each seem'd either,[77]

Whilst Levinson's 'transformational act' of the sublime is achieved from encounter with the fragmentary form alone, the 'shape' of the Ossianic fragment is, like Milton's Death above, eurythmic to the sublimity of the 'substance' of the poetics. Blair had written of the 'true sense of Sublime Writing', as being 'undoubtedly […] such a description of objects, or exhibition of sentiments, which are in themselves of a Sublime nature, as shall give us strong impressions of them'.[78] Indeed, criticism of *Ossian*, from Blair through to today's academics, have consistently equated the sublimity of Macpherson's poetry with the formidable natural imagery which typifies it. Macpherson's choice of imagery largely consists of a periphrastic tautology of 'dark skies', 'grey mists', and 'roaring winds', what Nigel Leask terms a 'sublime *frisson'*, which can be read as a cut-out from Burke's taxonomy of the natural sublime.[79] Indeed, in his review of *Fingal,* Burke recognised and appraised the sublime intonation of Macpherson's repeating natural images:

> If in the allusions with which the poem abounds, the images of trees, rocks, waves, storms, beams of fire, and the great luminaries of heaven seem too

[75] Levinson, *The Romantic Fragment Poem*, p. 199.
[76] Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime*, p. 95.
–Weiskel's hypothesis of the 'sublime moment' is explored fully in Chapter 4 of this thesis in relation to James Beattie's seminal achievement of it with Edwin.
[77] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, II: lines 667–670, p. 41.
[78] Blair, *Lectures*, p. 59.
[79] Nigel Leask, *Stepping Westward,* p. 83.

> often repeated; it is because they are at once the most obvious to an unenlightened genius, and the grandest objects in nature'.[80]

This tautology of 'the grandest objects of nature', as with the repeated anagrammatic nomenclature, generates a sense of coherence which paradoxically is rendered entropic by the poetry's fragmentary form. As Alexander Regier explains, this is a specifically Burkean mode of sublimity which 'relies on this breaking force' of fragmentation - 'at the very core of the psychology of coherence (which makes an aesthetics of the sublime possible) lies a fragmenting force that exceeds its ordering categories'.[81] However, whilst the repetitive use of provocative natural images configure with Burke's 'ordering categories' of the natural sublime, they also serve poetically as a structural technique used throughout *Fragments*.

> I sit by the mossy fountain; on top of the hill of winds. One tree is rustling above me. Dark waves roll over the heath. The lake is troubled below. The deer descend from the hill. No hunter is seen; no whistling cow-herd is nigh. It is mid-day: but all is silent. Sad are my thoughts alone.[82]

In the quotation above from fragment II the cumulative succession of imagery frames the bard in natural sublimity, enveloped by turbulent natural forces from 'above', and 'below'. The poem is imbued with a sense of the *Enquiry*'s precept of privation in which Burke states that 'All *general* privations are great [sublime], because they are all terrible; *Vacuity, Darkness, Solitude* and *Silence*', with the absence of human life and silence transmuting into the sadness and solitude of the speaker. [83] The scene and images are then repeated at the close of the fragment: 'By the mossy fountain I will sit; on top of the hill of winds. When mid-day is silent around', emblematic of Macpherson's 'well-unified scheme' in which the profusion of synonymous and repeating names, epithets, and natural images provide a semblance of a fractured, yet mosaiced whole.

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[80] Anon, (Burke) 'Review of *Fingal: An Ancient Epic Poem'*, p. 55.
[81] Alexander Regier, *Fracture and Fragmentation in British Romanticism* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010) p. 87.
[82] Macpherson, 'Fragment II.', p. 9.
[83] Burke, *Enquiry*, p. 70.
–William Hazlitt wrote of Ossian that: 'There is one impression that he conveys more entirely than all other poets, namely the sense of privation, the loss of all things, of friends, of good name, of country — he is even without God in the world', in 'On Poetry in General', in *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, 9 vols., ed. by Duncan Wu (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1998), vol. 2., pp. 165–180, (p. 180).

Similarly, the following fragment of Macpherson's collection (III) opens with a replicated structure in which the bardic figure Carryl is introduced amid the anthropomorphised 'howls' and 'roaring' of river and wind:

> Evening is grey on the hills. The north wind resounds through the woods. White clouds rise on the sky: the thin-wavering snow descends. The river howls afar, along its winding course. Sad, by a hollow rock, the grey-hair'd Carryl sat. Dry fern waves over his head; his seat is in an aged birch. Clear to the roaring winds he lifts his voice of woe.[84]

The scene is an extension of the former fragment's, an almost relentless configuration of natural sublimity compiled in short, staccato summaries adding to the sense of mosaic. Furthermore, the poem concludes in an identically framed manner with Carryl situated 'by the stream of the plain' addressing 'Ye rocks!' which like the fern 'hang over [his] head'. George Saintsbury writes that the 'chief special secret' of Macpherson's verse style is 'the sharp and absolute isolation of sentences of unequal length', contending that there is 'hardly anywhere, in verse or prose, a style so resolutely *cumulative*, while maintaining such complete want of connection between the constituents of the heap'.[85] This style of 'parallelism' is one inherited from the Hebrew Bible and popularised during the eighteenth century by Robert Lowth's influential published lectures *De Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum* (1753), later translated in English as *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*.[86] Throughout his *Lectures*, Lowth commends the 'Hebrew Poets' for having 'accomplished the sublime' in a poetic manner above even that of classical authors such as Homer and Virgil.[87] Whilst the discourse on the sublime from Longinus through to Burke consistently references the Hebrew Bible as a primary exemplar of sublimity, Lowth's original analysis of parallelism led to a new appreciation of the poetic propensity for the sublime in Biblical verse-prose.

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[84] Macpherson, 'Fragment III.', p. 10.
[85] This is effectively a paraphrasing of Wordsworth's critique discussed in Chapter 6 of this thesis. George Saintsbury, *A History of English Prosody: From the Twelfth Century to the Present Day*, 3 vols. (London: Macmillan & Co., 1910), vol. 3., p. 44.
[86] See Murray Ruston who hails Lowth's lectures as 'a milestone of general literary criticism which happened to use the bible as its subject-matter', in *Prophet and Poet: The Bible and the Growth of Romanticism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), p. 21.
–See also David B. Morris who states 'The thoroughness and originality of Lowth's *Lectures* make them a landmark of Hebrew scholarship; and, not surprisingly, he devoted several individual lectures to discussing aspects of Hebrew sublimity', and that the 'precision and detail of [Lowth's] analysis [moved] his *Lectures* far beyond the jargon of standard eighteenth–century criticism', in *The Religious Sublime: Christian Poetry and Critical Tradition in 18th-Century England* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1972), p. 160.
[87] Robert Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* [1753] trans. by G. Gregory F.A.S., 3rd ed. (London: Thomas Tegg & Son, 1835), p. 59.

David B. Morris notes that Macpherson was directly influenced by Lowth's work because of the reverence shown to the *Lectures* by his mentor Blair who had 'read Lowth with attention'.[88] Morris contends that 'there is nothing in Blair's account [of the sublimity of Hebrew poetry] not to be found in Lowth' and that 'almost everything that Blair wrote concerning Ossian's use of hyperbole, personification, apostrophe, allegory, and epithets resembles passages from Lowth regarding the sublimity of the Hebrews'.[89] Whether or not Macpherson himself had read Lowth's Latin text is inconsequential beside the modified form of parallelism at work throughout the Ossianic corpus. By enveloping the interactions of his characters throughout *Fragments* with the rhythmic concurrences of repeating natural images, Macpherson is able to render a sublime which fuses not the human with the divine which the Bible achieves, but the natural and the supernatural with the human.

In fragment V, this coalescing of natural and supernatural elements with human experience and emotional response is pronounced. The poem opens again with a heavily rendered natural sublime, 'Autumn is dark on the mountains; grey mist rests on the hills. The Whirlwind is heard on the heath. Dark rolls the river thro' the narrow plain'.[90] At the grave of Connal, the bard speaks of the spirits which haunt the landscape ('At times are seen here the ghosts of the deceased'), before summoning the spectral lovers Connal and Crimora: 'Appear in thy armour of light, thou ghost of the mighty Connal! Shine, near thy tomb, Crimora! Like a moon-beam from a cloud'.[91] The bard recounts the heroic might of Connal, merging martial prowess with provocative natural imagery in a cumulative crescendo of sublimity, 'O Connal! It was here thou didst fall. Thine arm was like a storm; thy sword, a beam of the sky; thy height, a rock on the plain; thine eyes, a furnace of fire. Louder than a storm was thy voice, when thou confoundedst the field'.[92] The death of Connal by the misaimed arrow of his lover Crimora is announced in similar terms: 'She drew the string on Dargo; but erring pierced her Connal. He falls like an oak on the plain; like a rock from the shaggy hill'.[93] It is at the close of the poem in which Macpherson's use of parallelism becomes most distinct:

[88] Morris, *The Religious Sublime*, p. 164.
[89] Ibid., pp. 164–5.
[90] Macpherson, 'Fragment V.', p. 13.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid.

> The grass grows between the stones of their tomb; I sit in the mournful shade. The wind sighs through the grass; and their memory rushes on my mind. Undisturbed you now sleep together; in the tomb of the mountain you rest alone.[94]

Each sentence is composed of two parallel composites, divided by internal caesura. Nature conforms with the grief of the bard as it too grows and mourns. The wind sighing is parallelled by the memory rushing on the mind of the speaker. Similarly, the two repeating nouns, 'grass' and 'tomb' form a bridge between the landscape and the dead, with the bardic figure in communion with both. Murray Ruston speaks of the 'self-generating emotional force of parallelism which pulsates in rhythmic unison with the sense', an early and enduring example of Wordsworth's 'sense sublime'. [95]

Aside from imbuing the 'translations' with an authentic facade of ancientness, Macpherson's decision to publish his first collection of *Ossian* poems as fragments was tectonic and mapped out the poetic provenance of the Ossianic project. Macpherson's distillation of Burkean aesthetics within his own vividly rendered parallelism introduced his readership to a poetic mode of sublimity iconised by the blind bard Ossian in provocative interaction with the sublime forces of the natural world. Regier surmises that 'Fragmentation encourages us to look for details, and to perceive the importance of minuteness anew. It requires of us a certain attentiveness that reminds us how each fracture […] demands scrutiny in its relation to a larger structure'.[96] In his preface to *Fragments*, Blair had directed readers towards a similar act of scrutiny 'in relation to a larger structure', contending that the fragmented poems were 'originally episodes of a greater work', and that the three last poems (XIV, XV, XVI) were fragments of this 'Epic poem'.[97] Two years later Macpherson published *Fingal: An Ancient Epic Poem in Six Books* (1762) and the Ossianic found its anticipated apotheosis into sublime epic.

Fingal: An Ancient Epic Poem in Six Books

> The Writer of History represents but one single Portion of Nature; and for the most part, only that side of it which is connected with Politicks and Government: But the Poet, tho' confined to a single Action, takes Mankind for

[94] Ibid.
[95] Ruston, *Prophet and Poet: The Bible and the Growth of Romanticism*, p. 23.
[96] Regier, *Fracture and Fragmentation in British Romanticism*, p. 25.
[97] Hugh Blair, 'Preface', to 'Fragments of Ancient Poetry', in *The Poems of Ossian and Related Works*, pp. 5–6, (pp. 5,6).

> his Rule in the Execution. He has an Universal Idea for his Model, all the Passions to fill the Under-parts, and the whole Train of Accidents and Adventures in War, Dangers, and Death, to make out his Narration. He takes them originally from real Life and a single Part; but he is not tied down to the Circumstances of the Fact. The Image turns general in his Hands; and the more his Subject is varied, the richer and truer will be his Imitation'.[98]

As discussed in the introductory chapter, the generic conventions of the epic are absolute in their dependence on the poetic countenance of the sublime. Whilst many eighteenth century theorists from Addison through to Burke acknowledge this parity between the epic canon and sublimity, Thomas Blackwell's *An Enquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer* (1735) was instrumental in formalising this reliance and upholding the sublime as being the 'Universal Idea' in which epic poetry is modelled. Throughout his *Enquiry*, Blackwell typifies the Homeric epic as being the principal example of 'the sublimer kinds of writing'. The epic is promoted as being 'the highest form of poetry', and the sublime stands as the essence or 'nerve' of this poetic form: 'the marvellous and wonderful [the sublime] is the nerve of the epic strain'.[99] Blackwell, whose thesis is further credited with initiating the primitivist movement and the subsequent 'dependence of progressive theories of human society upon the reading of epic poetry', concludes his work by highlighting the eighteenth-century's dearth of sublime epic— 'what marvellous things happen in a well-ordered state? […] we may never be a proper subject of an heroic [epic] poem'. [100] However, Blackwell's commiseration was proven premature with the publication of *Fingal* which fulfilled the period's atavistic impulse for an epic poem, the sublimity of which, would rival that of the ancients.

Blackwell's influence on Macpherson and the production of *Fingal* has been acknowledged by critics, again through proximity with Blair.[101] As with Lowth's analysis of Biblical poetry, Blackwell's epic theory resurfaces in the writings of Blair, who echoes his

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[98] Thomas Blackwell, *An Enquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer*, [1735], 2nd ed. reprint (Hildesheim and New York: Georg Olms, 1976), p. 316.
[99] Blackwell, *Enquiry*, p. 26.
[100] Simon Dentith, *Epic and Empire in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.23.
[101]Dafydd Moore notes the theoretical influence of Blackwell and Blair: 'the frame of reference through which [Macpherson] understood the tales of his childhood and the further stories he collected, completed and invented, was that of mid–eighteenth–century classical theory as represented by Thomas Blackwell the Younger and others at Aberdeen, and by Blair at Edinburgh, complemented by the Biblical investigations of Robert Lowth's Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews (1753)', in Moore, '"A Comparison Similar to this": Ossian and the Forms of Antiquity', *Journal for Eighteenth–Century Studies*, vol. 39., no. 2. (2016), pp. 171–182, p. 173.

forebear in delineating the epic as being 'unquestionably the highest effort of Poetical Genius'.[102] Throughout his *Lectures,* Blair, employing the same rhetoric as Blackwell, reinstates the dependency of the sublime to the epic, categorising the form as demanding 'more strength, dignity, and fire' than any other poetic endeavour, because by generic definition it must contain: 'everything that is Sublime in description, tender in sentiment, and bold and lively in production'.[103] Correspondingly, after the publication of *Fingal* Blair devotes much of his accompanying 'Critical Dissertation' to proving that Macpherson's first epic comprises 'all the essential requisites of a true and regular epic'.[104] In doing so, Blair is echoing Blackwell so as to classify *Fingal* as epic because of its consummately sublime aspect: 'Throughout the whole of *Fingal*, there reigns that grandeur of sentiment, style, and imagery [the sublime], which ought ever to distinguish this high species of poetry [the epic]'.[105] Therefore, in a programme similar to *Fragments*, the emergence of the Ossianic as sublime is concomitant with the formal conventions of poetics.

The critic Brian Wilkie describes reading the 'great epics' as 'walking through a hall of mirrors' in which familiar scenes of heroes and heroism, battles and conquest reflect intertextually throughout.[106] Macpherson's *Fingal* follows a similar passage, the narrative recounting the battle between Swaran, the Norse king invading Moilena in Ireland, and the eponymous Fingal, king of Morven in the west of Scotland, who has come to the aid of the Irish king Cuchullin. Northrop Frye speaks of Macpherson's epics as 'cycles of vision', peopled by 'huge cosmological figures in whom the human and natural worlds can hardly be distinguished'.[107] It is this interfusion of the natural and human which generates the Ossianic sublime converging around the heroes Swaran and Fingal. The poem opens with an exemplary description of Swaran:

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[102] Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, p. 505.
[103] Ibid., p. 517.
[104] Blair, 'Critical Dissertation', p. 358.
[105] Blair bases his discussion of *Ossian*'s epic form on Aristotle's theory and offers a long comparison between Homer's epics and Ossian's, repeating throughout the sublime features of both. In Blair, 'A Critical Dissertation of *The Poems of Ossian*', p. 360.
–See also Richard Baum and Charles Briggs' discussion of Blair and *Ossian* in which they connect the epic form beyond the sublime to nationhood, noting that Blair's '*Critical Dissertation* is analogous to Blackwell's *Enquiry*' as both act as 'guides to the reading and interpretation of particular works of epic poetry as expressions not only of their individual authors, but of nations in history', in Richard Baum and Charles L. Briggs, *Voices of Modernity: Language Ideologies and the Politics of Inequality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 130.
[106] Brian Wilkie, *Romantic Poets and the Epic Tradition*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), p. 14.
[107] Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* [1947] (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 191.

> I saw their chief, says Moran, tall as a rock of ice. His spear is like that blasted fir. His shield like the rising moon. He sat on the shore; his dark host rolled, like clouds, around him.[108]

The depiction of Swaran is constructed from a contiguous array of simile whose store is both singularly and collectively sublime. This cumulative sequencing of tropes is again evidence of the influence of Lowth's *Lectures*, in which he writes that the Hebrew poets 'have assiduously attended to the sublimity of their compositions by the abundance and splendour of their figures […] for in those poems at least, in which something of uncommon grandeur and sublimity is aimed at, there predominates a perpetual, I had almost said a continued use of Metaphor, sometimes daringly introduced sometimes rushing in with imminent hazard of propriety'.[109] This daring, rushing use of metaphor (and by extension simile) which approaches transgression of poetic 'propriety' by its superlative use becomes a distinct feature of Macpherson's rendering of his heroes. Vincent de Luca comments that Ossianic poetry is 'particularly notable for generating its tropes from the same fund of images that composes the actual environment surrounding the dramatic characters', so that Macpherson achieves 'an actual blurring of the perceived boundaries between person and thing'.[110] The natural sublime of blasted firs and rising moons merge into the semblance of the Swedish king, his 'dark host' indistinguishable from gathering clouds emblemising the threatening violence of conquest - 'Gloomy and dark their heroes followed, like the gathering of the rain clouds behind the red meteors of heaven' — Macpherson's heroes hereby magnified into a near-apocalyptic sublime landscape.[111]

Whilst Macpherson populates his epic with an impressive roster of bards ('Cormac's hundred bards were there to give the war to song'), heroes ('Duchomar the most gloomy of men'), and maidens ('Morna, thou fairest of maids!'), it is Fingal who is most vividly figured.[112] The coming of Fingal to aid the embattled Cuchullin is again announced by Moran:

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[108] Macpherson, 'Fingal: An Ancient Epic Poem in Six Books' [1761], in *The Poems of Ossian and Related Works*, pp. 53–104, I: p. 55.
[109] Lowth, *Lectures*, p. 60.
[110] De Luca, *Words of Eternity*, p. 76.
[111] Macpherson, 'Fingal', I: p. 56.
[112] Ibid., pp. 60, 57, 57.

> The ships, he cried, the ships of the of the lonely isle! There the son of Fithil. —There Fingal comes, the first of men, the breaker of the shields. The waves foam before his black prows. His masts with sails are like groves in the clouds.
>
> Blow, said Cuchullin, all ye winds that rush over my isle of lovely mist. Come to the death of thousands, O chief of the hills of hinds. Thy sails my friend, are to me the clouds of the morning, and thy ships the light of heaven, and thou thyself a pillar of fire that giveth light in the night.[113]

Fingal is referred to by a series of epithets which attest to his hierarchical position within the extensive scheme of heroes, his martial prowess, and his kingship over not only men but nature ('chief of the hills of hinds'). Whereas Swaran's introduction is configured with darkness ('dark host […] gloomy and dark their heroes'), the arrival of Fingal's fleet is suffused with light ('thy ships the light of heaven, and thou thyself a pillar of fire that giveth light in the night'). This chiaroscuro of darkness and light emblemises the familiar dichotomy of good versus evil whilst further rendering the arrival of both Swaran and Fingal in a sublimity theorised by Burke. In the *Enquiry* Burke states that 'mere light is too common a thing to make a strong impression on the mind, and without a strong impression nothing can be sublime. But such a light as that of the sun, immediately exerted on the eye, as it overpowers the sense, is a very great idea'.[114] The strength of the impression is given by the use of metaphor which in this instance is markedly Biblical. The pillar of fire as theophany appears throughout the Hebrew Bible, as in Exodus 13:21, 'The Lord went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, so that they might travel by day and by night'.[115] Lowth had described such appearances as 'most sublime' and commented on this use of metaphor as being 'accounted by the Hebrews the most magnificent and most worthy'.[116] Macpherson relies on this metaphor throughout his poetry, with Fingal later being described as such:

> 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 forests of night are overturned.[117]

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[113] Ibid., II: p. 68.
[114] Burke, *Enquiry*, p. 79.
[115] *The Holy Bible*, Revised Standard Version, 2nd Ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005) Exodus 13:21.
[116] Lowth, *Lectures*, pp. 86–7.
[117] Macpherson, 'Fingal' V: p. 91.

Macpherson repurposes biblical figuration to characterise his heroes, poetically achieving a sublimity which remains distinct as Ossianic because of its mediation of provocative natural images: 'when the branchy forests of night are overturned'.[118] This technique is perhaps most prominent at the poem's climactic scene in which the opposing kings meet in contest.

The battle between Fingal and Swaran is a spectacle which suitably follows the conventions of the epic in portraying excessive physical and martial displays:

> 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 his hero's 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.[119]

Macpherson's construction of the scene is dependent on sound to achieve the Burkean requisite of 'terror' ('Terrible is the battle of the kings'). The opening display of men at arms is configured through a heavy use of plosives concatenated by the anaphoric recurrence of 'There' and 'Their' which generates pace and ferocity to the scene of combat. This transforms into an extended use of sibilance as the heroes 'rush' against each other, enacting phonetically their grappling, 'sinewy' bodies. In a note to the text Macpherson provides an example to show that this scene aligns with those of the epic canon, stating that 'this passage resembles one in the twenty third Iliad', before providing the following quotation from Alexander Pope's translation: 'Close lock'd above their heads and arms are mixt; / Below their planted feet at distance fixt; / Now to the grasp each manly body bends;/ The humid sweat from ev'ry pore descends; / Their bones resound with blows: sides, shoulders, thighs, Swell to each gripe, and bloody tumours rise'.[120] Macpherson's 'translation' mirrors that of Pope's in the shared emphasis on consonance and sibilance illustrating the extent of Macpherson's imitation of the wrestling bout between Ajax and Ulysses. Despite such obvious intertextual

–Fingal is described as a pillar of fire in books II and V of this epic, and Ullin describes Trenmor as being 'like a pillar of fire in the bright arms of his valour' in the final book, whilst in 'Carthon: A Poem', the hero is described as such: 'He stands, in the midst, like a pillar of fire […], in Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian*, p. 68, p. 91, p. 99, p. 130.

[118] Ibid.

[119] Macpherson, 'Fingal', V: p. 91.

[120] Macpherson, note to 'Fingal', p. 432.

inheritance, Macpherson's innovatory Ossianic styling of the sublime appears in the bardic vision which immediately proceeds this scene:

> Thus, have I [Ossian] seen on Cona: (but Cona I behold no more) thus have I seen two dark hills removed from their place by the strength of the bursting stream. They turn from side to side, and their tall oaks meet one another on high. Then they fall together with all their rocks and trees. The streams are turned by their sides, and the red ruin is seen afar.[121]

The contest between kings is paralleled but here the heroes are metaphorically transfigured into powerful natural features creating a landscape of sublimity indistinct from its human counterparts. John Dwyer writes that Macpherson's mastery of the sublime 'is evidenced[…] in those passages in which he demonstrates the force of nature or *nature's man*, the mighty Fingal'.[122] Significantly, it is the bard Ossian, whose interjection ('Thus, have I seen on Cona') transfigures Fingal and Swaran into forces of nature, signalling the visionary power of the bardic poet. This epitomises Macpherson's project of establishing Ossian within the ranks of bards renowned for the sublimity of their vision, a project which extends across *Fragments* and *Fingal*, and in the following year, *Temora*.

Temora: An Ancient Epic Poem in Eight Books

In 1763, Macpherson, with renewed support from Blair and the Edinburgh literati, published *Temora*, the final epic in the Ossianic cycle. Whilst *Fingal* had enjoyed immediate and pervasive success, *Temora* provided the many detractors of Macpherson with convincing evidence against the poet's claims of the authenticity of his work. The most assiduous, and 'crushing attack' against *Temora* came from the Scottish historian Malcolm Laing, who released in 1800 his 'Dissertation of the Supposed Authenticity of Ossian's Poems', followed by a two volume collection, titled *Poems of Ossian, containing the Poetical Works of James MacPherson in Prose and Verse, with Notes and Illustrations* (1805) in which he painstakingly collates an exhaustive range of sources (from Homer through to Lowth), which he argues are the true origins of Macpherson's work.[123] Laing states that within *Ossian* there is only 'an

[121] Ibid., p. 91.
[122] Dwyer, 'The Melancholy Savage: Text and Context in the Poems of Ossian', p. 177.
[123] Kristine Louise Haugen, 'Ossian and the Invention of Textual History', in *Journal of the History of Ideas*

occasional sublimity' and instead what predominates, 'particularly in *Temora*', are 'sentimental descriptions' which have 'stripped [Macpherson's] characters of any sense of historical realism or authenticity'.[124] Harold Bloom commends sentimentalism as being a 'crucial mode of thought and feeling in the middle and later eighteenth century', describing it as the 'self-conscious, overtly dramatic manifestation [of feeling], sincere despite its theatrical overtones'.[125] The closing speech of Fingal in *Temora* is undoubtedly a close example of this: 'Dost thou always delight in blood? In the tears of the sad? – No, ye dark rolling years, Fingal delights not in blood. Tears are wintry streams that waste away my soul'.[126] For Laing, as for many during the period and after, the sentimental and the sublime are considered 'antithetical' and that 'to choose one is to deny the possibility of the other, those qualities that make something or someone sublime disqualify them from being sentimental and social and vice versa'.[127] Therefore, the presence of sentimental affectation throughout *Temora* is why the poem suffered such severe criticism during the period, a consensus which has largely persisted.[128] Whilst acknowledging the work of critics such as Adam Potkay and Dafydd Moore who each offer compelling analysis of the sentimental throughout *Temora*, the remainder of this chapter will set out to revise the poem's status of 'aesthetic failure' through consideration of how Macpherson is nevertheless successfully able to render the sublime.[129]

Temora recounts the return of Ossian, Fingal, and their band of warriors to Ireland this time to meet the rebel brothers Cairbar and Cathmor in battle for murdering the young Irish king Cormac. Whilst Macpherson's final epic is typified by the provocative use of metaphor and simile which characterise both *Fragments* and *Fingal*, the poem extends a more pervasive natural feature throughout, that of mist, which becomes inherent to the sublime aspect of the Ossianic. This porous mist seeps through the narrative, and the penultimate book opens with a

vol. 59, no. 2 (April, 1998), pp. 309–327, (p. 310).

[124] Malcolm Laing, 'Dissertation of the Supposed Authenticity of Ossian's Poems', in *The History of Scotland: From the Union of the Crowns on the Accession of James VI. to the Throne of England, to the Union of the Kingdoms in the Reign of Queen Anne*, [1800] 3rd ed., corrected, 4 vols. (London: J. Mawman, 1819), Vol. IV., pp. 427–522, (p. 462).

[125] Harold Bloom, 'Introduction' to *Poets of Sensibility and the Sublime*, ed. by Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1986), pp. 1–9, (p. 8).

[126] Macpherson, 'Temora: An Ancient Epic poem in Eight Books', in *The Poems of Ossian and Related Works*, pp. 225–292, VIII: p. 290.

[127] Moore, *Enlightenment and Romance in James Macpherson's Poems of Ossian*, p. 115.

[128] See Marylin Butler who states, 'There is a critical consensus that *Fingal* is better than *Temora*', in Butler, *Mapping Mythologies: Countercurrents in Eighteenth–Century British Poetry and Cultural History* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 96.

[129] Dafydd Moore, 'Heroic Incoherence in James Macpherson's "The Poems of Ossian"', in *Eighteenth–Century Studies*, vol. 34, no. 1. (Fall, 2000), pp. 43–59, (p. 46).

–Adam Potkay, 'Virtue and Manners in Macpherson's Poems of Ossian', in *Modern Language Association*, vol. 107, no. 1. (Jan. 1992), pp. 120–130.

concentrated configuration which Macpherson calls attention to in his summary: ‘The poet describes a kind of mist, which rose, by night, from the lake of Lego, and was the usual residence of the souls of the dead, during the interval between their decease and the funeral song’.[130] The mist is therefore introduced as a purgatorial precinct in which the supernatural resides:

> From the wood-skirted waters of Lego ascend, at times, grey-bosomed mists; when the gates of the west are closed, on the sun's eagle eye. Wide, over Lara's stream, is poured the vapor dark and deep: the moon, like a dim shield, lay swimming through its folds. With this, clothe the spirits of old their sudden gestures on the wind, when they stride, from blast to blast, along the dusky night. Often, blended with the gale, to some warrior's grave, they roll the mist a grey dwelling to his ghost, until the songs arise.[131]

The ‘grey-bosomed mists’ macerate the scene of night, cumulating and intermingling with the spirits who wander through the winds. The mist becomes a vehicle to summon the dead, and the spirit of Conar is told to pour ‘his deep mist on Fillan’ (Fingal’s son who had fallen in battle in book VI). After this supernatural rite is performed the ghost of Fillan appears and is substantiated by and in mist, ‘Dark and mournful sat the ghost, bending in his grey ridge of smoak. The blast, at times, rolled him together: but the lovely form returned again. It returned with slow-bending eyes: and dark winding locks of mist’. The apparition of Fillan approaches his ‘lonely’ father and makes the following plea: ‘Am I forgot in the folds of darkness; lonely in the season of dreams?’.[132] Dwyer writes that ‘misty memory and ethereal spirits merge in the twilight world of the Ossianic poems’, as here the appeal of Fillan is one of remembrance, his mist-borne presence a coalition of the worlds of conscious, subconscious and unconscious (awake, dreaming, and dead).[133] The mist therefore performs more than that of a topographical feature of the sublime, becoming one of supernatural presence petitioning human response. This typically Ossianic coalescing of the natural, ghostly, and human, is all dependant on the sublimity provoked by natural imagery and the bardic vision which witnesses such as the synergetic circle of the sublime becomes apparent.

[130] Macpherson, ‘Temora’, VII: p. 278.
[131] Ibid., p. 279.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Dwyer, ‘The Melancholy Savage: Text and Context in the Poems of Ossian’, p. 190.

The proliferation of mist throughout *Temora* suitably converges at the traditional climax of the epic form, the battle between two heroes. However, the manner in which Macpherson presents this climactic encounter between Fingal and the rebel chief Cathmor has historically proven detrimental to the Ossianic project.

> The sun looked forth from his cloud. The hundred streams of Moi-lena shone. Slow rose the blue columns of mist, against the glittering hill. – Where are the mighty kings? - Nor by that stream, nor wood, are they! – I hear the clang of arms! – Their strife is in the bosom of mist. – Such is the contending of spirits in a nightly cloud, when they strive for the wintry wings of winds, and the rolling of the foam-covered waves.[134]

In shrouding the contest of kings in now familiar 'blue columns of mist', critics have dismissed the scene as another example of an overtly polite sentimentalism in which Macpherson shies away from the conventional violent description of the epic, and in doing so, the sublime. Paul DeGategno suggests that here Macpherson 'turns away from the military engagement in order to linger among the various half-lights produced by the battle', and yet the passage opens with the suffusion of light which Burke had theorised sublime.[135] Similarly, Dafydd Moore's reading of the 'structural and emotional economy of the sentimental *Ossian*' states that 'politeness is vouched not only by presentation but by selection, by a discreet averting of the poetic gaze'.[136] Yet the reliance on mist throughout *Temora* would suggest that the poet's gaze is not so much averted but directed, the bardic vision of Ossian sees a mutational landscape in which heroes shrouded in mist move like 'the contending of spirits in a nightly cloud'. This is visionary power and the 'sense sublime' of the poet.

That this is a deliberate direction towards the sublime is explained by Macpherson in a note to the scene: 'The conduct of the poet, in this passage, is remarkable. […] Nothing new, nor adequate to our high idea of the kings, could be said. Ossian, therefore, throws a *column of mist* over the whole, and leaves the combat to the imagination of the reader [so that] our imagination stretches beyond […] description'.[137] Potkay notices that this is correlative with the theory of Burke:

> The literal and figurative mystification of violence derives its aesthetic power from Edmund Burke's sublime of obscurity, according to which "a clear idea is ... another

[134] Macpherson, 'Temora', VIII: p. 290.
[135] Paul DeGategno, *James Macpherson* (Boston: Twayne, 1989), p. 79.
[136] Moore, 'Heroic Incoherence', p. 49.
[137] Macpherson, note to 'Temora', p. 526.

> name for a little idea" (63). The absence of precise definition allows the reader's imagination, in Macpherson's formulation, to stretch beyond the words on the page, presumably into a subjective realm of associated impressions and affects.[138]

For Macpherson, as for Burke, sublimity is dependent on the 'high idea', not 'little idea', of the reader, and this is achieved through provocation of the imagination.[139] Predating Burke, Lowth had maintained that for poetics 'the frequent use of the metaphor renders a style magnificent but often obscure'.[140] Indeed, whilst many critics have commented on Macpherson's obscuring mists, which as Rhys Kaminski-Jones most recently observes are 'usually associated with vagueness, transience, and weakness', there has yet to be any comment on the poet's metaphorical formation of the mists into columns.[141] Macpherson's note is explicit in stating that Ossian 'throws *a column of mist* over the whole', not simply a body of mist, the use of italics emphasising that the column is as significant as the mist. Furthermore, during the final speech of Fingal at the close of *Temora*, (critically derided by Moore as responsible for the poem's ending on 'a note of bankruptcy and failure'), the Scottish king specifically requests that Ossian as bard record his appearance in battle as such: 'My fathers, Ossian, trace my steps; my deeds are pleasant to their eyes. Wherever I come forth to battle, on my field, are their columns of mist. – But mine arm rescued the feeble; the haughty found my rage was fire'.[142] Fingal's appearance is therefore united across both epics with the appearance of mist and fire, the columns a transmutation of his figuration as 'pillar of fire' throughout *Fingal*. In repeating Exodus 13:21, 'The Lord went in from of them in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light', it is clear that Macpherson's poetics are shaped by that of the Hebrew Bible, with a shared use of metaphorical pillars turned columns. That the sublimity rendered becomes Ossianic is due in part to a figuration of a more naturalistic and viable 'mist' rather than 'heavenly' cloud, but more broadly that it is repeatedly relayed throughout the narrative and in Macpherson's notes that

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[138] Potkay, 'Virtue and Manners in Macpherson's Poems of Ossian', p. 124.
[139] This is a development of Longinus's theory of 'lofty ideas' in which he states: 'It is natural to us to feel our souls lifted up by the true Sublime, and conceiving a sort of generous exultation to be filled with joy and pride, as though we had ourselves originated the ideas which we read. If then any work, on being repeatedly submitted to the judgment of an acute and cultivated critic, fails to dispose his mind to lofty ideas; if the thoughts which it suggests do not extend beyond what is actually expressed; and if, the longer you read it, the less you think of it,—there can be here no true sublimity, when the effect is not sustained beyond the mere act of perusal', in 'On the Sublime', p. 107.
[140] Lowth, *Lectures*, p. 50.
[141] Rhys Kaminski-Jones, 'Floating in the Breath of the People: Ossianic Mist, Cultural Health, and the Creation of Celtic Atmosphere, 1760–1815', in *Romanticism*, vol. 27., no. 2. (2021), pp. 135–48, (p. 138).
[142] Moore, 'The Melancholy Savage: Text and Context in the Poems of Ossian', p. 131.
–Macpherson, 'Temora', p. 290.

the vision of such comes from the bard, Ossian. The vision of pillars of fire, columns of mist, and the joy of grief are Ossian's. How appropriate that Macpherson chooses to call attention to the bard and bardic vision on the final pages of his epic.

In a note to book VIII of *Temora*, Macpherson makes the valediction of his and Blair's insistence on the affinity between ancient Greek epic and Celtic epic. Whilst he states that the 'genius of the Greek and Celtae was extremely dissimilar', the Greek poet and Celtic bard 'exactly correspond […] with respect to the grand essentials of the *epopoea*'.[143] The 'grand essentials' of the epic, are, as has been construed, the arresting quality of sublimity which Macpherson then accounts for:

> The preparations [Ossian] has made, in the preceding book [book VII], properly introduce the magnificence of description […] and tend to shew that the Celtic bard had more art, in working up his fable, than some of those, who closely imitated the perfect model of Homer. The transition from the pathetic to the sublime is easy and natural. Till the mind is opened, by the first, it scarcely can have an adequate comprehension of the second. The soft and affecting scenes of the seventh book form a sort of contrast to, and consequently heighten, the features of the more grand and terrible images of the eighth.[144]

Here, Macpherson concertedly appropriates the sublimity of the epic in his connection to the figure of the Celtic bard, revealing that it is the bard's role to 'properly introduce' the sublime into being. This emphasis on the bardic nature of the epic is then configured at the denouement of the poem. The return of the Irish heir Ferad-artho is prefigured by 'the voice of music', being that of the bards Condan and Carril.[145] From Fingal's camp, Ossian recounts that 'sudden bursts the songs from our bards', with Macpherson numerating this in the summary to the book, stating, 'the coming of Ferad-Artho is announced by the songs of a hundred bards'.[146] Ossian, Clonmal, Condan, Carril, and the hundred bards of Fingal's camp, this legion of bardic figures at the close of *Temora* is significant. Paired with the fixation on the Celtic bard's inherent epic formulae in his notes, Macpherson is conspicuously attempting to establish Ossian within the genealogy of bards, and the Ossianic poems within the epic

[143] The distinction made by Macpherson is one of poetic voice, he states '[the Greek poets] were lively and loquacious; a manly conciseness of expression distinguished the latter [the Celtic bards]'. Macpherson, note to 'Temora', p. 522.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Macpherson, 'Temora', p. 292.
[146] Ibid., p. 286.

canon. Bard and epic, for Macpherson, are indivisible and integral to sublimity, and the establishment of both alongside his imitative and yet innovative use of parallelism and metaphor are what achieve the Ossianic sublime.

In 1818, William Hazlitt wrote of the enduring impact of *Ossian* as being ‘a feeling and a name that can never be destroyed in the minds of his readers’.[147] Concurringly, in his seminal twentieth-century work on the theory of the sublime, Samuel Monk surmises that Ossian 'was a sublime, original genius. As such, he would be read and valued, and as such he would become a guide to the [sublimities] of storms and mountains and the ocean and the wild, uncultivated heath'.[148] This notion of Ossian as 'guide' is an important one. If Ossian was to become a guide to the natural sublime, as the ensuing rise in Highland tourism in search of what Leask terms ‘Fingalian Topographies’ attests to, Ossian would also guide the developing ‘shape and substance’ of sublime poetics.[149] Recently, Robert Crawford has explored how Ossian was instigative in ‘shaping’ the status of the bard to eighteenth-century cultural thought. Crawford states that ‘what Ossian-mania did throughout Britain and soon across Europe and North America was to excite the world about bards’, and that the bardic figure of Ossian ‘provided a model’ for subsequent poets, most notably Robert Burns.[150] Whilst Chapter 5 will explore how Burns remodels bardship to unrivalled success, the more immediate succession to Ossian was not of ancient bard, but a more contemporary minstrel figure, one whose ‘simple lays’ would challenge the epic canon’s sovereignty of the sublime.

[147] Hazlitt, ‘On Poetry in General’, p. 180.
[148] Monk, *The Sublime*, p. 126.
[149] Leask, ‘Fingalian Topographies: Ossian and the Highland Tour, 1760–1805’.
–See also Leask’s *Stepping Westward: Writing the Highland Tour c. 1720–1830*.
[150] Robert Crawford, ‘The Bard: Ossian, Burns, and the shaping of Shakespeare’, in *Shakespeare and Scotland*, ed. by Willy Maley and Andrew Murphy (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), pp. 124–40, (pp. 128, 131).

Chapter 3.

‘Songs Sublime’: Addison’s Ballad Papers, Percy’s *Reliques*, and the Succession of the Minstrel

Again the minstrels' songs sublime,
Soften'd for thee in echoing skies,
Shall fill the gloomy night of time,
That veils my early mysteries:
Their dying voice, to freedom dear,
Shall pour the deep sound in thy ear,
That bids the fateful past return:
To them the sacred power is given
To chant the patriot sons of heaven:
O! catch the inspiring hymns that consecrate their urn![1]

“A poet” said Ben Jonson, “should detest a ballad maker,” and they all did.[2]

The succession of the minstrel from the bard which the following chapters will be concerned with curiously begins with the pioneer of British aesthetic theory, Joseph Addison. As detailed in the opening chapter, Addison’s ‘Pleasures of the Imagination’ series (1712) had been ‘the first sustained piece of writing on aesthetics in eighteenth-century [Britain]’. [3] Addison’s work represents the initial and crucial development of the sublime from the rhetoric of Longinus towards a focus on the sublimity of nature, and the conscious experience resulting from such phenomena. Hugh Blair appraised the pioneering efforts of Addison in stating that he had ‘the merit of having opened a tract, which was before unbeaten’, clearing

[1] Jessie Stewart, *Ode to Dr. Thomas Percy, Lord Bishop of Dromore: Occasioned by the Reading of Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (Edinburgh: Mundell and Son, 1804), p. 9.
[2] Albert B. Friedman, *The Ballad Revival: Studies in the Influence of Popular on Sophisticated Poetry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 65.
[3] Monk, *The Sublime*, p. 57.

the way for the century's fixation on the sublime culminating around the theory of Burke and the actualisation of aesthetic conceptualisation in Macpherson's *Ossian.*[4] Furthermore, critics have also credited Addison with having initiated the eighteenth century's 'ballad revival', with Albert Friedman stating: 'Ballad criticism began in [Britain] with Addison's Chevy Chase papers'.[5] If Addison had revived critical interest in the ballad form, Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) would poetically inspirit such fascination and with distinguished success. The parallel is therefore distinct, if yet unnoticed. The three papers on the ballads of 'Chevy Chase' and 'Two Children in the Wood' that were published in *The Spectator* in 1711 are significantly situated between Addison's appraisal of the sublimity of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, beginning in 1694 with 'An Account of the Greatest English Poets', through to his *A Discourse on Ancient and Modern Learning* of 1734. Whilst this shows that the sublime was very much a present and considerable part of Addison's critical mode of thought, the ballad papers are yet to receive little, if any, interest from aesthetic scholarship. As such, the opening of this chapter will be dedicated to Addison's ballad papers as being both influential for the ensuing success of the ballad form in Percy's *Reliques*, and equally as significant in finding a contemporary poetics of the sublime in the 'Delight of the common People'.

The epigraph which entitles the 70th issue of *The Spectator* states *Interdum vulgus rectum vide*, is a quotation from Horace which reads 'Sometimes the public sees right'.[6] This epitomises the central dictate of Addison's 'Chevy Chase' papers, which argues both unequivocally and repeatedly that ballad poetry represents the 'Delight of the common people'.[7] The lexis of 'Delight' has in the history of aesthetics, and throughout Addison's own sublime theory, extensively conspired with the 'pleasing delight' experienced from sublimity.[8] Furthermore, Addison begins his ballad papers by noting the singularity of this 'particular Delight' in his encounters with ballad poetry:

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[4] Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, vol. 1., p. 52.
[5] Friedman, *The Ballad Revival,* p. 87.
[6] It is significant that the full quotation reads *Interdum vulgus rectum vide*; *est ubi peccat* (Epist. 2.1.63) 'Sometimes the people judge aright; at others they err'. in abbreviating this Addison breaks from neoclassical esoteric fastidiousness and bridges into the Romantic. There is also subtle significance to *vide* given Addison's emphasis on the importance of vision throughout his 'Pleasures of the Imagination' series, in Addison, *The Spectator* No. 70. [Monday, May 21, 1711], in *Critical Essays from The Spectator*, p. 36.
[7] Ibid.
[8] See Addison, *The Spectator* No. 412. [Monday, June 23, 1712], in which he states: 'There may, indeed, be something so terrible or offensive, that the Horror or Loathsomeness of an Object may over-bear the *Pleasure* which results from its Greatness, Novelty, or Beauty; but still there will be such a Mixture of *Delight* in the very Disgust it gives us, as any of these three Qualifications are most conspicuous and prevailing', in *Critical Essays from The Spectator*, p. 178.

> When I travelled, I took a particular Delight in hearing the Songs and Fables that are come from Father to Son, and are most in vogue among the common People of the Countries through which I passed; for it is impossible that any thing should be universally tasted and approved by a Multitude, tho' they are only the Rabble of a Nation, which hath not in it some peculiar Aptness to please and gratify the Mind of Man. Human Nature is the same in all reasonable Creatures; and whatever falls in with it, will meet with Admirers amongst Readers of all Qualities and Conditions.[9]

According to Addison the 'particular Delight' he experiences conforms to the 'peculiar Aptness' of the ballad to 'please and gratify the Mind of Man'. That this 'Aptness' is the pervading quality of the poetics of the sublime found in the ballad is substantiated by the extension of his claim to 'Readers of all Qualities and Conditions'. Addison then reiterates this claim by stating that 'an ordinary song or ballad that is the delight of the common People, cannot fail to please all such Readers as are not unqualified for the entertainment by their Affectation or Ignorance'.[10] Here, Addison's aesthetic theory distinctly converges with poetics. Firstly, that ballads have a quality or 'Aptness' which suscitates an experience of 'Delight' in the 'Mind of Man', and secondly, that this experience is universal in prospect to 'Readers of all Qualities and Conditions'. In this, Addison articulates the aesthetic principle of the sublime instance, and writing in 1711, is truly pioneering in his relation of sublimity to ballad poetry.

That Addison has remained wholly unrecognised for such an equation is evidenced in contemporary condemnation and modern criticism alike.[11] Edmund K. Broadus, whose early twentieth-century proposal for the influence of Addison's ballad papers supplied the touchstone for modernity's two most seminal works on the ballad, namely Gordan Hall Gerould's *The Ballad of Tradition* (1932), and Albert B. Friedman's *The Ballad Revival* (1961), opines that it is 'not hard to find so-called sources for this pronunciamento of Addison's', and significantly states Longinus as primary source.[12] Friedman, without acknowledging Broadus, reads Addison's pronouncement, not as referent to the sublime but

–This would later transpire into Burke's thesis in which he defines the 'Delight' experienced from sublimity at length, see *Enquiry* pp. 35–36.

[9] Addison, *The Spectator* No. 70., p. 36.

[10] Ibid.

[11] The contempt which Addison's publications immediately elicited will be recounted in turn.

[12] Edmund K. Broadus, 'Addison's Influence on the Development of Interest in Folk-Poetry in the Eighteenth Century, *Modern Philology*, Vol. 8, No. 1, (Jul. 1910), pp. 123–134, (p. 129).

to a 'reasoning toward a democratic theory of taste'.[13] Whilst he arbitrates between Nicolas Boileau (who Addison was in direct correspondence with) as substantiating this strain of thought, and Samuel Johnson as 'affirming' it, Friedman reconsiders Longinus to be inaugurator and quotes the same passage from *Peri Hypsous* as Broadus:

> For when men of different pursuits, lives, ambitions, ages, languages, hold identical views on one and the same subject, then that verdict which results, so to speak, from a concert of discordant elements makes our faith in the object of admiration strong and unassailable.[14]

Cursory perusal of this anecdote support Friedman's claims of a democratic aesthetic because Friedman (and Broadus) neglects to contextualise his source. The above passage closes chapter seven of *Peri Hypsous*, a chapter notably titled 'The True Sublime' in which Longinus's enduring thesis of the universal appeal of sublimity is propounded at length. The statement immediately preceding Friedman's selection defines the sublime in egalitarian terms: 'Sublimity in all its truth and beauty exists in such works as please all men at all times'.[15] Therefore, a fuller reading of Addison's referencing *Peri Hypsous* shows him to be ascribing to the ballad the universal approbation of the sublime.[16]

Moreover, Addison continues his first paper on 'Chevy Chase' by expanding his analysis of the innate appeal of the ballad by way of distinction: '*Homer, Virgil, or Milton,* so far as the Language of their poems is understood, will please a Reader of plain common Sense, who would neither relish nor comprehend an Epigram of *Martial* or a Poem of *Cowley*'.[17] Addison distances 'Chevy Chase' from the Augustan mode whilst significantly situating the ballad form within a now familiar genealogy of epic poets. The concentrated efforts of Macpherson in his footnotes and Blair in his 'Critical Dissertation', to align the Ossianic with the epic tradition are enacted first by Addison with the ballad of 'Chevy Chase', albeit considerably less successfully. Appealing to the authority of 'the greatest modern Criticks', Addison contends that 'an Heroick Poem should be founded upon some important Precept of Morality, adapted to the Constitution of the Country in which the Poet writes'.[18] Lee Andrew Elioseff notes that it is the French neoclassical writer Le Bossu whom

[13] Friedman, *The Ballad Revival*, p. 92.
[14] Longinus, 'On the Sublime', p. 107.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Monk provides an account of Addison's response to Longinus although he does not consider the ballad papers, in *The Sublime*, p. 56.
[17] Addison, *The Spectator*, No. 70., p. 36.
[18] Ibid., p. 37.

Addison is gesturing towards, and explains that 'a year later, as has been noted, [Addison] rejects Le Bossu's contention that an epic poem is *founded* upon a preconceived moral'.[19] Whilst this precept has been dispelled, Addison's second proposal that 'the next Point observed by the greatest Heroic poets, hath been to celebrate Persons and Actions which do Honour to their Country', is far more aligned with the epic's propensity for sublimity.[20] Addison then performs an exhaustive comparison between the 'Sentiments and Actions' and 'heroic mode' of 'Chevy Chase' and that of the *Aeneid*, arguing that in both there lies the 'Greatness of Thought' which moves beyond the precepts of poetic form into that of the sublime.[21] Friedman notes that even today the 'traditional ballad', (much like the epic) resists generic definition, observing that 'the traditional ballad is in many respects a genus rather than a genre'.[22] In considering the ballad alongside the epic Addison was ridiculed for showing a parity between two genres deemed at that time incomparable. Yet, the similitude between ballad and epic was not one of poetic genre, but in Friedman's terms, one of genus. This genus, which Addison recognised, was the genus of the sublime.

Correspondingly, Addison in the second of his 'Chevy Chase' papers qualifies his thesis in stating that, 'Had this old Song been filled with Epigrammatical Turns and Points of Wit, it might perhaps have pleased the wrong Taste of some Readers; but it would never have become the Delight of the common People'.[23] Here, Addison again distinguishes the ballad from the ornate Augustan mode of wit and epigram in favour of what he extols as the form's defining characteristic of genus: 'majestick Simplicity'.[24] As detailed in the opening chapter, Addison represents the bridge between the rhetorical sublime of Longinus and the emergence of a conceptual sublime based on nature, the mind, and poetry, typified by Burke and actualised by Macpherson. Marjorie Hope Nicolson explains that in Addison's later aesthetic theorising, 'the vocabulary used by Addison […] shows careful avoidance of the term

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[19] Lee Andrew Elioseff, *The Cultural Milieu of Addison's Literary Criticism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1963), pp. 64–65.
–For Addison's response to French neoclassicism see Denise Gigante's chapter on Addison 'Milton's Spots: Addison on *Paradise Lost*', *Milton in the Long Restoration*, pp. 7–21.
[20] Addison, *The Spectator* No. 70, p. 37.
[21] Addison, *The Spectator* No. 70, 74, see also No. 85 where he states 'those only who are endowed with a true Greatness of Soul and Genius, can divest themselves of the little Images of Ridicule, and admire Nature in her Simplicity and Nakedness', p. 48.
[22] Friedman, *The Ballad Revival*, pp. 20–21.
–See also Susan Stewart, *Crimes of Writing: Problems in the Containment of Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 108.
[23] Addison, *The Spectator*, No. 74, p. 41.
[24] Burke would later use such terminology to appraise the sublime nature of *Ossian*— 'whose expressive singularity evidently retains the majestic air, and the native simplicity of a sublime original', in 'Review of *Fingal: An Ancient Epic Poem'*, p. 50.

sublime'.[25] Instead, terms such as 'Delight', 'majestick', and more frequently, 'greatness' supply a cypher for the sublime. Therefore, in stating that 'the Sentiments in that Ballad ['Chevy Chase'] are extremely natural and poetical, and full of majestic Simplicity which we admire in the greatest of the ancient Poets', Addison is acclaiming the ballad sublime.[26] As with his tautological fixation on the universal appeal of the ballad, Addison repeats his candidacy of the ballad's sublime simplicity: 'What can be more sounding and poetical, or resemble more the majestic Simplicity of the Ancients, than the following Stanzas?'.[27] Whilst a full account of Addison's quotations from 'Chevy Chase' and his direct comparisons with the *Aeneid* are beyond the scope of this chapter, it is worth noting the poetic sublimity of two of his selected stanzas:

> With fifteen hundred Bowmen bold,
>
> All chosen Men of Might,
>
> Who knew full well, in Time of Need,
>
> To aim their Shafts aright.
>
> The Hounds ran swiftly thro' the woods
>
> The nimble Deer to take,
>
> And with their Cries the Hills and Dales
>
> An Eccho shrill did make.[28]

The scene is one of a hunting party yet is martial in conscription. Sublimity is evoked by way of multitude and poetically conformed from the convergence of assonance; extenuating the multitude of bowmen, with consonance; characterising them in redoubted terms- 'Men of Might'.[29] The powerful description which follows precipitates the coming battle as does the felling and cries of the deer in the subsequent stanza. In line with the Ossianic, the human and the natural are subsumed into one semblance of sublimity as the martial scene turns arcadian.

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[25] This is due to Addison's directive in moving from a rhetorical device towards an aesthetic concept, in Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*, p. 311.
[26] Addison, *The Spectator*, No. 74, p. 41.
[27] Ibid., p. 42.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Multitude is included in Burke's theory under section XIII on 'Magnificence', in the *Enquiry*, pp. 77–78.

The sequenced iambic tetrameter and trimeter, the consistent prism of ballad metrics, enacts the urgency of the eponymous 'chase', as the cries of the deer are extenuated and then contracted into anthropomorphised 'Eccho'.[30] Whilst Addison reads in these stanzas Virgil, there is distinct resonance between the 'echoing heaths' of *Ossian* and that of 'Chevy Chase'. That which is 'sounding and poetical' in the *Aeneid*, is synonymous to that of 'Chevy Chase', so too would it become in *Ossian*, and thus Addison must then be acknowledged as forebear to Burke and Blair in his recognition and appraisal of sublime poetics.

Far from such approbation, Addison's ballad criticism was met with instant obloquy. Addison's immediate predecessor in aesthetic development, John Dennis, responded directly to Addison by denigrating ballads as 'old dogrel', possessed of 'No Magnificence, No Vehemence, No Painting' and damningly 'No Poetry'.[31] Johnson, an advocate, and admirer of Addison, writes of the 'chill and lifeless imbecility' of 'Chevy Chase', stating in his usual pugnacious manner that 'the story cannot possibly be told in a manner that shall make less impression upon the mind'.[32] Whilst modern critics have justly acknowledged Addison's role in igniting the 'ballad revival' of the eighteenth century their appraisal of his criticism is tempered at best. Broadus, who is forthright in promoting the ballad papers' influence, still remarks that Addison 'spoke better than he knew', and that the 'quotation of classical parallels in a criticism of the "Two Children in the Wood" is even more patently absurd than an examination of a poem having the heroic proportions of "Chevy Chase".[33] Friedman somewhat reluctantly admits the 'epic formulas' and 'faint heroic atmosphere' of 'Chevy Chase', yet his reasoning for Addison's selection of ballads is deleterious.[34] In writing of Addison's choice of 'Chevy Chase', Friedman infers from the ubiquity of the ballad during the period, 'rather implies that "Chevy Chase" had become almost the generic term for an old, non-topical ballad. Quite possibly, Addison had no special fondness for this ballad, but fixed upon it as the best representative specimen'.[35] In doing so, Friedman divests Addison's selection of 'Chevy Chase' of any poetic, aesthetic, or indeed, critical merit. A supposition

[30] George B. Walsh discusses how Longinus defines sublimity as being an 'echo': 'Thus, Longinus defines sublimity on the one hand as quality of *logoi* (1.3) and on the other hand as an "echo" (*apekhema*) of "high spirit" (*megalophrosynes*), 9.2)', in George B. Walsh, 'Sublime Method: Longinus on Language and Imitation.' *Classical Antiquity* 7.2 (1988) pp. 252–269, p. 260.
[31] John Dennis, *The Critical Works of John Dennis*, ed. Edward Niles Hooker, 2 vols. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1939–1943), vol. 2, pp. 37–38.
[32] Samuel Johnson, 'Life of Addison', p. 37.
[33] Broadus, 'Addison's Influence', p. 128.
[34] Friedman, *The Ballad Revival*, pp. 88–89.
[35] Ibid., p.89. Friedman later notes that 'Much the same reason probably determined Addison's choice of "The Two Children in the Wood" before going on to account for its extrinsic worth. pp. 89–90.

which wildly contradicts Addison's recognised status as influential for both aesthetics and literary criticism. Similarly, Elioseff classifies Addison's ballad criticism as 'a failure' and provides the fullest account of the 'condemnation and satirical jibes' it was met with.[36] For Elioseff, it is Addison's defence of the ballad's 'majesty' that his critics found 'unconvincing'.[37]

Therefore, it is possible to surmise that neither critics of the early eighteenth or twentieth centuries were, or still are, able to recognise Addison's discourse on the poetic 'majesty' of the ballads as being equally a discourse on the sublime. Addison's ballad papers receive no mention in any of the major studies of the sublime since and including Monk, and the above points raised in this thesis remain a frangible connection of its own limited authority. All except for one yet unconsidered mention in Edmund Burke's *Enquiry*:

> Among the common sort of people, I never could perceive that painting had much influence on their passions. It is true that the best sorts of painting, as well as the best sorts of poetry, are not much understood in that sphere. But it is most certain that their passions are very strongly roused by a fanatic preacher, or by the ballads of Chevy-Chase, or the children in the wood, and by other little popular poems and tales that are current in that rank of life. I do not know of any paintings, bad or good, that produce the same effect. So that poetry, with all its obscurity, has a more general, as well as a more powerful dominion over the passions, than the other art.[38]

Burke's distinguishing of poetry in favour of painting is a familiar and much examined principle of his treatise requiring no further comment. However, in justifying this tenet with reference to 'the ballads of Chevy-Chase, or the children in the wood', Burke, as his editor James T. Boulton notes, is justifiably referencing Addison's ballad criticism.[39] In doing so, Burke is noticing that there is an inherent quality, or in Addison's words 'aptness', of the ballad that is sublime. By enforcing the primacy of poetry over painting, whilst signalling to Addison, the ballad form is upheld as an example of poetics' 'more general, as well as a more

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[36] Elioseff, *The Cultural Milieu of Addison's Literary Criticism*, pp. 64–65.
[37] Ibid., p. 65.
[38] Burke, *Enquiry*, p. 61.
[39] Boulton states: 'Addison had written on Chevy Chase in *Spectator* Nos. 70 and 74'. He also writes on 'Children in the Wood' in *Spectator* No. 85, in Burke, *Enquiry*, note 6. to p. 61.
– See also Johnathon Brody Kramnick who contends that 'the idea that sublime obscurity dwells in folk culture hints at the high–cultural appropriation of antique common forms, a move that is[…] canonised in such anthologies as Percy's *Reliques'*, in Kramnick, *Making the English Canon: Print–Capitalism and the Cultural Past, 1700–1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 77.

powerful dominion over the passions'. The importance of such a proposition cannot be understated and allows for an entire reconsideration of the ballads' position within the poetic practice and sublime outpourings of the eighteenth century.

For all the posturing from Longinus through to Blair for the epic as *summa forma*, what emerges is an undercurrent of poetic morphology inspired by an egalitarian vision of sublime poetics as being the 'Delight of the common people'. The phenomenal success of the Ossianic was due in significant part to the contemporary need for sublime poetic expression of aesthetic principles which were traditionally ordinated around the formal features and pre-eminence of the epic. Macpherson's and Blair's project, (whilst covert), was one of marrying ballad poetics to epic proportions. Conversely, Addison's proposal was a direct inversion of this process in synthesising the epic to the ballad. Whilst this was immediately rejected by his peers, Burke was not alone in his recognition of the sublime potential of the ballad. In 1723, 'Chevy Chase' was published anonymously in *Collection of Old Ballads*. In the preface to the second addition, the editor, presumed to be Ambrose Phillips (a friend of Addison's), makes a striking amelioration:

> The very Prince of Poets, old Homer, if we may trust ancient records, was nothing more than a blind Ballad-singer, who writ Songs of the Siege of Troy, and the Adventures of Ulysses; and playing the Tunes upon his Harp, sung from Door to Door, till at his Death somebody thought fit to collect all his Ballads, and by a little connecting 'em, gave us the Iliad and Odysses [sic], which since that Time have been so much admired.[40]

The figuration of the 'Prince of Poets' moving 'from Door to Door' followed by a collection and 'a little connecting 'em' bears an uncanny resemblance to Macpherson's tours of the Highlands to do the very same. Whereas Macpherson was in search of the Ossianic epic, here the 'somebody' is in search of ballads. What is most significant is the transfiguration of Homer from the ancient archetype of blind bard into a strikingly contemporary 'blind Ballad-singer'. This transfiguration represents the syncretic composite from bard and epic, to ballad and ballad-singer. In 1765, the year Macpherson published his collected works *The Poems of*

[40] Anon, 'Preface' to *A Collection of Old Ballads. Corrected from the best and most Ancient Copies Extant. With Introductions Historical, Critical, or Humerous, Illustrated with Copper Plates,* 3 vols (London: James Roberts, 1725), vol. I., pp. iii–iv.

Ossian, Thomas Percy published *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, and the bard became fully transfigured as minstrel.

Reliques of Ancient English Poetry

The critical contempt for the ballad which resisted Addison's panegyric largely persisted throughout the eighteenth century until Thomas Percy published his collection *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* in 1765. Samuel Johnson, who would later (somewhat contradictorily) champion *Reliques*, describes in his dictionary of 1755 the ballad as being 'now applied to nothing but trifling verse'. As Phillip Connell notes it remained 'a genre more traditionally associated with plebian street literature', found in the cumulative dispensation of ballads in chapbooks and broadsides since the sixteenth century. [41] Despite the early success of other publications such as *Collection of Old Ballads* (1723), and Allan Ramsay's *Tea-Table Miscellany* (1723–1737)), and *The Ever Green* (1724) which followed in the wake of Addison's criticism, during the time of Percy's collecting, editing, and publishing *Reliques*, the ballad was yet associated with 'political sedition, the red-nosed rhymester and the gutter'.[42] Whilst this critical ostracism certainly contributed to Macpherson's decision to reject the ballad-origins of *Ossian* in favour of the more esoteric epic, Percy's project sought instead to rescue the ballad from 'the gutter', depoliticise it, and reinstate the 'red-nosed rhymester' as ancient English minstrel. Percy, whose project began from the literal rescuing of a manuscript of old ballads from a kitchen hearth, enlisted a group of antiquarians and men of letters to compile and edit the three volumes of *Reliques*. Whilst Percy may have been 'as much a conductor of an orchestra of researchers as he was the editor of ballads', the composition was still very much the work of his own interests, and these interests were both indebted to Addison, and aligned with the developing poetics of the sublime.[43]

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[41] Philip Connell, 'British Identities and the Politics of Ancient Poetry in Later Eighteenth-Century England', in *The Historical Journal*, vol. 49, no. 1 (2006) pp. 161–192, (p. 175).
–See also Dianne Dugaw, 'The Popular Marketing of "Old Ballads": The Ballad Revival and Eighteenth-Century Antiquarianism Reconsidered', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 21 (1987), pp. 71–90.

[42] Eileen Mackenzie, 'Thomas Percy and Ballad "Correctness"', in *The Review of English Studies*, vol. 21, no. 81 (Jan. 1945), pp. 58–60, (p. 60).
Whilst Ramsay's collections were not entirely comprised of ballads, rather featuring old Scots poems and songs, Murray Pittock notices that Ramsay was directly influenced by Addison's ballad papers in blending Addison's 'aesthetic commitment to 'a taste for polite writing' (Spectator, 7 May 1711) with the English author's 'delight in hearing the songs and fables that...are most in vogue among the common people' (Spectator, 21 May 1711)', in Pittock, 'General Editor's Preface' to *The Edinburgh Edition of the Collected Works of Allan Ramsay: Volume VI, The Ever Green*, ed. by Murray Pitttock and James J. Caudle (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2024), pp. iii–xii, (p. vi).

[43] Nick Groom, 'Introduction' to Thomas Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, 3 vols. (London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1996), vol. 1., pp. 1–68, (p. 6).

Significantly, it is on the authority of Addison which Percy relies on to promote the 'pleasing simplicity' of the ballad.[44] In the Preface to *Reliques*, Percy offers an *apologia* for his collection:

> In a polished age like the present, I am sensible that many of these reliques of antiquity will require great allowances to be made for them. Yet have they, for the most part, a pleasing simplicity and many artless graces, which, in the opinion of no mean critics, have been thought to compensate for the want of higher beauties.[45]

In a footnote to this passage, Percy directly references 'Mr Addison' as primary critic and the first of his ballad papers *Spectator 70* as critical source. The 'pleasing simplicity' of Percy then conforms to the 'majestick Simplicity' of Addison and his distinguishing of the ballad as possessing the 'peculiar aptness' of the sublime which is able to 'please and gratify the Mind of Man' is therefore implicit. Addison's influence is compounded by Percy referencing Addison's 'excellent critique' in his introduction to 'The Ancient Ballad of Chevy Chase', the opening poem of *Reliques*.[46] Addison's appraisal of 'Chevy Chase' had made three distinctions which aligned with the developing theory of the sublime the first of which was the 'majestick Simplicity' alluded to by Percy above. The two other proponents were the heroic propensities of the ballad and the universal approbation of the form, both of which Percy sweepingly recapitulates in his opening remarks:

> The fine heroic song of *Chevy-Chase* has ever been admired by competent judges. Those genuine strokes of nature and artless passion, which have endeared it to the most simple readers, have recommended it to the most refined; and it has equally been the amusement of our childhood, and the favourite of our riper years.[47]

Correspondingly, Percy selects as epigraph to the third volume of *Reliques* the passage from *The Spectator* No. 70 on the ballad being 'the delight of the common people', confirming his agreement with Addison on the egalitarian universality of the ballad.[48] There is further reference to Addison in Percy's introductory remarks to both 'The Children in the

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[44] See Broadus who states 'when Bishop Percy was about to give *Reliques* to a world whose attitude toward folk–poetry was still a matter of uncertainty, he felt constrained to invoke the authority of Addison to justify a serious consideration of the ballad', in 'Addison's Influence on the Development of Folk-Poetry in the Eighteenth Century', p. 134.
[45] Thomas Percy, 'Preface' to *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* [1765], ed. with introduction by Henry B. Wheatley, 3 vols. (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1910), vol. I, pp. 7–15, (p. 8).
[46] Ibid. p. 19.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid., vol. III, p. 2.

Wood', and 'The Wanton Wife of Bath' which Addison only mentions fleetingly.[49] What emerges from such a distinct and extensive reliance on Addison is both Percy's familiarity with the ballad papers and his dependency on Addison to re-establish the ballad in critical terms. That such terms move beyond poetic form into aesthetic composition is emphasised by the specific focus of Percy's referencing. The 'pleasing simplicity' of Percy's appraisal on the 'genuine strokes of nature and artless passion' of the ballad uphold Addison's precepts of sublimity laid out in his *Spectator* series, as Percy continually responds to Addison's work in aesthetic terms: 'the reader that would see the general beauties of this ballad set in a just and striking light, may consult the excellent criticism of Mr Addison'.[50] The question then arises as to why Addison was ridiculed by his contemporaries whereas Percy was praised? Johnson, for instance, who openly mocked Addison's ballad papers and dismissed the form as 'trifling verse' in 1755, nearly a decade later offered his full support for Percy's ballad collection. Whilst critics have offered varying responses to the influential success of *Reliques*, the distinguishing factor between the critical milieu of Addison and that of Percy in terms both aesthetic and poetic is Percy's matriculation of the minstrel.

Included within the capacious three volumes of *Reliques* is Percy's dissertation 'An Essay on the Ancient English Minstrels' which sets out to provide a cultural ordination of the minstrel as idealised poet figure. This essentially historicist account charts the role of the native English minstrel from ancient times up until the Elizabethan period in a calculated attempt to provide cultural and national heritage to the fallen figure of the contemporary 'red-nosed rhymester'.[51] The fulcrum which substantiates this entire dialectic is that the minstrel is successor to the bard, with Percy stating: 'The minstrels seem to have been the genuine successors of the ancient bards who united the arts of poetry and music, and sung verses to the harp of their own composing'.[52] Critics including Nick Groom, Philip Connell, and Kathryn Sutherland have recognised this attempt as being in direct response to Macpherson's success with the Celtic bards of *Ossian*. Connell describes how 'the revival of interest in the ancient Celtic bard, also inspired Thomas Percy's answering defence of English literary

[49] Ibid. For 'The Children in the Wood', Percy states that it has been 'set in so favourable a light by the *Spectator*, No. 85', and for 'The Wanton Wife of Bath', Percy references *The Spectator*, No. 248, writing 'Mr Addison has pronounced this an excellent ballad', vol. III, pp. 169, 333.
[50] Ibid. Percy's introduction to 'The More Modern Ballad of Chevy Chace', vol. I, p. 252.
[51] See John Regan who describes the essays by Percy as constituting 'a rich and inadequately understood form of eighteenth–century historiography', in 'Ambiguous Progress and its Poetic Correlatives: Percy's *Reliques* and Stadial History', in *ELH*, vol. 81., no. 2 (Jun. 2014), pp. 615–634, (p. 616).
[52] Percy, 'An Essay on the Ancient Minstrels in England', in *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, vol. I, pp. 345–381, (p. 346).

antiquity', with Sutherland noting that 'the minstrel of the *Reliques* is a composite, idealised figure of several cultures and ages', one who 'merges inevitably' with the Ossianic bard of Macpherson. [53] Such accounts argue for the complex nationalist motivations apparent between the Ossianic production and the responding work of Percy which provided 'a national poet and national song' that could politically contend with the Celtic awakening of *Ossian*.[54] However, as with the divisive body of criticism on the Ossianic production and controversy, such focus on the political and historical contexts of Percy's minstrelsy obscures adequate aesthetic and indeed poetic analysis of the ballads themselves by overlooking the function which Macpherson's, and likewise, Percy's bard and minstrel performs throughout each respective corpus.

Nigel Leask is perhaps alone then in noticing an aesthetic impetus to Percy's ballad production. Writing on the distinction between earlier ballad collections and Percy's *Reliques*, Leask surmises that Ramsay's *Tea-Table Miscellany* (1724) presented a 'sign of feminised "politeness"', suited best to the parlour table. Leask contends that Ramsay's 'apotheosis of "feminity", "modernity", and "politeness" was 'directly challenged' by Percy in proposing instead a 'masculine "antiquity" and "sublimity"' of the Minstrel-ballad.[55] Whilst this supposition holds true, the more immediate challenge was to *Ossian* and whereas Macpherson had levelled his aesthetic approach on the obscurity of fragment and epic, Percy had 'discovered an energising obscurity in the form and content of "old ballads" which approached the Burkean sublime'.[56] Percy's 'discovery' was of course inherited from Addison, yet Leask's statement that 'Percy "gift-wrapped" his volume along the lines of the new aesthetic of the sublime' is worth consideration.[57] The dedication to Elizabeth, the Countess of Northumberland, which opens *Reliques*, offers a moment of striking intertextual and inter-medial confluence between Ossianic poetry, Burkean aesthetics, and Percy's summation of his ballad collection:

> the rude songs of ancient minstrels, aspires to the patronage of the Countess of Northumberland, and hopes that the barbarous productions of unpolished ages can

[53] Philip Connell, 'British Identities and the Politics of Ancient Poetry in Later Eighteenth–Century England', p. 164, and Kathryn Sutherland, 'The Native Poet: The Influence of Percy's Minstrel from Beattie to Wordsworth', in *The Review of English Studies*, vol. 33, no. 132 (Nov. 1982), pp. 414–433, (pp. 421–422).
[54] Ibid., p. 419.
[55] Nigel Leask, '"A degrading species of Alchymy": Ballad Poetics and the Meanings of Popular Culture', in *Romanticism and Popular Culture in Britain and Ireland*, ed. by Philip Connell and Nigel Leask, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 51–71, (p. 53).
[56] Ibid. pp. 54–55.
[57] Ibid. p. 54.

> obtain the approbation or notice of her […] these poems are presented to your ladyship, not as labours of art, but as effusions of nature, showing the first efforts of ancient genius, and exhibiting the customs and opinions of remote ages: of ages that had been almost lost to memory, had not the gallant deeds of your illustrious ancestors preserved them from oblivion. No active or comprehensive mind can forbear some attention to the reliques of antiquity.[58]

The dedication reads almost as a palimpsest to Burke's 1761 review of Macpherson's *Fingal*. Burke's appraisal of *Ossian* as 'inestimable *relicks* of the genuine spirit of poetry', which are 'recovered from the obscurity of barbarism' and the 'rust of fifteen hundred years' transmute into Percy's own 'reliques of antiquity' as 'barbarous productions of unpolished', and 'remote ages'.[59] Similarly, Burke's appraisal of *Ossian* as retaining 'the majestic air, and the native simplicity of a sublime original', transpires with Addison's 'majestick simplicity' which Percy re-establishes into the 'pleasing simplicity' of *Reliques*. Therefore, what becomes apparent is that the critical heritage provided by Addison allowed Percy to promote his ballad collection in terms which aligned with the impressive exemplar set by *Ossian*, distinct in poetic form and yet united in aesthetic countenance with a shared emphasis on poetic persona and fount of sublimity in bard turned minstrel.

Ossian's success lay in Macpherson's ability to provide a contemporary need for a poetics of the sublime which was centred around the role of the bard. Ossian, as bard, allowed for a complete experience of the sublime- from the objective sublime of nature to the subjective human experience provoked by such, then immortalised in bardic song and poesy. Macpherson's project sought to merge the Homeric bard into a Celtic one co-ordinated around the classically sublime form of the epic. Addison had largely failed to coalesce the sublimity of ballad with epic because of the absence of this vital poetic figure. Percy, however, responded directly to *Ossian* in transfiguring the Celtic bard into English minstrel and therefore must have desired an inheritance of the sublime investiture of bard into minstrel, epic into ballad. Eileen Mackenzie comes close to articulating such a transference when she states that 'the object' in Percy's editing and amending of the ballads 'always seem to have been to attain to some standard or ideal which he had in mind'.[60] Later, Mackenzie reiterates this theory by stating 'the ballad in Percy's collection had to conform to an

[58] Percy, 'Dedication' to *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, vol. I, pp. 1–3,
[59] Anon (Widely assumed to be Edmund Burke) 'Review of *Fingal: An Ancient Epic Poem'*, p. 50.
[60] Elieen Mackenzie, 'Thomas Percy and Ballad "Correctness"', p. 59.

eighteenth-century ideal'.[61] Without full explication of such a governing 'ideal', Mackenzie grasps at a definition in stating that Percy's ballads were 'adorned with sentiment, softened with Arcadian charm or rendered "impressive" by Gothic gloom to suit contemporary taste'.[62] Such a confluence of features invariably arrives at the eighteenth century's most prominent ideal; the sublime. However, scholarship on Percy has continually failed to articulate this ideal or explore the aesthetic investiture of *Reliques*, and so Percy's ballad collection, like Addison's ballad criticism, remains neglected in critical analysis of sublimity. Subsequently, the remainder of this chapter will explore the sublime aspect of two of the major ballads in the collection, 'Chevy Chase', and 'Hardyknute', before endeavouring to answer why Percy's *Reliques* remains overlooked as an integral and influential moment in the development of the poetics of the sublime.

'The Ancient Ballad of Chevy Chase'.

If Addison had began the ballad revival of the eighteenth century with his essays on 'Chevy Chase', it was fitting that his beneficiary Percy should open his collection of some hundred and eighty ballads with 'The Ancient Ballad of Chevy Chase'. Significantly, Percy also includes an alternative version, conspicuously titled 'The More Modern Ballad of Chevy-Chace'. Percy's preference for the ancient over the modern ballad is made explicit in a moment of conceit in which he 'flatters' himself for having 'recovered the genuine antique poem'.[63] Whilst Percy shows deference to the 'excellent critique' of Addison, he also situates himself as successor in describing Addison as being 'mistaken with regard to the antiquity of the common-received copy' whilst asserting the primacy of his 'true original song' in its 'rugged garb of antiquity'.[64] The preference for such conforms to the antiquarian and primitivist interests of Percy examined by Nick Groom and John Regan, yet it also suggests an aspiration towards the sublimity of the Ossianic. Jonathon Brody Kramnick writes that 'obscurity forms a unity between a text's sublimity and its recession into the dimness of the past, whether this be a function of the oldness of the language, or of genre, or of the empirical instability of the text itself'.[65] The conscription of translated Gaelic into the uniqueness of Macpherson's prose-verse, the epic form, and the effective, albeit problematic 'empirical

[61] Ibid. p. 60.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Percy, introduction to 'The Ancient Ballad of Chevy–Chase', in *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry,* p. 19.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Kramnick, *Making the English Literary Canon*, p. 103.

instability' of *Ossian* all conspire to achieve that unity of sublimity based on Burkean obscurity. Similarly, Percy is invoking a concordant unity whilst replacing the ancient epic with ancient ballad. By prologuing 'The Ancient Ballad of Chevy-Chase', and indeed *Reliques*, with such a posture, Percy is signalling to the sublime quality of the ballad, again reflective of his forebear Addison.

The poem is a border ballad which narrates the encounter between the English Earl Percy of Northumberland, and the Scottish Earl Douglas. Lord Percy invades the woodlands of Cheviat to hunt deer, and Douglas confronts the English party, a battle ensues, and both Earls are killed. In a footnote to the ballad, Percy comments on the archaic language used: 'the style of this and the following ballad is uncommonly rugged and uncouth, owing to their being writ in the very coarsest and broadest northern dialect'.[66] Whilst this lends the poem authenticity both historical and regional, the archaic and obstructive vernacular adds an obfuscating patina to a reading of the text which conforms to the 'empirical instability' of the sublime.[67] The depiction of the beaters sent to startle the deer and the 'Grea-hondes' in chase enacts this stylistic form of sublimity:

> The dryvars thorowe the woodes went
>
> For to reas the deer;
>
> Bomen bickarte uppone the bent
>
> With ther browd aras cleare.
>
> Then the wyld thorowe the woodes went
>
> On every syde shear;
>
> Grea-hondes thorowe the greves glent
>
> For to kyll thear dear.[68]

The lexicon is extended in words such as 'thorowe' and 'woodes' adding syllabic breadth to conform to the traditional ballad metrics of alternating iambic tetrameter with trimeter. This

[66] Percy, 'The Ancient Ballad of Chevy–Chase', pp. 23–35, footnote to p. 35.
[67] See Nick Groom who notes the 'visual quality of outlandish and obsolete spellings that are lost when the word is spoken […]', in, '"The Purest English": Ballads and the English Literary Dialect', *The Eighteenth Century*, vol. 47, no. 2/3, 2006, pp. 179–202, (p. 189).
[68] Percy, 'The Ancient Ballad of Chevy–Chase', I: lines 19–26, p. 24.

also coalesces with the assonance of the long ‘o’ phonetic to enact the ‘dryvars’ harrying the deer. The abbreviated staccato of the following trimeter envisions the startled deer which is then propelled by the enjambed tetrameter and heavily consonant ensuing line as the bowmen bend and release their ‘browd aras cleare’. Whilst both metre and alliteration create a melodious progression of action and reaction, the entropic semantic configurations throughout lend dissimilitude to the scene. Diction such as ‘wyld’, ‘syde’ and ‘greves’ offer a form of perceivable obscurity, whilst completely unfamiliar words such as ‘bickarte’ add to this dissonance. This lexical confusion generates sublimity in so far as it engages the imagination by way of provocation. As Burke writes ‘the mind is hurried out of itself, by a croud of great and confusing images; which affect because they are crouded and confused’.[69]

The ‘crowding’ of sublime images throughout ‘Chevy-Chase’ is largely achieved through repetition. In the opening stanzas, Cheviat is repeatedly depicted on high: ‘that he wolde hunte in the mountayns / Off Chyviat within days thre’,‘In Cheviat the hillys so he;’, and ‘The begane in Chyviat the hyls abone’ (lines 3–4, 16, 27). Such a tautological configuration of height which ‘crowds’ the verse is relative to theory of the sublime as both Addison and later Burke describe ‘huge heaps of mountains, high rocks, and precipaces’ as being the ‘rude kind of magnificence which appears in many of these stupendous works of nature’.[70] Furthermore, throughout the ballad there is a crowding placement of multitudes which repeat and concatenate to evoke sublimity. In the first part of the ballad Lord Percy’s ‘fifteen hundrith archares bold’ align with the ‘hondrith fat hartes ded ther lay’, then superceded by the ‘myghti sight to se’ of Douglas’s ‘twenty hondrith spear-men good’ (lines 13, 30, 44, 47). Configurations of multitudes of men at arms with that of the felled deer signals the ensuing battle in the second half of the ballad, as death in nature foretells the catalogue of death to come. Here, the contrast between the heroic verse and sonorous lines of the epic with that of the ballad are made distinct. Both epic and ballad share a narratological concentration on martial encounters, yet the distinction in metre generates a different although similarly sublime ‘confusion’ of images. Whilst the extended and regular length lines of the epic allow for a stately and nevertheless bloody encounter, the alternating length iambic of the ballad metre renders a more kinetic spectacle of battle. The meeting of Douglas and Percy showcases this movement:

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[69] Burke, *Enquiry*, p. 62.
[70] Addison *The Spectator*, No. 412, pp. 178–181, p. 178.
–Burke, *Enquiry*, p. 72.

At last the Duglas and the Perse met,

Lyk to captayns of might and mayne;

The swapte together tyll the both swat

With swords, that wear of fyn myllan.

Thes worthe freckys for to fight

Ther-to the wear full fayne,

Tylle the bloode owte off thear basnetes sprente,

As ever dyd heal or rayne. (lines 25–32)

Again, alliteration works in conjunction with metre, as the sibilance of the first stanza generates pace to rush through the imperfect trimeter like the rushing of the two Earls to duel and the meeting of swords. Douglas and Percy are lost in the confusion of the encounter and become amorphous as 'captayns of might and mayne' and 'worthe freckys [men]'. The verse reaches a crescendo of plosive phonaesthesia as blood rains 'off thear basnetes [helmets] sprente', and the extended tetrameter is met with the finality of the proceeding trimeter 'as ever dyd heal or rayne'. The ballad, with its alternating metre, therefore, achieves the 'crouded and confused' images of battle in a poetic mode altogether sublime. The terror of such violence is proliferated throughout *Reliques*, in ballads such as 'The Battle of Otterbourne', and 'St George and the Dragon', with Groom acknowledging that 'the bloodiness of death and dismemberment incarnadines the entire three volumes'.[71] Yet blood and gore do not alone achieve sublimity. The ballad poetic renders the sublime through a confluence of metre, figuration, sentiment, and spectacle, and of all the ballads included in Percy's collection, it is 'Hardyknute' which best exposes this.

'Hardyknute. A Scottish Fragment'.

Aside from Percy's own rescued manuscript, the ballad of 'Hardyknute' represents an example of found-text whose notoriety is only surpassed by that of *Ossian*. The poem had been first published in Edinburgh in 1719 as a folio entitled *Hardyknute, A Fragment*. It was expanded and corrected by Allan Ramsay in *The Ever Green* (1724), and was later published

[71] Nick Groom, *The Making of Percy's 'Reliques'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), p. 45.

anonymously in London as *Hardyknute, a Fragment; being the first Canto of an Epick Poem: with general remarks and notes* (1740).[72] Significantly, in 1754 an edition of 'Chevy-Chase' is published which includes *Hardyknute: A Fragment. Being the First Canto of an Epic Poem, with General Remarks and Notes*. Following then from Addison's project of marrying epic to ballad, 'Hardyknute' is shown to gradually fulfil that promise in the eyes of its publishers, as Mel Kersey notices, 'with the union of Hardyknute and Chevy Chase, Addison's ballad-to-epic design achieves its own measure of completion'.[73] Therefore, the ballad of 'Hardyknute', represents a morphological transposition from ballad to fragment to epic, augured by Addison, then reinstated by Percy in 1765. Furthermore, it represents a poetic mode of evolution as well as model too distinctly parallelled by Macpherson not to be considered influential. By the time *Reliques* was published, it was critical opinion that 'Hardyknute' was largely the invention of Elizabeth Halkett, Lady Wardlaw and written in 1719. [74] Whilst Percy describes it as a 'fine morsal of heroic poetry' which 'hath generally past for ancient', he also concurs with his peers in describing how Lady Wardlaw had 'pretended she found this poem, written on shreds of paper, employed for what is called the bottoms of clues'.[75] Despite the ballad's recognised inauthenticity, which Percy and his backer Johnson famously opposed, the inclusion of the ballad in *Reliques* suggests that it possesses merits beyond that of antiquarian interest, even superseding such interest. Indeed, Percy's most notable successor in ballad collection and editing, Walter Scott, describes the profound and enduring effect the ballad holds when he states that it is 'the first poem I ever learnt, the last I shall ever forget'.[76] That this effect is of the sublime is professed by the

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[72] Ramsay's editorial practice throughout *The Ever Green*, particularly conspicuous in his presentation of 'Hardyknute', in which he performed a 'strategy of free adaptation and strategic normalisation of his source material, including the mending of verses he felt insufficiently smooth, and even the supply of additional (spurious) stanzas' has been recently hailed by Murray Pittock as anticipating the work of Percy's ballad collection in *Reliques* and Scott's subsequent collection *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802), with Pittock claiming that such 'clearly indicates Ramsay's founding role in Romanticism'. In Pittock, 'Introduction to the Text', in *The Edinburgh Edition of the Collected Works of Allan Ramsay: Volume VI, The Ever Green*, pp. 1–19, (p. 7).

[73] Mel Kersey, 'Ballads, Britishness and Hardyknute', in *Scottish Studies Review,* vol. 5, no. 1, (Mar. 2004), pp. 40–56, (p. 50).

[74] For a full account of the authenticity controversy surrounding the origins of 'Hardyknute' see Margaret Russett's chapter 'Genuity or Ingenuity? Invented Tradition and the Scottish Talent', in which she notes that by the end of the eighteenth century the poem became 'virtually synonymous with literary fakery; so much so, that 50 years later, its spuriousness had infected the entire canon of Scottish popular balladry', in *Romanticism, Sincerity and Authenticity*, ed. by Tim Milnes and Kerry Sinanan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 31–57, (p. 41).

[75] Percy, introduction to 'Hardyknute. A Scottish Fragment', in *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, vol. II, pp. 105–108, (p. 105).

[76] Walter Scott quoted by David Masson who provides an extensive account of Scott's admiration for 'Hardyknute' as well as Lady Wardlaw's apparent authorship, in *Edinburgh Sketches & Memories* (London and Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1892), pp. 92–107.

anonymous editor of the 1740 edition: ‘There is a grandeur, a majesty of sentiment, diffused through the whole: a true sublime, which nothing can surpass’.[77]

The ballad earns its title as fragment due to its episodic narrative, the lacunae of which provides a sense of incompletion, and with its ambiguous ending, of more to come. The narrative recounts an aged yet strong knight, the eponymous Hardyknute, who is encountered feasting in his castle Fairly when he is summoned to defend his Scottish homeland from the invasion of a Norse king. On his way he encounters a wounded knight which he attempts to aid, before proceeding to battle, defeating the Norse invaders, and then returning to Fairly castle. Whilst the narrative is fragmented in such a way, each episode, although at times indistinct, propel the ballad as a whole to invoke sublimity. As with ‘Chevy-Chase’, there is a conspicuous fixation on elevation. Hardyknute is introduced ‘High on a hill his castle stood, / With ha’s and tow’rs a height’, and when summoned by the king the command reads: ‘Go little page, tell Hardyknute,/ That lives on hill sae hie,’.[78] Correspondingly, when Hardyknute rides to battle he is positioned once more in a situation of height, ‘Now with his fierce and stalwart train, / He reach’d a rising hight’ (lines 153–154). Importantly, such configuring of the hero on high is rendered fully sublime by merging the literal with the figurative, as Hardyknute and his sons are elevated in both position and status: ‘High was their fame, high was their might, / And high was their command’ (lines 23–24). Such tautology of height, therefore, enacts an imposition within the characterisation of Hardyknute to equate to his physical and martial prowess. This sense of ‘might’ is comparatively sequined to impose upon the reader:

> Then red red grew his dark-brown cheeks,
>
> Sae did his dark-brown brow;
>
> His looks grew keen, as they were wont
>
> In dangers great to do;

–Scott was also a self–proclaimed admirer of Percy’s *Reliques* stating: ‘To read and to remember was in this instance the same thing, and henceforth I overwhelmed my schoolfellows, and all who would hearken to me, with tragical recitations from the ballads of Bishop Percy. The first time, too, I could scrape a few shillings together, which were not common occurrences with me, I bought unto myself a copy of these beloved volumes; nor do I believe I ever read a book half so frequently, or with half the enthusiasm’, quoted in, John Gibson Lockhart, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott* (New York: Macmillan, 1914), pp. 18–9.

[77] Anon, *Hardyknute: A Fragment. Being the First Canto of an Epick Poem; With General Remarks and Notes* (London: R. Dodsley, 1740), p. 4.

[78] Percy, ‘Hardyknute. A Scottish Fragment’, pp. 109–121, lines 9–10, 49–50, (pp. 109–110).

He's ta'en a horn as green as grass,

And gi'en five sounds sae shill,

That trees in green wood shook thereat,

Sae loud rang ilka hill. (lines 57–64)

The longer length eight-line stanza of the poem allow for a sartorious figuration of image and episode more akin to that of the epic. There is a profusion of colour, typical of the ballad form, which generates a kaleidoscopic vision of the might of Hardyknute. The 'dark-brown' countenance, which would become intrinsic to Ossianic characterisation, is unsettled and grows 'red red' at the prospect of battle. A horn, 'as green as grass' disturbs the anthropomorphised 'green wood'. This coalescing of repeated colours, 'red red', 'dark-brown', 'dark-brown', 'green', and 'green' enacts the reactionary response of the sublime. However, as later modelled by Fingal, it is the hero who provokes response as the sublime might of his action (the sounding of his horn) disturbs nature, rather than the linear encounter of nature upon man.

The battle which ensues between the Scottish and Norse forces is one of more prominent confusion than any of the other martial encounters featured throughout *Reliques*. Whilst the standard form of battle in both ballad and epic is styled to feature individual encounters between heroes on opposing sides, in 'Hardyknute' there is an overbearing sense of confusion to the whole scene. It is uncertain who is slain on either side as gory deaths are recounted in contrasting detail: 'Another arrow well he mark'd, / It pierc'd his neck in twa' (lines 205–206). These are met by various lamentations and professions of vengeance from uncertain characters. Importantly, this sense of indeterminacy is mirrored throughout the fragmented narrative. Margaret Russet describes this ballad as 'above all' being a 'mystery'.[79] This sense of mystery is formed beyond the ubiquitous battle scenes of both ballad and epic during the incident of the wounded knight. When Hardyknute is riding 'O'er hills and mony a glen' towards battle he encounters a wounded knight who commiserates '"Here maun I lye, here maun I dye, / By treacherie's false guiles; / Witless I was that e'er ga faith / To wicked woman's smiles' (lines 114, 117–120). The scene is one of high sentiment as Hardyknute offers the comfort of castle Fairly and his lady's 'kindly care'. Hardyknute's repeated attempts at aid are obstinately rejected by the fallen knight, and the unnamed knight's

[79] Russett, 'Genuity or Ingenuity? Invented Tradition and the Scottish Talent', p. 33.

similarly repeated avowals to die generate this sense of both mystery and foreboding. The unresolved scene appears anachronistic until the denouement of the ballad in which Hardyknute returns from victory to Fairly:

> Now loud and chill blew th' westlin wind,
>
> Sair beat the heavy shower,
>
> Mirk grew the night ere Hardyknute
>
> Wan near his stately tower.
>
> His tow'r that us'd wi torches blaze
>
> To shine sae far at night,
>
> Seem'd now as black as mourning weed,
>
> Nae marvel sair he sigh'd. (lines 313–320)

Here, the sublime is fully realised as Hardyknute is ensconced in the 'sublime frisson' of wind and rain which would typify the Ossianic. The vision of the lightless castle shrouded, like the hero, in night, is one prescient of the Gothic sublimity of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) published the year before *Reliques*. Isolation, privation, and natural sublimity all conspire to impose the sense of mystery which embodies the ballad, as the configuration of colours turn to a repeated and imposing darkness based on human experience: 'seem'd now as black as mourning weed,', 'Black fear he felt, but what to fear / He wist nae yet; wi dread' (lines 319, 333–334). This dread and fear at the conclusion of the narrative is the lasting impression of the poem, and the irresolute ending creates 'an atmosphere of unrelieved foreboding and Ossianic indeterminacy'.[80] Indeed, the dissonant scene of the wounded knight when connected with the final stanzas of the poem match with Macpherson's *Fragments* in so far that they suggest the promise of a fuller narrative of epic proportions. As Russet explains, it is this which mid-century commentators 'schooled by Joseph Addison' read as signifying 'the "first *Canto*" of a "Heroick Poem"', hereby showing that Addison's correlation of epic with ballad had finally achieved provenance.[81]

The sublime is nascent in various forms throughout *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*. Aside from many of noted martial countenance, there is in ballads such as 'Take Thy

[80] Kersey, 'Ballads, Britishness and Hardyknute', p. 47.
[81] Russett, 'Genuity or Ingenuity? Invented Tradition and the Scottish Talent', p. 35.

Old Cloak About Thee', 'Robin Hood' and 'King Estmere' moments of prominent natural sublimity. Ballads such as 'The Witch of Wokey' and 'Admiral Hosier's Ghost' offer a supernatural sublime akin to the stream of spirits which haunt Ossian. Yet, whilst modern critics describe *Reliques* in terms of 'mystery', 'Gothic', the 'quiet, dark tone' or reaching towards an undefined ideal, there exists no substantial correlation of the ballads with the sublime.[82] As with Addison, Percy's engagement with the aesthetic remains almost entirely overlooked, which given the sublime countenance of 'Chevy-Chase', and more so 'Hardyknute', raises the question as to why? One possible answer is proximity to *Ossian*, with Percy's collection in 1765 immediately presiding beside the provocative phenomenon and overbearing shadow of the Ossianic sublime. Another response is that *Reliques* consists of an attenuation of the sublime, diluted within the heterogenous collection of ballads which are more often humorous, pithy, or at times ridiculous, as one ballad reads- 'The grasshopper, gnat, and fly, / Serve for our minstrelsie'.[83] Indeed, Percy himself seems to comment on such. In 1772, Percy had written to Sir David Dalrymple of an unfulfilled future project of a 'more elevated kind that the last [*Reliques*]: on grave, sublime and moral subjects'.[84] Whilst both of the above are worthy considerations, Percy's exclusion is most fittingly aligned with that of his predecessor, Addison.

The frontispiece for *Reliques* presents a scene in which a minstrel with harp in hand is surrounded by people of various rank and station. A wounded knight resting upon his shield, several women and a pair of nobles are all configured around the minstrel at play. The tableau is framed by two trees, and a walled town provides the backdrop. The scene speaks of Addison's vision of the ballad, the 'Delight of the common people', and that 'Human Nature is the same in all reasonable Creatures; and whatever falls in with it, will meet with Admirers amongst Readers of all Qualities and Conditions.[85] That this is relative to the sublime is answered by Percy's carefully edited inscription from Nicholas Rowe which reads:

> These venerable ancient song-enditers
>
> Soar'd many a pitch above our modern writers:
>
> With rough majestic force they mov'd the heart,

[82] Groom, '"The Purest English": Ballads and the English Literary Dialect', p. 193.
[83] Percy, 'The Fairy Queen', in *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, vol. III, pp. 204–207, (p. 207).
[84] Quoted in Eileen Mackenzie, 'Thomas Percy's Great Schemes', in *The Modern Language Review*, vol. 43, (Jan 1, 1948), pp. 34–38, (p. 36).
[85] Addison, *The Spectator*, No. 70, p. 36.

And strength and nature made amends for Art.[86]

Addison had found in the ballad the 'majestick simplicity' of the sublime, a 'rough majestic force' which despite his own faltering start, would gradually build momentum throughout the eighteenth century until provoking Percy's 'seminal, epoch-making work of English Romanticism'.[87] *Reliques* in almost every sense fulfilled the vision of Addison and would in turn inspire some of the greatest works of the British Romantic period, from Beattie and Burns to Wordsworth and Scott. Yet, the question remains as to why Percy's ballad collection, like Addison's ballad criticism, remains overlooked in terms sublime. The title page of *Reliques* provides an anomalous scene to that of the frontispiece. The illustration is one of concentrated sublimity, a lone harp surrounded by manuscripts representative of the ballad tradition is emboldened by the natural sublimity of ruins, obfuscating shrubbery, and a blasted tree rising upwards. The inscrolled Latin epigraph 'durat opus vatum' speaks of the universal approbation of the sublime admired by Addison- 'song alone survives'. However, there is a distinct absence to the scene. There is no minstrel present. Despite Percy's success in establishing the minstrel as successor to the bard, there is throughout the *Reliques*, a notable absence of that vital poetic figure. Therefore, there is little access granted to the sublime experience of poesy required for a poetics of the sublime. Macpherson's success derived from his advocacy of the bard. In each of his collections of poetry, the bardic figure of Ossian is absolutely central, and it is Ossian's sublime 'joy of grief' which allows readers full engagement with the sublime. Addison had promoted the ballad as having the same sublime propensities as the epic which Percy had fulfilled whilst offering a genealogical successor of the epic bard with his ordination of the ballad minstrel. Yet, *Reliques* represents an attenuation of the sublime aside *Ossian* in so far as it fails to fully capture the sublime moment which defines a poetics of the sublime. The importance of *Reliques* for the development of this poetics cannot be understated but it would be the poets who followed who would fully capture the sublime experience of the poet figure.

[86] The inscription is from Rowe's prologue to his play *The Tragedy of Jane Shore* [1714], however, Percy edits out the line directed at Shakespeare 'In such an age, immortal Shakespeare wrote' and switches 'he mov'd the heart' to '*they* mov'd the heart'. Tom Duggett explains that in doing so Percy 'contrived to give his anonymous medieval minstrels poetic priority over Shakespeare', in Duggett, *Gothic Romanticism: Architecture, Politics, and Literary Form* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 4.
[87] Groom, 'Introduction' to *Reliques*, p. 3.

Chapter 4

‘Return my roving Muse!’ James Beattie and *The Minstrel; or, The Progress of Genius*

> In truth he was a strange and wayward wight, Fond of each gentle, etc. etc… […] That verse of Beattie’s *Minstrel* always reminds me of him, and indeed the whole character of Edwin resembles much what William was when I first knew him.[1]

> I could hear the murmering of the sea for three miles, of course I often stopped “listening with pleasing dread to the deep roar of the wide weltering waves”. This from the *Minstrel*.[2]

In 1771, the year Walter Scott, ‘the last minstrel’, was born, another minstrel was brought into being. James Beattie’s *The Minstrel; or, The Progress of Genius* (1771, 1774) was published in two cantos, both of which relate the story of Edwin, ‘a strange and wayward wight’ who roams through the sublimity of nature as a young minstrel. Whilst Beattie was considered by some to be ‘the great philosopher of his generation’, from his ‘common sense’ refutation of Humean scepticism in *An Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth, in Opposition to Sophistry and Scepticism* (1771), it was Edwin’s ‘simple tale’ which would have the most enduring impact on history. [3] Critics have widely recognised the influential stature of Edwin, particularly in fostering the Romantic period’s fascination with nature and the role of the poet. Indeed, the connections between Beattie and the Romantics that followed are ‘so various and so plausible that the case for Beattie’s importance is in danger of being prematurely closed once too easily established’.[4] Yet, as Conrad Brunstrom asserts, ‘insufficient attention has been paid to the nature as opposed to the mere extent of *The Minstrel’s* reverberative capacity’.[5] The Wordsworths accounts are therefore enlightening in regards to the nature of Edwin’s influence. For William, it is the ‘pleasing dread’ of the

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[1] Dorothy Wordsworth in *The Early Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. by E. de Selincourt (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1935), p. 93.
[2] William Wordsworth in *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, The Later Years*, ed. by E. de Selincourt, 3 vols. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1939), vol, 3, p. 1334.
[3] William Walker, ‘The Bards of Bon–Accord 1375–1860’ [1887], quoted in E. H. King’s ‘James Beattie’s Literary Essays (1776, 1783) and the Evolution of Romanticism’, in *Studies in Scottish Literature*, vol. 11, no. 4, pp. 199–216, (p. 200).
[4] Conrad Brunstrom, ‘James Beattie and the Great Outdoors: Common Sense Philosophy and the Pious Imagination’, in *Romanticism,* vol. 3, no. 1 (1997), pp. 20–34, (pp. 20–21).
[5] Ibid., p. 21.

sublime which recalls the poem, whilst for Dorothy it is William's capacity, or 'fondness' for such as young poet. For the Wordsworths Edwin represents the corporeal manifestation of poetics into poet. This transition from poetry to poet was one moderated by Beattie. This chapter will explore how Beattie develops a poetics of the sublime from his contemporaries James Macpherson and Thomas Percy, with consideration of his reverence for Joseph Addison, successfully 'apotheosising' bard and minstrel into what Beattie himself terms 'poet sublime'.[6]

Beattie's promotion of this idealised figure of a poet sublime is evident throughout his extensive critical output. In 1760, Beattie was appointed to Alexander Gerard's former chair as Professor of Moral Philosophy and Logic, a post which he maintained until his death in 1803. It was during this period at Marischal college, now termed the Aberdonian Enlightenment, in which Beattie and his peers Gerard, William Duff, and Thomas Reid produced some of the leading works of aesthetic theory. However, the critic Paul Wood distinguishes Beattie from his contemporaries in describing them as 'anatomists' of the mind whereas Beattie was 'a painter'.[7] Such an epithet conveys the creative and expressive impulse of Beattie yet would be better modified to suit his own views and success as being not painter, but poet, and indeed, poet sublime. The literary critical works of Beattie, his *Essays on Poetry and Music* (1776), and *Dissertations Moral and Critical* (1783), have been largely recognised as being both successful and influential in anticipating Romantic poetic practice.[8] However, like his 'hero' Joseph Addison's ballad papers, Beattie's essay on the sublime, 'Illustrations on Sublimity' included within *Dissertations*, has been consistently overlooked. Dismissed by Samuel Monk as being 'one of the least original essays on the sublime', Beattie's most extensive twentieth-century commentator Everard King, likewise delineates 'Illustrations' as being 'primarily a reiteration of Edmund Burke's ideas' and gives no mention of it in his otherwise comprehensive article on Beattie's literary essays prospering the 'Evolution of Romanticism'. [9] As such, there is an inherent disconnect between Beattie

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[6] See Marilyn Gaull, 'the fictional bards of Macpherson, Gray, and Percy are apotheosized by… *The Minstrel*', in *English Romanticism: The Human Context* (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988), p. 261.
[7] Paul Wood, 'Science and the Pursuit of Virtue in the Aberdeen Enlightenment', in *Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment* ed. by M. A. Stewart (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 127–49, (p. 146).
[8] Roger Robinson, 'Introduction' to James Beattie, *Essays: On Poetry and Music* [1776] printed in *The Works of James Beattie*, 10 Vols., introduced by Roger Robinson (London: Routledge/Thoemmes, 1996), vol. 4. pp. v–xxviii, (p. vi).
[9] Monk, *The Sublime*, p. 129.
–Everard H. King, *James Beattie's The Minstrel and the Origins of Romantic Autobiography* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), King gives a brief assessment of Beattie's engagement with the sublime in terms of the influence of *Ossian* and Thomas Gray. pp. 35–37.

the sublime theorist, relegated to a summary role, and Beattie as sublime poet, author of *The Minstrel*. However, in reconsidering the former, Beattie's *Minstrel* attains a more prominent role within the lineage of sublime poetics, largely inspired by Joseph Addison.

In his appraisal of the conception of *Dissertations*, Roger Robinson notes that Beattie had 'intended the style to be as close as possible to that of his hero, Addison'.[10] A letter to Sir William Forbes shows Beattie admitting himself as student: 'I have honestly endeavoured, as far as I could, to imitate the simplicity, plainness, and modulation of Addison's prose, which has been my particular study through several years, and which in my former books I did not imitate so much as I think I ought to have done'.[11] Consequently, in his essay 'Of Imagination' included within *Dissertations*, Beattie offers a measured eulogium on Addison:

> He is not, some think, a profound philosopher; for he is always clear and harmonious, rational, manly, and interesting. But if writing be good, in proportion as it is useful; and if its noblest use be, to improve the heart, refine the taste, and sweeten the temper, Addison is of all uninspired authors, at least in prose, the best and most delightful.[12]

Addison is hereby shown to have refined the taste of Beattie. Correspondingly, earlier in *Dissertations*, Beattie qualifies taste as relative to sublimity, 'Elegance, Sublimity, Beauty, and the other qualities here mentioned as objects of taste', revealing that Beattie directly signals to the inheritance of aesthetic value from Addison.[13] In a letter to William Creech, Beattie writes of how he has taken on the mantle of Addison: 'I wish rather to form the taste, improve the manners, and establish the principles, of young men, than to make them profound metaphysicians; I wish in a word, not to make Humes of them, or Leibnitzes, but rather, if that were possible, Addisons'.[14] As James Harris notes, this statement 'alludes to the importance Beattie attached to the cultivation of *taste* in his students (and readers)', and it was Addison to whom Beattie persistently aspired.[15] Whilst such aspirations are made

–King, 'James Beattie's Literary Essays (1776, 1783) and the Evolution of Romanticism'.

[10] Roger Robinson, 'Introduction' to James Beattie, *Dissertations Moral and Critical*, (1783) printed in *The Works of James Beattie*, 10 Vols. introduced by Roger Robinson, (London: Routledge/Thoemmes, 1996) Vol. 5. pp. v–xxxiii, (p. xv).

[11] Beattie to Sir William Forbes, Aberdeen, 9 March 1783, quoted in Roger Robinson, 'Introduction' to James Beattie, *Dissertations Moral and Critical*, p. xv.

[12] James Beattie, *Dissertations*, p. 198.

[13] Beattie, *Dissertations*, p. 165, see also p. 146, 'Imagination, united with some other mental powers and operating merely as a percipient faculty, in conveying suitable impressions of what is elegant, sublime, or beautiful in art and nature, is called *Taste'*.

[14] Letter to William Creech, 28 March 1789, quoted in James A. Harris, *Of Liberty and Necessity: The Free Will Debate in Eighteenth-Century British Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), pp. 150–151.

[15] Ibid.

explicit throughout Beattie's 'Illustrations of Sublimity', there has yet to be any critical engagement or exploration of the aesthetic investiture gained from Addison.

Contrary to King's surmisal that 'Illustrations', is 'primarily a reiteration of Edmund Burke's ideas', there is no mention given to Burke throughout the essay.[16] Certainly, the *Enquiry*'s ordered taxonomy of sublimity illustrated with examples from the familiar troop of classical poets of the sublime is evident, as Beattie draws upon the same model in an anomalous fashion, his exemplars being, 'Homer, Virgil, Milton, and all the sublime poets'.[17] Yet, throughout the discourse, it is instead Addison who is consistently referenced and depended upon as authority. Central to Beattie's thesis is that the encounter with sublimity induces an experience of 'pleasurable astonishment': 'In general, whatever awakens in us […] pleasurable astonishment is accounted sublime'. This is later expanded upon in more axiomatic terms: 'Nothing is sublime that does not raise in the mind a *pleasing* astonishment; and nothing can please a rational being, but what is consistent with itself, and regulated by the standard of nature'.[18] Whilst there is no direct reference to Addison here, the similarity between his dictate in the 'Pleasures of the Imagination' series and Beattie's own theory is distinct. In his consideration of 'the Prospects of an open Champain country, a vast uncultivated Desart, of huge Heaps of Mountains, high Rocks and Precipices, or a wide Expanse of Waters', Addison states that the sight of the 'rude kind of Magnificence' of such 'stupendous works of Nature' causes the participant to be 'flung into a pleasing Astonishment at such unbounded Views'.[19] Beattie, having restated Addison's mandate of 'pleasing astonishment', (some seven times throughout the essay) then directly mirrors his forebear's seminal assertion that 'the most perfect models of sublimity are seen in the works of nature', and provides a synonymous catalogue of the natural sublime: 'mountains, volcanoes, rivers, cataracts, oceans, the expanse of heaven, clouds and storms, thunder and lightning, the sun, moon, and stars […] without the study of nature, a true taste in the sublime is absolutely

[16] Throughout the entirety of both *Essays on Poetry and Music*, and *Dissertations Moral and Critical*, there is only one acknowledgment of Burke's *Enquiry*: 'Nay, it has been justly remarked by the best critics [Burke is here mentioned in a footnote] that, in the description of great objects, a certain degree of obscurity, not in the language, but in the picture or notion presented to the mind, has sometimes a happy effect in producing admiration, terror, and other emotions connected with the sublime', in Beattie, *Essays on Poetry and Music*, p. 93.
–James T. Boulton argues that 'there can be little doubt […] that Beattie was heavily indebted to Burke', but does not notice the consistent referencing to Addison, and therefore misappropriates Beattie's inheritance of 'Pleasing Astonishment', in Boulton, 'Introduction' to Burke, *Enquiry*, pp. lxxxiv–lxxxvi.
[17] Beattie, *Dissertations*, p. 636, as detailed in the opening chapter, Burke was indebted to Addison for much of the *Enquiry*'s model and material.
[18] Ibid. pp. 610, 646.
[19] Addison, *The Spectator*, No. 412, p. 178.

attainable'.[20] Therefore, Beattie inherits Addison's pre-eminence for nature whilst employing the same lexicon to account for the concurrent sublime experience.

Throughout 'Illustrations', this reliance on Addison is compounded by direct quotation from both the 'Pleasures of the Imagination' series, and the essays on *Paradise Lost*. In describing how a 'common sentiment may be made sublime, when it is illustrated by an allusion to a grand object', Beattie quotes at length from *The Spectator*, No. 421, the final of the 'Pleasures' papers.[21] Furthermore, after conspicuously paraphrasing Addison's argument against 'Technical' or recondite expressions not being appropriate to 'sublime writing', Beattie acknowledges his predecessor by quoting this time from Addison's essays on *Paradise Lost:* 'It is one of the greatest beauties of poetry to make hard things intelligible, and to deliver what is abstruse of itself in such easy language, as may be understood by ordinary readers'.[22] This is significant as it reveals that Beattie is indebted to Addison for more than the aesthetic conceptualisation of the natural sublime, as he is hereby shown to have obtained an understanding of the poetic. Indeed, 'Illustrations' as a whole, is largely concerned with how the sublime is achieved by poetry, with Robinson describing the essay as not so much an account of aesthetic theory as that of poetics, praising it as 'perhaps his best and clearest short expression of his poetic principles'.[23] Therefore, when Beattie states that 'True poetry is addressed to all mankind; and therefore its ideas are general; and its language ought to be so plain, as that every person acquainted with the poetical dialect may understand it', the influence of Addison's ballad papers which had promoted the universal approbation of the ballad is very much evident.[24] Concurrently, Beattie's emphasis throughout 'Illustrations of Sublimity' on simplicity being intrinsic to sublime poetics is clearly inherited from the Addisonian protraction of the 'Majestick Simplicity' of the ballad:

> That style is sublime, which makes us conceive a great object, or a great effort, in a lively manner; and this may be done, when the words are very plain and simple. Nay, the plainest and simplest words have sometimes a happy effect in setting off what is intrinsically great […] he will *feel*, how much more affecting the one is in its simple majesty, than the other in its gaudy ornaments; and what inexpressible sublimity.[25]

[20] Beattie, *Dissertations*, p. 617.
[21] Ibid. pp. 632–633.
[22] Ibid. p. 652, quoting Addison in, *The Spectator*, No. 297.
[23] Robinson, 'Introduction', to *Dissertations*, p. xxvii.
[24] Beattie, *Dissertations*, p. 652.
[25] Ibid. pp. 630, 635.

This is revelatory as it allows for significant room to suggest that Beattie's *Minstrel* was inspired by the same poetic principles as Percy's *Reliques*, encouraging an awareness of an undercurrent of sublime poetics yet unnoticed which connects to the beginning of aesthetic theory with Joseph Addison. Addison's seminal work in breaking from the rhetorical sublime and epical primacy, emerges throughout Percy's advocacy of the ballad and the succession of the minstrel from the bard. Therefore, it can be stated that the same precepts which had begun the ballad revival appear in Beattie's theory of the sublime which then provide a new understanding of the poetic principles which inform *The Minstrel*.

Contrary to such a proposal, recent criticism has argued that the link between Percy's *Reliques* and Beattie's *Minstrel* is of a superficial and 'unproductive' nature. Ronnie Young states that 'Percy's influence on the poem is […] more limited than Beattie himself suggests', following Laura Bandiera's somewhat imperious statement that *The Minstrel* 'owes virtually no debt to Percy's work, apart from the title and perhaps the historical and geographical framework which, being limited to brief mentions of "gothic days" and "north countries", remains unproductive and detached from the narrative itself'.[26] Such reasoning stems from Kathryn Sutherland's seminal essay of 1982 which discusses the poem's preface, noting that 'the immediate debts to Percy are evident', but that these are comprised of 'the Minstrel himself', and 'his dwelling in "the north countrie".[27] Sutherland then makes the claim that 'Edwin, who "Concourse, and noise… ever fled; / Nor cared to mingle in the clamorous fray", is clearly not the descendant of Percy's noble and sociable entertainer'.[28] Whilst Sutherland's conclusion that Edwin's 'real ancestor is Beattie's early poetic self', allows for compelling readings of the autobiographical roots of the poem, and the development of the Romantic construction of selfhood, the dismissal of Percy detaches Beattie's *Minstrel* from a poetic inheritance which Beattie himself acknowledges.[29]

Roger Robinson notes that throughout Beattie's surviving letters 'he repeatedly states that the first hint of [*The Minstrel*] came from Percy's essay on the old minstrels', as with his letter to Thomas Gray in which he wrote 'There was something in the character of the

[26] Ronnie Young, 'James Beattie and the Progress of Genius in the Aberdeen Enlightenment', in *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* Vol. 36, No. 2 (2013), pp. 245– 261, (p. 247).
–Laura Bandiera, 'In Days of Yore How Fortunately Fared the Minstrel': Towards a Cultural Genealogy of Wordsworth's Preface to Lyrical Ballads, in *European Journal of English Studies*, vol. 6, no. 2 (2002), pp. 189–206, (p. 193).
[27] Sutherland, 'The Native Poet: The Influence of Percy's Minstrel from Beattie to Wordsworth', p. 422.
[28] Ibid. p. 423.
[29] Ibid.

Minstrel there described, which struck me and pleased me'. [30] Whilst the title of the poem is an obvious acquisition which Sutherland and others have remarked upon, a more careful perquisition shows the subtitle to be directly transcribed from *Reliques*. Percy had written in his dedication to the Countess of Northumberland, 'By such bonds, Madam, as I am now introducing to your presence, was *the infancy of genius nurtured and advanced*', from such, does Beattie's *The Progress of Genius* naturally proceed. Correspondingly, Beattie states in his preface to the poem that 'Antique expressions I have avoided; admitting, however, some old words, where they seemed to suit the subject; but I hope none will be found that are now obsolete, or in any degree unintelligible to a reader of English poetry'.[31] David Hill Radcliffe notes that this avoids 'social and historical discriminations with a non genre-specific poetic diction that would become the norm in romantic poetry', however, it also replicates Percy's example in editing *Reliques*.[32] Furthermore, it shows a development from *Reliques* in attempting to achieve a perspicuous poetics which Beattie extols throughout 'Illustrations'. In this sense, there is a viable move towards, perhaps not the genre of the ballad, but certainly the genus of the form which had been recommended by Addison and promoted by Percy as concurrent to sublimity. This is particularly marked by the substantial inclusion of ballads and balladry within *The Minstrel*.

> Meanwhile, whate'er of beautiful, or new,
>
> Sublime, or dreadful, in earth, sea, or sky,
>
> By chance, or search, was offered to his view,
>
> He scanned with curious and romantic eye.
>
> Whate'er of lore tradition could supply
>
> From Gothic tale, or song, or fable old,
>
> Roused him, still keen to listen and to pry.[33]

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[30] Robinson notices that 'This acknowledgement was made in several letters, including one to Percy himself, and in the "Advertisement" to all five quarto editions of the first book of *The Minstrel*.', in Roger Robinson, 'The Origins and Composition of James Beattie's Minstrel', in *Romanticism* vol. 4, no. 2. (1998), pp. 224–240, (p. 226).
[31] James Beattie, 'Preface' to 'The Minstrel; or, The Progress of Genius', [1784] in *Poetical Works*, printed in *The Works of James Beattie*, 10 Vols. Vol. 9. pp. xi–xii, (p. xi).
[32] David Hill Radcliffe, 'The Poetry Professors: Eighteenth–Century Spenserianism and Romantic Concepts of Culture', in *1650–1850: Ideas, Aesthetics, and Inquiries in the Early Modern Era*, vol. 5, no. 6, pp. 121–150, (p. 138).
[33] Beattie, *The Minstrel*, pp. 1–64, I: LVIII., (p. 30).

Edwin's development throughout the first canto of the poem, his progress of genius, is configured from two principal sources. The most prominent, and indeed most influential source is nature, from which he is continually shown to respond with 'curious and romantic eye'. Secondly, is that of 'lore tradition', the 'Gothic tale, or song, or fable old' which in both balladry, and ballad vision accounts for nearly half of the first canto. When Edwin seeks shelter in a cottage from 'winter's drenching rain / And driving snow' he meets the Beldam and is 'instructed by tradition hoar' consisting of the ballad which the old woman recites.[34] As Maureen McLane writes, here 'Beattie takes great care to represent [the ballad] in its many modes as a crucial part of minstrel *Bildung*'.[35] The ballad sang is 'Various and strange' and includes a comprehensive codex of balladry; the 'legends' of 'halls and knights, and feats of arms, displayed' merge into 'the moon-light revel of the fairy glade', whilst witches in caves 'Midst fiends and spectres', 'Yell in the midnight storm'.[36] In such a way is the syncretic and often sublime composition of Percy's *Reliques* recounted in a no doubt ironic 'long-winded tale'.[37] The ballad codex also aligns with the work of the Elizabethan poet Edmund Spenser 'the arch-poet of dreams and fairy fantasies', from whose allegorical epic, *The Faerie Queen* (1590–1609) Beattie inherits *The Minstrel*'s stanza form.[38] Here, the yet unacknowledged presence of Addison is once again prominent.

Greg Kucich, in his otherwise commensurate monograph on the influence of Spenser on Romanticism, dismisses Addison's admiration for, and indeed promotion of *The Faerie Queen* by quoting an abridged version of the young Addison's versified lament for Spenser's loss of favour during the late seventeenth century: 'But Now the mystic tale, that pleas'd of yore, / Can charm an understanding age no more; / The long-spun allegories fulsome grow, / While the dull moral lies too plain below'.[39] Whilst Kucich reads Addison's 'slighting of Spenser's ineffective moralism' as critique, a fuller version of the poem shows a more favourable appraisal:

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[34] Ibid. I:XLIII., p. 30.
[35] Maureen N. McLane, 'Dating Orality, Thinking Balladry: Of Milkmaids and Minstrels in 1771', in *The Eighteenth Century*, vol. 47, no. 2 (Summer, 2006), pp. 131–139, (p. 135).
–See also W. Ruddick who notes that 'traditional ballads wake [Edwin's] poetic powers', in 'Beattie's *Minstrel* and the Lessons of Solitude', in *Aberdeen and the Enlightenment*, ed. by Jennifer J. Carter & Joan H. Pittock (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987), pp. 321–346, (p. 329).
[36] Beattie, *The Minstrel*, I:XLIV., p. 23.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Greg Kucich, *Keats, Shelley, and Romantic Spenserianism* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), p. 5.
[39] Ibid. pp. 14–15.

Old *Spenser* next, warm'd with poetick rage,

In ancient tales amus'd a barb'rous age;

An age that yet uncultivate and rude,

Where-e'er the poet's fancy led, pursu'd

Thro' pathless fields, and unfrequented floods,

To dens of dragons, and enchanted woods.

But now the mystic tale, that pleas'd of yore,

Can charm an understanding age no more;

The long-spun allegories fulsome grow,

While the dull moral lyes too plain below.

We view well-pleas'd at distance all the sights

Of arms and palfreys, battles, fields and fights,

And damsels in distress, and courteous knights.[40]

Written when Addison was still at college, Spencer's 'mystic tale' of a 'poet's fancy' would later be promoted by both him and Steele throughout *The Spectator*. Indeed, Hazel Wilkinson notes that Addison and Steele inaugurated a revival of Spencer by having 'peppered *The Spectator* with references to *The Faerie Queene'*, and that because of this the Tonsons, publishers of *The Spectator*, 'realised that their customers would expect to be able to buy the books discussed in the magazine', and so commissioned the playwright John Hughes to edit an edition of *The Faerie Queen* which they published in 1715 (the first since the folio of 1679).[41] In one of his 'Pleasures of the Imagination' papers, a mature Addison considers the sublimity which arises from the 'poet's fancy' of Spenser: 'There is a kind of Writing,

[40] Joseph Addison, 'An Account of the Greatest English Poets' [1694], in *The Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Addison: Vol. I. Poems and Plays*, 2 vols. (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1914), vol. I., pp. 31–36, lines 17–29, (pp. 31–32).

[41] Hazel Wilkinson, 'Edmund Spenser and Coterie Culture, 1774–1790', in *Re-evaluating the Literary Coterie, 1580–1830 From Sidney to Blackwood's*, ed. by Will Bowers and Hannah Leah Crummé (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 111–136, (p. 114).
–See also David Hill Radcliffe who states that 'Addison was largely responsible' for renewal of Spenser, and that 'Addison's widely read *Spectator* essays on the imagination, *Paradise Lost*, and ballad poetry made possible a return to Gothicism', in Radcliffe, *Edmund Spencer: A Reception History* (Drawer: Camden House, Inc., 1996), pp. 31, 33.

wherein the Poet quite loses Sight of Nature, and entertains his Reader's Imagination with the Characters and Actions of such Persons as have many of them no Existence, but what he bestows on them. Such are Fairies, Witches, Magicians, Demons, and departed Spirits'.[42]Addison posits Spenser alongside, Ovid, Virgil, and Milton as having an 'admirable Talent in Representations of this kind' and articulates the sublime by stating that 'These Descriptions raise a pleasing kind of Horrour in the Mind of the Reader'.[43] Crucially, it is this avowal which shows the influence of Addison in Beattie's use of Spenserian figuration, synchronised and ameliorated into *The Minstrel*'s inclusion of ballads and balladry.

Edwin, like a young Addison, is 'well-pleas'd' in listening to the Beldam's ballad, filled with the shared Spenserian roster of fairies, witches, and 'knights and feats of arms, displayed'.[44] His response mirrors that of the mature Addison writing in *The Spectator*, as Beattie appears to directly paraphrase his forebear's tenet that such figurations 'raise a pleasing kind of Horrour' when Edwin's reaction is one typical of the sublime, ascending from 'Wonder and joy' to 'horror his amazement rose'.[45] Beattie, in 'Illustrations', echoes Addison in theorising on such potency: 'Verbal descriptions infusing sublime horror are such as convey lively ideas, of the objects of superstition, as ghosts and enchantments; […] or of those external things, which are pleasingly terrible, as storms, conflagurations, and the like'.[46] However, Addison's 'peppered' remarks on *The Faerie Queen* are marginal in comparison to the weight of his advocacy of the ballad form, and similarly, Beattie's modulation of Spenserian filters is superseded by his rejection of Spenserian allegory and the primacy given to the various forms of balladry included throughout *The Minstrel*.[47] There is direct reference to two ballads, both included within Percy's *Reliques,* namely 'The Nut-Brown Maid', and Addison's favoured 'Two Children in the Wood'.

Behold, with berries smeared, with brambles torn,

The babes, now famished, lay them down to die;

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[42] Addison, *The Spectator*, No. 419, p. 172.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Beattie, *The Minstrel*, XLIV., p. 23.
[45] See McLane: 'an intensely detailed imaging of oral tradition in action– songs sung, legends recited, emotions aroused (wonder, joy, horror)', in 'Dating Orality, Thinking Balladry: Of Milkmaids and Minstrels in 1771', p. 135.–for Beattie's relation of horror with sublimity see 'Illustrations', pp. 630–631.

[46] Beattie, *Dissertations*, p. 615.
[47] As Radcliffe notes, Beattie 'rejects Spenserian allegory in order to develop an educational program grounded in human passions [the sublime] accessible to all– in the contemplation of natural [sublimity], in the mystery of old wives tales, in the folk wisdom of ballad literature', in *Edmund Spenser: A Critical Reception*, p. 81.

'Midst the wild howl of darksome woods forlorn,

Folded in one another's arms they lie;

Nor friend, nor stranger, hears their dying cry:

"For from the town the man returns no more." [48]

Described as 'one of the Darling Songs of the Common People', Addison had commended the ballad on account of its simplicity and therefore, its direct relation to nature: 'This Song is a plain simple Copy of Nature, destitute of all the Helps and Ornaments of Art […] pleases for no Reason, but because it is Copy of Nature'.[49] As with his appraisal of 'Chevy-Chase', Addison concentrates his discussion on the 'Majestick Simplicity' of the ballad form, attempting to 'shew the Genius of the Author amidst all [the ballad's] Simplicity'.[50] Given the emphasis placed on simplicity as condition for sublimity made by Beattie throughout 'Illustrations', the inclusion of 'Two Children in the Wood' in *The Minstrel* is emblematic of the inheritance of a poetics of the sublime directly linked to Addison and his successor Percy.

Percy's ordination of the minstrel as scion to the Ossianic bard is similarly evident within Beattie's poem. Macpherson had relied on Ossian as bard and an aggrandised population of bards throughout *The Poems of Ossian* to infiltrate the epic canon and the tradition of the sublime poet, and Beattie employs a similar scheme for Edwin and minstrelsy. In a gesture to the epic convention, Beattie makes a salutation to the minstrels 'mighty masters of the lay', as muses:

But hail, ye mighty masters of the lay,

Nature's true sons, the friends of man and truth!

Whose song, sublimely sweet, serenely gay,

Amused my childhood, and informed my youth.

O let your spirit still my bosom sooth,

Inspire my dreams, and my wild wanderings guide!

Your voice each rugged path of life can smooth;

[48] Beattie, *The Minstrel*, I: XLVI., p. 24.
[49] Addison, *The Spectator*, No. 85., p. 47.
[50] Ibid.

For well I know, wherever ye reside,

There harmony, and peace, and innocence, abide.[51]

Subsequently, throughout the minstrel, there is a conspicuous proliferation of 'rustic pipes', 'Gothic lyre's' and 'harps', which reveal a shared orchestration of indoctrinating Edwin within the ranks of the minstrels, as Macpherson had done with Ossian and the bards. Indeed, just as Ossian would act as 'guide' to the bardic visions of Macpherson's epics, the minstrels 'inspire [the] dreams' and 'wild wanderings' of Edwin. In a scene, reflective of the Ossianic dialectic between the natural and the supernatural, Edwin's inspired dreams turn sublime.

When the long-sounding curfew, from afar,

Loaded with loud lament the lonely gale,

Young Edwin, lighted by the evening star,

Lingering and listening, wandered down the vale.

There would he dream of graves, and corpses pale; [52]

The sublime is rendered from the enlengthened assonance of the anthropomorphised 'lonely gale', its 'loud lament' being distinctly Ossianic. Edwin is then induced into sublime experience by his mirroring of nature in alliterative mimesis as he is shown 'lingering and listening'. Having entered a dream state he encounters 'graves', 'corpses', and 'ghosts' that 'to the charnel-dungeon throng', amidst a sublime euphony of wailing, an owl's 'terrific song', and a 'blast that shrieks by fits the shuddering aisles [of ghosts] along'.[53] Beattie then doubles this stanza with an alternate and enhanced entrance into a dream state vision.

Or, when the setting moon, in crimson dyed,

Hung o'er the dark and melancholy deep,

To haunted stream, remote from man, he hied,

Where fays, of yore, their revels wont to keep;

And there let Fancy roam at large, till sleep

[51] Beattie, *The Minstrel*, I: XLII, p. 22.
[52] Ibid., I: XXXII, p. 17.
[53] Ibid.

A vision brought to his entranced sight.

And first, a wildly murmuring wind 'gan creep

Shrill to his ringing ear; then tapers bright,

With instantaneous gleam, illumed the vault of night.[54]

This alternative scene is one of heightened sublimity, comprised of Burkean obscurity, alongside a demonstrable synchronisation with the Ossianic. In the opening to book seven of *Temora*, 'when the gates of the west are closed on the sun's eagle-eye', the 'spirits of old' appear 'blended with the gale, to some warrior's grave'.[55] Beattie's ghosts who coalesce with the wind, can be seen as direct intertextual transposition of Macpherson's spirits who make 'sudden gestures on the wind, when they stride, from blast to blast, along the dusky face of the night'.[56] When Fingal, in a dream state, encounters the ghost of his son Fillan, there is a 'winding vale' described, replicated by Edwin who 'wandered down the vale'. Similarly, *Temora*'s 'moon, like a dim shield' becomes 'the setting moon' of *The Minstrel*, and the pervasive Ossianic mist 'the vapour dark and deep' which enchants the 'blue-winding Lubar' is morphed into Beattie's 'dark and melancholy deep' of the 'haunted stream'.[57] Beattie had written on the sublimity of such a tableau in 'Illustrations': 'Figures so deeply shaded cannot present a definite outline: forms of such terrific grandeur must be to a certain degree invested with darkness'.[58] Here then, does the long shadow of the Ossianic sublime cast its silhouette across the face of Edwin's tale, only to be startlingly dispelled by Beattie in a move worthy of both Addison and Percy.

Anon in view a portal's blazoned arch

Arose; the trumpet bids the valves unfold;

And forth an host of little warriors march,

Grasping the diamond lance, and targe of gold.

Their look was gentle, their demeanour bold,

And green their helms, and green their silk attire;

[54] Ibid., I: XXXIII, p. 17.
[55] Macpherson, 'Temora', p. 279.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Beattie, *Dissertations*, footnote to p. 642.

> And here and there, right venerably old,
>
> The long-robed minstrels wake the warbling wire,
>
> And some with mellow breath the martial pipe inspire.[59]

From the enchanted portal a host of warriors march forth. However, whilst they are heralded by trumpets and martial pipes, armed with lances, targes and helms, they are distinctly not of the same cast as Fingal's mighty force. Diminutive in stature, their weapons and armour forged from fantastic, lavish materials, the central oxymoron 'Their look was gentle, their demeanour bold', signals the satirical conceit of Beattie in Spenserian burlesque. John Dwyer notes that for Macpherson 'sublimity may be seen in the entire machinery of the epic', from *Ossian*'s towering warriors, obscure battles and heroic deaths, the classical model of the epic affords an established and identifiable palimpsest of sublime topology.[60] Here, Beattie can be seen to playfully dismantle this machinery. The tautology of colour, combined with 'the merriment, and song, and timbrels clear' in which the little warriors turn to dance throughout the proceeding stanza show that the supposed Ossianic vision is instead another form of balladry, of a distinctly Spenserian cast. This is cemented by the 'long-robed minstrels' replacing the 'right venerably old' bards of the epic tradition. In doing so, Beattie reverses the process of Macpherson who had brought together ''a disparate ballad tradition' and 'built it into a recognisably epic one, originating in one epic poet'.[61] Consequently, in dismantling the epic pretensions of the Ossianic, Beattie fulfils the work of Addison and Percy in upholding balladry and the poetic figure of the minstrel as successor to the bard.

> In short, our Souls are at present delightfully lost and bewildered in a pleasing Delusion, and we walk about like the enchanted Hero of a Romance, who sees beautiful Castles, Woods and Meadows; and at the same time hears the warbling of Birds, and the purling of Streams; but upon the finishing of some secret Spell, the fantastick Scene breaks up, and the disconsolate Knight finds himself on a barren Heath, or in a solitary Desart.[62]

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[59] Beattie, *The Minstrel*, I: XXXIV, p. 18.
[60] Dwyer, 'The Melancholy Savage: Text and Context in the Poems of Ossian', p. 178.
[61] Dafydd Moore, 'The Ossianic Revival, James Beattie and Primitivism', in *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature: Enlightenment, Britain and Empire (1707–1918)*, ed. by Susan Manning et al. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 90–98, (p. 92).
[62] Addison, *The Spectator*, No. 413, p. 155.

Edwin's delight in the scenes of 'Fancy', be it from the Beldam's ballad, or the dream state vision, are always superseded, like Addison's 'disconsolate Knight', by a return to the primary mode of his instruction- the sublimity of nature. It is this concentrated focus on nature's power to shape, refine, and instruct the poet which presents a new juncture for the poetics of the sublime, one in which Beattie carefully distances himself from both epic and ballad:

> The exploit of strength, dexterity, or speed,
>
> To him nor vanity nor joy could bring.
>
> His heart, from cruel sport estranged, would bleed
>
> To work the woe of any living thing,
>
> By trap, or net; by arrow, or by sling;
>
> These he detested, those he scorned to wield:
>
> He wished to be the guardian, not the king,
>
> Tyrant, far less, or traitor, of the field.
>
> And sure the sylvan reign unbloody joy might yield.[63]

For Edwin, there is no delight to be found in exertions of 'strength, dexterity, or speed', typical to both epic heroism and the 'cruel sport' of the innumerate hunting scenes of ballads such as 'Chevy-Chase'. Beattie supplants the typical epic and ballad roster of kings, tyrants, and traitors, for Edwin as 'guardian'. The formal pretensions of kingship are manipulated, transferred to, and personified by nature in the Spenserian stanza's closing alexandrine: 'And sure the sylvan reign unbloody joy might yield'. This supplication to nature's 'Majesty', which characterises the poem as a whole, is configured by Beattie at a formal level, with his recalibration of the sublime in Spenserian stanza. This project is outlined by Beattie in the preface.

Having stated the design of the poem as being 'to trace the progress of a Poetical Genius […] till that period at which he may be supposed capable of appearing in the world as a Minstrel', Beattie offers an *apologia* for his choice of the Spenserian stanza.[64] Johnson,

[63] Beattie, *The Minstrel*, I:XVIII, p. 10.
[64] Beattie, 'Preface' to *The Minstrel*, p. xi.

ever outspoken in literary opinion, had excoriated the form for being 'at once difficult and unpleasing; tiresome to the ear by its uniformity, and to the attention by its length'.[65] Beattie appears to directly respond to this censure in stating 'what some critics have remarked, of its uniformity growing at last tiresome to the ear, will be found to hold true, only when the poetry is faulty in other respects'.[66] Remarkably, this would not in fact 'hold true' as Johnson would tell Beattie himself that 'there is not a line in *The Minstrel* which one would not wish to have written'.[67] Beattie's argument in favour of the form is telling,

> It pleases my ear, and seems, from its Gothic structure and original, to bear some relation to the subject and spirit of the Poem. It admits both simplicity and magnificence of sound and of language, beyond any other stanza that I am acquainted with.[68]

The defining characteristics of the form are 'simplicity' and 'magnificence', both of which are integral to Beattie's account of the poetics of the sublime given in 'Illustrations', as Moore notes, for Beattie 'sublimity might be best vouched for by simplicity'.[69] Beattie, therefore, aligns with both Macpherson and Percy in selecting a form which would best promote the poetic ideal they each sought after. Whilst the subject may have differed greatly, the spirit was in essence the same.

Recent criticism has considered Beattie's choice of form in terms of influence. Greg Kucich looks forward in considering the influence Beattie's reworking of the Spenserian stanza had on Romantic poetry such as Keats' *The Eve of St. Agnes* (1820), and Shelley's *Adonais* (1821). Conversely, Radcliffe looks to its heritage, identifying a series of Spenserian burlesques throughout the eighteenth century which inspired Beattie, including William Shenstone's *School-Mistress* (1742), James Thomson's *Castle of Indolence* (1748), and Gilbert West's *Education* (1751). Kucich notes a 'new kind of divisive psychological experience controlling *The Minstrel*' and makes passing reference to Edwin's 'aesthetic

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[65] Samuel Johnson, '*The Rambler*, No. 121. [Tuesday, 14 May 1751]', in *The Yale Editions of the Works of Samuel Johnson: The Rambler*, ed. by W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss, 3 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), vol. 2., pp. 280–286, (p. 285).
[66] Beattie, 'Preface' to *The Minstrel*, p. xii.
[67] Beatie, quoted in King, 'James Beattie's *The Minstrel* and the Origins of Romantic Autobiography', p. 39. –See also David Hill Radcliffe who states that Beattie had 'answered every one of Johnson's objections to Augustan Spenserianism: Spenser's stanza could be used successfully in a long poem, Spencer's diction could be modified to suit modern tastes, Spenser's allegory could be readapted to poetry, and republican sentiments could find a place in a politically reactionary poem', in *Edmund Spencer: A Reception History*, p. 81.
[68] Beattie, 'Preface' to *The Minstrel,* p. xii.
[69] Moore, 'The Ossianic Revival, James Beattie and Primitivism', p. 96.

mission', whereas Radcliffe discusses Edwin's 'higher state of consciousness' as being derived from his 'aesthetic education'.[70] As Radcliffe contends: 'Beattie's poem […] terminates not in action, but a higher state of consciousness. Description was essential to this purpose, for 'vision' was at once the means and end of aesthetic education, in *The Minstrel*'.[71] Whilst Radcliffe identifies this 'aesthetic education' as poetic 'vision' he, like Kucich, struggles to articulate that the aesthetic is that of the sublime, a higher state of consciousness peculiar to the poet's elevated mind through encounter with the sublime. As Beattie himself states: 'Poetry is sublime when it elevates the mind'.[72] Whilst this had been captured by Macpherson in the epic form of Ossian's bardic vision, Edwin's 'simple tale' relates the progression necessary to achieve such a state. At every venture it is the supremacy of nature which provokes poetic rapture: 'O Nature, how in every charm supreme! / Whose votaries feast on raptures ever new!'.[73]

> And oft he traced the uplands, to survey,
>
> When o'er the sky advanced the kindling dawn,
>
> The crimson cloud, blue main, and mountain grey,
>
> And lake, dim-gleaming on the smoky lawn;
>
> Far to the west the long, long vale withdrawn,
>
> Where twilight loves to linger for a while;
>
> And now he faintly kens the bounding fawn,
>
> And villager abroad at early toil.
>
> But, lo! the sun appears! and heaven, earth, ocean, smile.

In the above stanza Beattie situates the young poet amidst the temporal and spatial concurrences of sublimity.[74] The advance of the 'kindling dawn' is depicted through a configuration of colour: 'The crimson cloud, blue main, and mountain grey' which reflect

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[70] Kucich, *Keats, Shelley, and Romantic Spenserianism*, p. 73.
–Radcliffe describes this 'aesthetic education' as pertaining to Edwin's 'epiphanic encounters with rainbows, fairies, ballads, and old wives' tales', in Radcliffe, 'The Poetry Professors', p. 139.
[71] Ibid. p. 141.
[72] Beattie, *Dissertations*, p. 620.
[73] Beattie, *The Minstrel*, I: XL p. 21.
[74] Parts of the following paragraphs collate with the work of my MPhil dissertation, although the points of contact are few and the breadth and scope of the chapter is significantly improved and expanded.

‘dim-gleaming on the smoky lawn’ creating a unity between sky, landscape, and lake.[75] The measurement of distance is expanded by the central line ‘Far to the west the long, long vale withdrawn’, the assonance and repetition of ‘long’ conspiring with the ‘vale’ of the setting sun ‘withdrawn’, to create a sense of spatial extension beyond the bounds of language.[76] The enjambment of this line into a rumination on a ‘twilight’ that ‘loves to linger for a while’ reflects the poetic capacity to ‘linger and listen’. Edwin’s rapture at the movements of time and space is digressed from to acknowledge the ‘bounding fawn’ and ‘villager abroad at early toil’ who share the landscape with him yet he only ‘faintly kens’.[77] The concluding line of the stanza mirrors that of the preceding stanza which opens with a corresponding spondaic exclamation ‘But, lo!’ which signals the rising of the sun and a return to a unity of ‘heaven, earth, [and] ocean’ who ‘smile’.[78]

As with the dream state vision, this stanza acts as a preliminary contemplation to an alternate and magnified scene which represents the apogee of Edwin’s experience of sublimity as poetic epiphany becomes entelechy:

> And oft the craggy cliff he loved to climb,
>
> When all in mist the world below was lost.
>
> What dreadful pleasure! there to stand sublime,
>
> Like shipwrecked mariner on desert coast,
>
> And view the enormous waste of vapour, tost
>
> In billows, lengthening to the horizon round,
>
> Now scooped in gulfs, with mountains now embossed!
>
> And hear the voice of mirth and song rebound,
>
> Flocks, herds, and waterfalls, along the hoar profound![79]

The use of anaphora connects both stanzas with Beattie repeatedly situating Edwin on high (‘And oft he traced the uplands, to survey’), (‘And oft the craggy cliff he loved to climb’). This marks an important innovation of Beattie’s aesthetic theory transmediated into poetic

[75] Ibid. I: XX., p. 11.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid., I: XXI. p. 11.

configuration. One of Beattie's opening considerations of the sublime in 'Illustrations' is given to the experience later iconised by the German painter Caspar David Friedrich:

> Great depth […] because it astonishes and pleases the imagination, is also to be considered as sublime. For, if we be ourselves secure, everyone must have observed, that it is agreeable to look down, from a mountain, upon the plain […] upon the various objects below […] it is pleasant to look down from an elevated situation, because here too there is greatness and delightful astonishment.[80]

That Beattie is innovatory in emblemising such a positioning is attested to by Simon Bainbridge who notices how Beattie 'shifts the sublime viewpoint to the mountain top'.[81] Bainbridge considers the important distinction that whilst Addison and Burke 'primarily saw the sublime as produced by looking *at* mountains, […] James Beattie emphasised how sublimity could be experienced by looking *from* peaks.[82] This theory is actualised in Beattie's verse when Edwin, standing above 'the world below' in which 'all is lost in mist', exclaims: 'What dreadful pleasure!'. It is in this moment in which the Romantic sublime is realised with the 'paradigmatic figure of the sublime poet', standing 'solitary, powerless, silent and rapt' before the 'object, the landscape or the idea which first arrests him'.[83] The sublimity of the 'enormous waste of vapour' and 'mountains now embossed!' is eclipsed by this epochal positioning of the poet 'standing sublime' in his moment of transcendence.

Essential to the now established concept of the Romantic sublime, is this experience of what Thomas Weiskel terms the 'sublime moment'.[84] For Weiskel, the Romantic sublime converges around this instance of the 'sublime moment' that acts as a 'metaphorical substitution of a "power within" for the external power'.[85] This dialectic between the 'power within' and the 'external power' is brought about through expression. It is the impression of the 'external power' of sublimity as found in 'billows, lengthening to the horizon round', that brings about the expression of Edwin who 'stands sublime', allowing the 'voice of mirth and song' to 'rebound' in his hearing and 'along the hoar profound'. As Weiskel notes, 'The power within […] is greater far than the external power- to which, however, we remain

[80] Beattie, *Dissertations*, pp. 606–607.
[81] Simon Bainbridge, 'Highlands, Lakes, Wales', in *The Cambridge Companion to The Romantic Sublime*, ed. by Cian Duffy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), pp. 117–128, (p. 119).
[82] Ibid.
[83] Angela Leighton, *Shelley and the Sublime: An Interpretation of the Major Poems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). p. 21.
[84] Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime*, p. 95.
[85] Ibid.

subject as natural beings'.[86] This can be clarified by the distinction between Macpherson's reliance on the metaphorical use of mist to connote the subjective experience of memory, with the natural phenomena of mist in Beattie's stanza that directly provokes the sublime moment. Figurative orchestration is superseded by psychological examination, as Weiskel notes: 'The sublime makes everyman his own psychologist', in so far that it elicits a psychological response and therefore a subsequent enquiry into the emotion produced within. [87] This double intuition peculiar to poetic genius is articulated by Beattie: 'If a man under the influence of any passion were to compose […] a poem […] his work would […] exhibit an image of his mind'.[88]

Beattie's instigation of the sublime moment, the hallmark of the Romantic sublime, represents a watershed moment in the development of the poetics of the sublime in which the Romantic is seen to emerge. Whilst Murray Pittock notices that Beattie's reworking of the Spenserian stanza to include 'Ossianism, sentiment, and the ballads', (to which I add the sublime), displays 'a hybridisation of forms', something greater is also shown to occur.[89] The orchestrated, diffuse, and ultimately problematic machinations of Macpherson and Blair, Addison and Percy, to align sublimity with formal precepts is shown in some way redundant. What Beattie effectively does is convey that the sublime is not conscripted to poetic form. Neither epic nor ballad, nor Spenserian stanza are of inherent sublimity by way of morphology. The poetic of the sublime emerges from composition of sublime experience, centred on, and empowered by the figure of the poet. Beattie had effectively completed the genealogical ascendency of the minstrel from the bard. Whilst minstrel and bards would continue to appear in sublime castings throughout the Romantic period and beyond, most successfully by Scott, what Beattie had done, however tacitly, was also break free from such typecasting. Edwin may have been manufactured as minstrel, but his enduring and influential role was that of Beattie's as poet sublime. Therefore, in standing sublime, Edwin was very much standing apart.

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[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid. p. 83.
[88] Beattie continues 'such we suppose the mind of every sublime writer to be; and such in fact it must be, as long at least as he employs himself in sublime composition', in *Essays on Poetry and Music*, p. 208.
[89] Murray Pittock, *Scottish and Irish Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 135.

Chapter 5.

Nature's Bard: Robert Burns and a Vision Sublime

> The simple Bard, unbroke by rules of art,
>
> He pours the wild effusions of the heart;
>
> And if inspir'd 'tis Nature's pow'rs inspire;
>
> Her's all the melting thrill, and her's the kindling fire.[1]

If Beattie's Edwin was to stand apart, no poet in literary history, not Shakespeare, Milton, or Ossian, has been more singled out for their bardic role than Robert Burns. Whilst it would take a lifetime of self-fashioning, and posthumous centuries of biographical and critical inquiry to achieve such status, Burns's bardship begins in poetry, and a poetics which is markedly sublime. The epigraph to Burns's first published collection — the Kilmarnock edition of *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (1786) — introduces and epitomises the complex, often contradictory legerdemain which Burns curated to achieve his enduring status as Scotland's national bard. The epigraph, a 'hand in glove portrayal of Burns's self-projection of himself as a poet', also represents an instance of genealogical allegiance which cannot be understated.[2] Here, Burns assumes the role of untutored bard which Macpherson's *Ossian*, and the subsequent primitivist ideals of the period yet upheld.[3] Correspondingly, the dedication from *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, in which Percy states that 'these poems are presented to your Ladyship, not as labours of art, but as effusions of nature', is poetically transcribed by Burns as 'wild effusions of the heart'. Subsequently, the bard is defined by Beattie's aesthetic and poetic ideal as 'simple', with *The Minstrel*'s Edwin providing an 'indelible' model to Burns as poet, who later wrote to Miss Logan: 'I send you more than

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[1] Anonymous, although widely attributed to Burns, 'Epigraph' to 'Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect' [1786], in *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns, Vol. 3: Commentary* ed. by James Kinsley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 970.

[2] Editor's note in *The Canongate Burns: The Complete Poems and Songs of Robert Burns,* ed. Andrew Noble and Patrick Scott Hogg (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2001), p. 5.

[3] See Nigel Leask who contends that in the epigraph 'Burns astutely played to the taste for poetic primitivism […] promoted by Macpherson's *Ossian* and James Beattie's *The Minstrel*', although Leask, like his fellow critics (later discussed), conflates this with 'sensibility', and the 'sentimental cult of Natural Genius', in *Robert Burns and Pastoral: Poetry and Improvement in Late Eighteenth–Century Scotland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 3–4, 43.

India boasts, / In Edwin's simple tale'.[4] Critics have recognised this 'emulating vigour' in which Burns was apt to 'string his rustic lyre' and that he possessed 'one of those minds that absorbs influences as blotting paper absorbs ink'.[5] As the epigraph shows, Burns 'subordinates himself to a tradition he himself regards as transcendent' and it is anthropomorphised nature which repeatedly inspires transcendental experience and expression from her metonymic store of 'thrill' and 'fire'.[6] In 1784, a young Burns had ruminated on such experience as sublime:

> I have various sources of pleasure & enjoyment which are, in a manner, peculiar to myself; or some here & there such other out-of-the way person. — Such is the peculiar pleasure I take in the season of Winter, more than the rest of the year — This, I believe, may be partly owing to my misfortunes giving my mind a melancholy cast; but there is something even in the —
>
> "— Mighty tempest & the hoary waste
>
> Abrupt & deep stretch'd o'er the buried earth"
>
> — which — raises the mind to a serious sublimity, favorable to every thing great & noble. —There is scarcely any earthly object gives me more — I don't know if I should call it pleasure, but something which exalts me, something which enraptures me — than to walk in the sheltered side of a wood or high plantation, in a cloudy, winter day, and hear a stormy wind howling among the trees & raving o'er the plain.[7]

Burns's entry into his commonplace book reveals a profound and reverential understanding of sublime experience which has yet to be considered by modern criticism. The encounter with winter and the familiar set of 'paradigmatic elicitors of the sublime', in this case the woods and 'stormy wind', provoke enrapturement and exaltation of the poet in which Burns can be

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[4] Quoted by King, *James Beattie's The Minstrel and the Origins of Romantic Autobiography* p. 59.
–See Ian C. Robertson 'there is no doubt that *The Minstrel*, and, in particular, the character of Edwin in Book One, as the budding uneducated minstrel brought up in Nature, made an indelible mark on Burns's concept of himself as poet', in 'Beattie's The Minstrel: A Missing Link in Scottish Poetry', in *Studies in Scottish Literature* vol. 43. no. 2. (2017), pp. 237–254, (p. 251).
[5] Thomas Crawford, *Burns: A Study of the Poems and Songs* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd Ltd., 1960) p. 185.
– Carol McGuirk, *Robert Burns and the Sentimental Era* (East Lothian: Tuckwell Press, 1985,1997), p. 36.
[6] Ibid. p. 116.
[7] Robert Burns, 'First Commonplace Book' [April 1784], in *The Oxford Edition of The Works of Robert Burns, Vol. 1: Commonplace Books, Tour Journals, and Miscellaneous Prose* ed. Nigel Leask (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 40–69, (pp. 45–6).

seen as Edwin, standing sublime, his mind elevated to 'a serious sublimity'.[8] However, the fulcrum of the passage is Burns's invocation of sublime poetry, two lines from Thomson's *The Seasons* which reveal Burns's fluid conception of sublimity that responds to the objective instance in nature, but which is articulated by poetry.

Contra to Liam McIlvanney's statement that 'Burns's poetry- witty, social, intimate - is not "sublime" in its subject matter (it does not describe grand, imposing spectacles, such as battles or turbulent natural forces)', throughout his extensive corpus Burns continually grapples with the 'grand imposing spectacles' and 'turbulent natural forces' which 'scarcely [more than] any earthly object' enlivened his bardic temperament.[9] Poems such as 'The Humble Petition of Bruar Water to the Noble Duke of Athole', 'Verses written with a Pencil at Taymouth', and 'The Falls of Fyers' (quoted below) emblemise this pronounced commitment to 'Admiring Nature in her wildest grace'.[10]

Among the heathy hills and ragged woods

The roaring Fyers pours his mossy floods;

Till full he dashes on the rocky mounds,

Where, thro' a shapeless breach, his stream resounds.

As high in air the bursting torrents flow,

As deep recoiling surges foam below,

Prone down the rock the whitening sheet descends,

And viewles Echo's ear, astonished, rends.

Dim-seen, through rising mists and ceaseless show'rs,

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[8] Robert R. Clewis, 'Towards a Theory of the Sublime and Aesthetic Awe', in *The Sublime Reader*, ed. by Robert R. Clewis (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), pp. 340–354, (p. 343).
– This passage aligns directly with Roger Robinson's summation of *The Minstrel*: 'Edwin's response to nature, especially in the sublime aspect, his thoughts and feelings, his tendency to melancholy and love of solitude, his early attachments to poetry and music[…]' in Robinson, 'The Origins and Composition of James Beattie's *Minstrel*', p. 227.
–See also Carol McGuirk who notices that *The Minstrel* 'offers some fascinating parallels to Burns's career as bard', in *Robert Burns and the Sentimental Era,* p. 144.
[9] Liam McIlvanney, 'Hugh Blair, Robert Burns, and the Invention of Scottish Literature', *Eighteenth–Century Life*, vol. 29, no. 2 (Spring 2005), pp. 25–46, (p. 39).
[10] Robert Burns, 'Written with a Pencil over the Chimney–piece, in the Parlour of the Inn at Kenmore, Taymouth', in *Burns: Poems and Songs*, ed. by James Kinsley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 279–280, (p. 279).

The hoary cavern, wide surrounding lours:

Still thro' the gap the struggling river toils,

And still, below, the horrid cauldron boils—[11]

The progressive experience of the falls is versified in linear descent as 'mossy floods' cascade into 'bursting torrents', blasting into 'ceaseless show'rs', saturating the reader in the sublimity of both the falls and the poem. Thomson's influence is distinct, yet Burns is ultimately successful in assuming the archetype. In 1801, John Stoddart had visited the falls and written of the experience in his published tour journal *Remarks on Local Scenery and Manners in Scotland*. Leask observes that 'the Falls of Foyers above Loch Ness represents the aesthetic highlight of Stoddart's tour: [quoting Stoddart] "no spot. . .which I have seen, is at all comparable to this, in the strong and sudden impression which it produces"'.[12] In his encounter with 'the sublime and terrific scene' of the Falls, Stoddart misquotes lines from Burns's poem: 'As high in air the bursting torrents flow, / As deep recoiling surge foam below'.[13] Burns's invocation of Thomson, is mirrored by Stoddart's invocation of Burns a quarter of a century later, confirming Burns within the ranks of sublime poets whilst illustrating the reciprocal response of nature and poetics intrinsic to the role of the bard.

Recently, Fiona Stafford has connected 'the centrality of "Nature"' to Burns with 'the complexities of aspiring to be a "simple bard"'.[14] Behind Burns's reverence of nature and the self-fashioning conceit 'Gie me ae spark o' nature's fire, / That's a' the learning I desire' lies a familiarity with, and apprenticeship to poets of the eighteenth century, from Thomson through to Beattie, whose verse is characterised by the sublime. Burns's autobiographical letter to Dr. John Moore of 1787 is revelatory in showing Burns's autodidactic learning of poetics from a collection of ballads: 'The collection of songs was my *vade mecum*. I pored over them, driving my cart, or walking to labour, song by song, verse by verse; carefully noting the true tender, or sublime, from affectation and fustian'.[15] What becomes apparent then is Burns's responsiveness and commitment to a sublimity 'inspir'd' by nature, but very much focalised on poetry, and therefore Burns's construction of his bardic persona must be

[11] Ibid. 'Written with a Pencil, standing by the Fall of Fyers, near Loch–Ness', p. 285.
[12] Nigel Leask, *Stepping Westward*, pp. 179, 185.
[13] Ibid. pp. 184–5.
[14] Fiona Stafford, 'Burns and the Natural World', in *The Oxford Handbook of Burns* ed. by Gerard Carruthers, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024) pp. 199–215, (p. 204).
[15] Robert Burns 'Letter 125. (4) to Dr John Moore (Edinburgh, 23rd September 1787)', in *The Letters of Robert Burns, Vol. 1: 1780–1789*, 2nd Edn, ed. by J. De Lancey Ferguson, and G. Ross Roy (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1985), pp. 135–147, (pp. 139–40).

considered alongside the germane conformity of the sublime. However, the bond between Burns, his bardship, and the sublime has to this day proven insurmountable, with modern scholarship of Burns offering a deprecating range of comment from the anecdotal to McIlvanney's outright denial. This is distinctly contrary to contemporary reviews of Burns's poetry which expressed recognition, and indeed, admiration for what Walter Scott praised as 'the sublimer passages' of the poet's work.[16]

> His simple strains, artless and unadorned, seem to flow without effort from the native feelings of the heart. They are always nervous, sometimes inelegant, often natural, simple and sublime.[17]

James Anderson, writing in London's *Monthly Review* in December of 1786 surmises that whilst Burns's poetry may be at times 'nervous' and 'sometimes inelegant', such blemishes are surpassed by the poems being 'often natural, simple and sublime'. Yet, the disconnect between contemporary appraisals of Burns's poetics of the sublime, and today's critical dissonance is demonstrated when Rhona Brown, whose otherwise rigorous and compelling chapter, observes that Anderson 'echoes many watch-words of early Burns criticism: "comic"; "lively"; "country"; "nature"; "simple"; "artless"; "unadorned"; "native"; "simplicity"', the omission of 'sublime' as a 'watch-word' being marked.[18] In a familiar gesture, Brown mentions the 'simple and sublime' only as precursor to Wordsworth's 'ideal poet', and his ubiquitous utterance 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings'.[19] In doing so, Burns's manifestation of the sublime is obliquely pushed onto the established and comfortable ground on which Wordsworth stands, frustratingly relegating Burns to a precursory role. Similarly, Gerard Carruthers introduces Burns's poem 'The Cotter's Saturday Night' as being an 'exercise in the sublime'.[20] Whilst Carruthers devotes several pages of otherwise comprehensive analysis to the poem there is no further reference to Burns's

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[16] Walter Scott, Review of Cromek's '*Reliques of Burns*, in *Quarterly Review* (1809), quoted by Andrew Noble in 'Robert Burns', *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture 1776–1832*, Gen ed. Ian McCalman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 439–440, (p. 440).
[17] James Anderson, 'Unsigned review in *Monthly Review*' [December 1786], in *Robert Burns: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Donald A. Low, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1974) pp. 71–74, pp. 71–72.
[18] Rhona Brown, '"Guid black prent": Robert Burns and the Contemporary Scottish and American Periodical Press', in *Robert Burns and Transatlantic Culture*, ed. by Sharon Alker, Leith Davis, and Holly Faith Nelson, (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 71–83, p. 81.
[19] Ibid., p. 82. This is of course an important claim, one which Murray Pittock argues for extensively in Murray G. H. Pittock, 'Robert Burns and British Poetry' in *Proceedings of the British Academy, Volume 121, 2002 Lectures*, ed. by P. J. Marshall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 191–211.
[20] Gerard Carruthers, *Robert Burns* (Horndon: Northcote House, 2006), p. 15.

engagement with sublimity, emblematic of the anecdotal, punctuated consideration of sublimity endemic to modern criticism of Burns.

The nexus of this critical oversight can be traced to the most prominent case of such in Henry Mackenzie's celebrity review of Burns's Kilmarnock edition published in *The Lounger* in 1786. Despite his status as being 'Scotland's leading literary figure', and the critical consensus which acknowledges that he provides 'by far the most influential contemporary account' of Burns's poetry, Mackenzie's *Lounger* review has been consistently overlooked in terms of its aesthetic declarations concerning sublimity.[21] Mackenzie, author of Scotland's most celebrated work of sentimentalism, *The Man of Feeling* (1771), a book which Burns 'prize[d] next to the bible', also received the dedication of Scott's *Waverley* in 1814, in which Scott significantly hails Mackenzie as being 'our Scottish Addison'.[22] In an unfortunate literary-critical parallel, Mackenzie's review has suffered the same fate as Addison's ballad papers in so far that it has garnered no acknowledgement of its axiomatic reverence of the sublime. Consequently, just as Addison's ballad essays have been consistently dismissed, even disparaged, so too has the *Lounger* review, and therefore revision is subsequently necessary. Donald A. Low's *Robert Burns: The Critical Heritage* (1974) is still referenced in decrying Mackenzie's review as 'a disastrously inaccurate essay in criticism, which gave rise to endless distortions of Burns's poetry'.[23] Low's argument is that 'the whole tendency of Mackenzie's encomium was to emasculate *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*', claiming that Mackenzie 'apologised for the language in which the poet did his best work, and concentrated on the poems of sentiment in English'.[24] The conflation of Mackenzie as man of sentiment, and his review sentimentalising, and therefore emasculating Burns has proven persistent, something which Low inherits from his predecessor David Daiches.[25] The historian Daiches, in a strikingly acetone attack on eighteenth-century aestheticians states that:

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[21] Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral*, p. 106.
–Low, *Robert Burns: The Critical Heritage*, p. 67.
[22] Walter Scott, *Waverly; or, Tis Sixty Years Since* [1814], ed. by Claire Lamont (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 377.
[23] Low, 'Introduction' to *Robert Burns: The Critical Heritage*, pp. 1–57, p.17.
–This statement is quoted by both Andrew Noble, in the 'Introduction' to *The Canongate Burns*, p. xlvi, and by Nigel Leask in 'Robert Burns and Romanticism in Scotland and Ireland', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Romanticism*, ed. by Murray Pittock (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), pp. 127–138, (p. 128).
[24] Ibid.
[25] Low states that 'the fullest analysis of Burns' poems and songs has come from academic critics' and then gives primacy to Daiches as being 'author to two valuable studies', in Low, *Robert Burns: The Critical Heritage*, p. 50.

> Eighteenth-century Scottish literary criticism, which is almost entirely concerned with rhetoric, with the study of formal devices for stirring the emotions, 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. The reception of Macpherson's *Ossian* is evidence of this or, to take a more particular case, Henry Mackenzie's review of Burns's Kilmarnock volume in *The Lounger*, which praised some of the weakest and most sentimental of Burns's stanzas as being 'solemn and sublime, with… rapt and inspired melancholy'.[26]

The unnamed literary critics are most certainly Hugh Blair and James Beattie, the latter branded by Daiches as 'a bad philosopher and indifferent poet', and whilst alarmingly divesting them of the capability to discern sublime poetry, he, like Low, targets Mackenzie's review for praising in terms sublime 'some of the weakest and most sentimental of Burns's stanzas'.[27]

Thomas Crawford states that in approaching his 1960 landmark study of Burns's poetry and songs he began 'from one blindingly simple premiss - that in investigating any phenomenon whatsoever you look first for the "principal contradiction", the main opposition around which all the other conflicts can be grouped'.[28] As illustrated above, the 'principal contradiction' which unites both Daiches and Low's enduring criticism of Mackenzie's review is the conflation of the sentimental with the sublime. Burns is, as Daiches notices, 'a tightrope walker', and the contradictory positioning in which Burns exists as poet, between pathos and passion, is as Crawford surmises, that 'which makes Burns criticism at once so fascinating and complex'.[29] However, in the past century of Burns studies, Harold Bloom is alone in acknowledging Burns's composite of the sentimental and the sublime, what he describes as a 'complex fusion' in which 'the passion for the Sublime mode, agonistic and transcendental, was able to reconcile itself with the milder responsiveness of Sensibility [the sentimental]'.[30] Burns is, as Bloom states, wholly informed by such a fusion: 'In Robert Burns and the early Blake, the unstable union of Sensibility and the Sublime helped stimulate

[26] David Daiches, *The Paradox of Scottish Culture: The Eighteenth-Century Experience* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 22.
[27] Ibid. p. 21.
[28] Thomas Crawford, 'Introduction' to *Burns: A Study of the Poems and Songs*, p. i.
[29] David Daiches, 'Robert Burns: The Tightrope Walker', in *Love and Liberty: Robert Burns: A Bicentenary Celebration*, ed. by Kenneth Simpson (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1997), pp. 18–31.
[30] Bloom, 'Introduction' to *Poets of Sensibility and the Sublime*, p. 7.

the only poets of the eighteenth century who could rival Dryden and Pope'.[31] Yet the hegemonic whitewashing of the sublime by the sentimental from critics is pervasive, an 'unstable union' which has bred critical oversight and limited a richer understanding of Burns's poetics. The reception of Mackenzie's *Lounger* review is emblematic of this contradiction, despite Mackenzie's assertion of Burns after his death, that he was not only a poet of sentiment, but very much a poet of the sublime: 'when he allowed his mind its proper play, he produced poetry of a very high cast, full of tenderness and sublimity'.[32]

Carol McGuirk, whose monograph *Robert Burns and the Sentimental Era* (1985) which takes its cue from the 'sentimental forces at work' revealed by Low's collection of early reviews in *The Critical Heritage*, has convincingly perpetuated Burns's status as sentimental poet.[33] Burns, who self-professed his affiliation with the sentimental cult of feeling of Shenstone, Sterne, and Mackenzie, produced some of his most celebrated poems and songs in the sentimental mode, such as 'Love and Liberty', and 'To a Mouse', and McGuirk provides compelling analysis of the full range.[34] However, like her critical predecessors, McGuirk also anneals the review of Mackenzie's declarations of sublimity in favour of sentimentalism. With the sentimental implicitly accounted for in terms of 'feeling', 'curiosity', and 'pride', McGuirk states that Mackenzie's review 'begins with a sentimental meditation', which stresses 'the pleasurable reverie genius produces in the mind of a spectator'.[35] Yet, the review opens with Mackenzie explicitly assimilating poetic genius with the sublime in a distinctly Addisonian fashion:

> To the feeling and susceptible there is something wonderfully pleasing in the contemplation of genius, of that supereminent reach of mind by which some men are distinguished. In the view of highly superior talents, as in that of great and stupendous

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[31] Ibid. Unfortunately, Bloom's comment on Burns, whilst revelatory, remains anecdotal.
[32] Henry Mackenzie, *The Anecdotes and Egotisms of Henry Mackenzie 1745–1831,* ed. by Harold W. Thomson (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), p. 151.
[33] McGuirk concludes her introduction by stating that 'the convenient collection of early reviews in *The Critical Heritage* probably made it inevitable by some hand, so clearly does it show sentimental forces at work in the initial critical reception of Robert Burns' before quoting Low directly in his imprimatur that 'This topic [Burns and sentiment] has not yet been investigated', in McGuirk, *Robert Burns and the Sentimental Era*, pp. xxvii–xxviii.
[34] See Robert Burns, 'Letter 13. (1) to Mr John Murdoch [Lochlee 25th Jan. 1783]' in which Burns states 'My favourite authors are of the sentimental kind, such as Shenstone, particularly his *Elegies;* Thomson; *Man of Feeling,*—a book I prize next to the Bible; *Man of the World*; Sterne, especially his *Sentimental Journey*; Macpherson's *Ossian*, etc.;—these are the glorious models after which I endeavour to form my conduct', in *The Letters of Robert Burns, Vol. 1: 1780–1789*, 2nd Edn, ed. by J. De Lancey Ferguson, and G. Ross Roy (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1985), pp. 16–18, (p. 17).
[35] McGuirk, *Robert Burns and the Sentimental Era*, p. 65.

> natural objects, there is a sublimity which fills the soul with wonder and delight, which expands it, as it were, beyond its usual bounds, and which, investing our nature with extraordinary powers, and extraordinary honours, interests our curiosity and flatters our pride.[36]

Whilst McGuirk provides a sentimentalist reading of the above which dictates that 'the main function of genius, then, is to "flatter the pride" of the nongenius', Mackenzie can be read distinctly theorising a model of sublimity based on the encounter with poetic genius, similar in effect to 'that of great and stupendous natural objects', which evokes both 'wonder and delight' and a transcendent, and 'extraordinary' exaltation of the spectator. Sandra Shapshay distinguishes the phenomenology of awe with that of the sublime as being primarily to do with humility, and therefore its counterpart pride. Whereas awe elicits a response of 'humility and accommodation', the sublime evokes humility superseded by investiture of pride, 'the paradigmatic phenomenology of the sublime involves a feeling of humility but also a feeling of *exaltation* of the self'.[37] Mackenzie is therefore introducing Burns by way of, not a 'pleasurable reverie', but an over-powering, transcendent extolment of the self from encounter with the sublime presence of poetic genius.

This is substantiated when Mackenzie performs a literal apotheosis of genius: 'This divinity of genius, however, which admiration is fond to worship, is best arrayed in the darkness of distant and remote periods, and is not easily acknowledged in the present times, or in places with which we are perfectly acquainted'.[38] Kenneth Simpson notes that Mackenzie's essays in *The Lounger* are indebted to Addison's *The Spectator* publications, and here such inheritance is distinguished.[39] In 1711, Addison's *The Spectator*, No. 160, had 'transformed' the notion of genius from that of superficial epithet; 'There is no character more frequently given to a writer than that of being a genius', to what he defined as 'great genius'; 'Among great geniuses those few draw the admiration of all the world upon them, and stand up as the prodigies of mankind, who, by the mere strength of natural parts, and without any assistance of art or learning, have produced works that were the delight of their

[36] Henry Mackenzie, 'unsigned essay in *The Lounger*' [9 December 1786], in Low, *Robert Burns: The Critical Heritage*, pp. 67–85, (p. 67).
[37] Sandra Shapshay, 'A Theory of Sublime Responses, the Thin and the Thick', in *The Sublime Reader* pp. 329–339, (p. 331).
[38] Mackenzie, 'unsigned essay in *The Lounger*', p. 67.
[39] Kenneth Simpson, *The Protean Scot: The Crisis of Identity in Eighteenth Century Scottish Literature* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988), p. 179.

own times and the wonder of posterity'.[40] For Addison, such genius is distinguished by sublimity, the 'nobly wild and extravagant' which as Mackenzie reiterates, is traditionally found in the 'darkness of distant and remote periods'. Yet, for both Addison and Mackenzie, the 'extraordinary Figure' of 'original Genius' that appears, not in the distinctly Ossianic mode from the 'darkness of distant and remote periods', but within contemporary society, is a prize worthy of commendation. Addison precursors such apotheosis by way of the classical epigraph from Horace which heads his essay on genius, '–Cui mens divinior, atque os / Magna sonaturum des nominis hujus honorem. (HOR., *Sat.* i. 4, 43).', translating to 'On him confer the poet's sacred name, / Whose lofty voice declares the heavenly flame'.[41] This emerges in Mackenzie's review as Burns's famous and problematic epithet 'heaven-taught ploughman'.

Modern criticism has discerned the 'untruth of both propositions contained in [Mackenzie's] apothegm' of Burns as being either 'heaven-taught' or 'ploughman'.[42] Yet, critics also agree that Mackenzie appropriates this title from the following stanza in Beattie's *The Minstrel*:

> Then grieve not, thou, to whom the indulgent Muse
>
> Vouchsafes a portion of celestial fire;
>
> Nor blame the partial fates, if they refuse
>
> The imperial banquet, and the rich attire.
>
> Know thine own worth, and reverence the lyre.
>
> Wilt thou debase the heart which God refined?
>
> No; let thy heaven-taught soul to heaven aspire,
>
> To fancy, freedom, harmony, resigned;
>
> Ambition's grovelling crew for ever left behind.[43]

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[40] Addison, *The Spectator*, No. 160 [Monday, September 3, 1711], pp. 250–253, (p. 250).
–See also Ken Frieden's estimation that with Addison's essay 'genius was transformed', whilst exploring Addison's innovative role in shaping the eighteenth–century fascination with genius, in Frieden, 'The Eighteenth-Century Introjection of Genius', in *Poets of Sensibility and the Sublime*, pp. 55–69, (p. 57).
[41] Ibid.
[42] Leask, 'Robert Burns and Romanticism in Britain and Ireland', p. 128.
[43] Beattie, *The Minstrel,* I: VII, p. 4.

Whilst McGuirk dismisses this reference, stating that 'Mackenzie had applied the epithet "heaven-taught" to Burns as though it simply meant unlettered', she then goes on to state that 'Beattie, however, intended the expression to signify the idealising impulse of the true bard'.[44] To 'know thine own worth, and reverence the lyre' is an 'idealising impulse' which can be read throughout Burns's Kilmarnock volume, and a maxim to Burns as poet. Therefore, Mackenzie does not so much ordain this conception of Burns, as recognise it, professed throughout Burns's own poetry. Assimilating the parity between Burns's 'poetic genius' and the sublime, Mackenzie connects him with the most prominent and successful contemporary figure of 'the true bard', Beattie's Edwin, and *The Progress of Genius*, something which Burns himself attempts in life and in poetry, with one poem above all representative of such venture. It is this poem, 'The Vision', which Mackenzie notably selects to 'first present my readers with an extract, in which I think they will discover a high tone of feeling, a power and energy of expression, particularly and strongly characteristic of the mind and the voice of a poet'.[45] Some six stanzas from the second duan of the poem (lines 205–40), are singled out by Mackenzie in terms of sublimity: 'Of strains like the above, solemn and sublime, with that rapt and inspired melancholy in which the poet lifts his eye "above this visible diurnal sphere"'. The stanzas show Coila, Burns's Ayrshire muse, relate to the poet her witnessing of him in youthful pursuit of poetry and the sublime:

> "With future hope I oft would gaze
>
> Fond, on thy little early ways,
>
> Thy rudely, caroll'd, chiming phrase,
>
> In uncouth rhymes;
>
> Fir'd at the simple, artless lays
>
> Of other times.
>
> "I saw thee seek the sounding shore,
>
> Delighted with the dashing roar;

[44] McGuirk, *Robert Burns and the Sentimental Era*, p. 145.
[45] Mackenzie, 'unsigned essay in *The Lounger*', p. 69.

Or when the North his fleecy store

Drove thro' the sky,

I saw grim Nature's visage hoar

Struck thy young eye.[46]

Burns's intertextual positioning of the speaker as young Edwin is pronounced, and his direct borrowing from Beattie's sublime rendering is indubitable:

Thence, musing, onward to the sounding shore,

The lone enthusiast oft would take his way,

Listening, with pleasing dread, to the deep roar

Of the wide-weltering waves. In black array

When sulphurous clouds rolled on the vernal day,

Even then he hastened from the haunt of man,

Along the darkening wilderness to stray,

What time the lightning's fierce career began,

And o'er heaven's rending arch the rattling thunder ran.[47]

Burns's poetics are entirely shaped by *The Minstrel*, with the shared end rhymes of 'sounding shore' and 'dashing [deep] roar' philologically cloning Edwin in search of the synonymous 'delight' and 'pleasing dread' of the encounter with natural sublimity. However, Burns's poetic skill condenses Beattie's more elaborate neo-Spenserian rendering of a 'black array' of 'sulphurous clouds', 'lightening's fierce career', and 'rattling thunder', into a terse 'grim Nature's visage hoar'. This abbreviated form fits with the shorter habbie stanza's metrics yet retains sublime impact. What is most striking about the stanzas selected by Mackenzie is the revelation that it is not he who ordains Burns as 'heaven-taught', but Burns himself in the guise of his muse Coila:

"I saw thy pulse's maddening play,

[46] Burns, 'The Vision', in *Burns: Poems and Songs*, pp. 80–90, lines 205–216.
[47] Beattie, *The Minstrel*, I: LIV, p. 28.

Wild send thee Pleasure's devious way,

Misled by Fancy's meteor-ray,

By passion driven;

But yet the *light* that led astray

Was *light* from Heaven.[48]

Here, an intertextual triptych unfolds between Beattie, Burns, and Mackenzie centred on the minstrel or bard being 'heaven-taught' or 'heaven-led' which despite moving from fiction to self-fashioning, to falsehood, shows that sublimity was an essential ideal for Burns as poet, one appraised by early reviewers such as Mackenzie, and that 'The Vision' is the paramount expression of Burns's still unconsidered engagement with the sublime.

Distinguished by Mackenzie and Scott for its sublimity, 'The Vision' has been recognised by Crawford as 'one of Burn's highest achievements', with Carruthers likewise hailing it as 'arguably, the most ambitious creative experiment in the Kilmarnock edition'.[49] Burns's creative ambitions are passionately espoused in his commonplace book in which he articulates his poetic vision:

> There is a noble sublimity, a heart-melting tenderness in some of these ancient fragments, which show them to be the work of a masterly hand; and it has often given me many a heartake to reflect that such glorious old Bards — Bards, who, very probably, owed all their talents to Nature yet have described the exploits of Heroes, the pangs of Disappointment, and the meltings of Love with such fine strokes of Nature, and, O mortifying to a Bard's vanity their very names are "buried 'mongst the wreck of things which were" —
>
> O ye illustrious Names unknown! who could feel so strongly and describe so well! the last, the meanest of the Muses train — one who, though far inferiour to your flights yet eyes your path, and with trembling wing would sometimes soar after you — a poor rustic Bard unknown, pays this sympathetic pang to your memory! Some of you tell us, with all the charms of Verse, that you have been unfortunate in the world — unfortunate in love; he too, has felt all the unfitness of a Poetic heart for the

[48] Burns, 'The Vision', p. 89, lines 235–240.
[49] Crawford, *Burns: A Study of the Poems and Songs*, p. 191.
– Carruthers, *Robert Burns*, p. 15.

> struggle of a busy, bad world; he has felt the loss of his little fortune, the loss of friends, and worse than all, the loss of the woman he adored! Like you, all his consolation was his Muse — She taught him in rustic measures to complain — Happy could he have done it with your strength of imagination, and flow of verse![50]

Written in September of 1785, Burns's 'bardic manifesto' curiously aligns with both the purport and narrative of 'The Vision'.[51] Robert Crawford notes the probable link to Ossian's 'ancient fragments' and 'glorious old bards' which inspire Burns's reflection, with the 'noble sublimity' and 'heart-melting tenderness' emblematic of the 'complex fusion' of the sentimental and the sublime which Burns aspires to.[52] Correspondingly, 'The Vision' is divided into two duans, a configuration which Burns appropriates from Macpherson who defined the bardic and Gaelic etymology of the term: 'The bards distinguished those compositions, in which the narration is often interrupted, by episodes and apostrophes, by the name of *Duan*'.[53] The two duans of Burns's digressive poem are distinguished by the speaker's witnessing a vision of his native land and heritage through the mantle of his muse in the first, followed by the muse's vision of the speaker's progress in poesy in the second. Whilst an apostrophe to the ancient bards 'O ye illustrious Names unknown!', Burns's manifesto pronounces an integral division to Burns's own self-construction as bard. Burns identifies not as one of the ranks of 'glorious old Bards' such as Ossian, but instead as 'poor rustic Bard unknown', a conceit which becomes tautological throughout 'The Vision'. The protracted modesty topos of being 'far inferior' in 'strength of imagination and flow of verse' is counterpointed with a comparison of emulation, a similar state of misfortune, and a common source of consolation in the form of a muse. Crucially, Burns's muse is distinguished, as his own bardic nature, as 'rustic', having taught him in 'rustic measures to complain'. Consequently, 'The Vision' opens with the speaker's complaint parsed out in the 'rustic measures' of the Scots language tradition and the standard habbie form.

In the preface to the Kilmarnock edition Burns advocates for 'the genius of a Ramsay, or the glorious dawnings of the poor, unfortunate Ferguson' acknowledging his Scots heritage and the poetic tradition of his forebears: 'These two justly admired Scotch Poets he [Burns] has often had in his eye in the following pieces; but rather with a view to kindle at their

[50] Burns, 'First Commonplace Book' [September, 1785], p. 67.
[51] Crawford, *The Bard*, p. 198.
[52] Ibid., p. 197.
[53] James Macpherson, footnote to 'Cath-Loda' in *The Poems of Ossian and Related Works*, p. 534.

flame, than for servile imitation'.[54] Yet, whilst the rural setting and boisterous complaint of the poet 'I started, mutt'ring blockhead! coof!' are very much 'kindled' from his predecessors' 'flame', McGuirk notes how 'The Vision' and the rest of the poetry including in the Kilmarnock edition 'surprised Scotland' by 'steering literary Scots in a different direction'.[55] Under Burns, Scots and the standard habbie became 'no longer chiefly the argot of urban riot or rustic pastoral' which Ramsay professed, and which Fergusson significantly expanded and developed, but instead, '[became] again, for the first time since the Makars, a means of searching a poet's own soul'.[56] Whereas Longinus had first pronounced the sublime as 'the image of greatness of soul', Burns in a typically self-deprecating and humorous manner presents his poet not searching but questioning the 'greatness' of his soul. [57]

There, lanely by the ingle-cheek,

I sat and ey'd the spewing reek,

That fill'd, wi' hoast-provoking smeek,

The auld clay biggin;

An' heard the restless rattons squeak

About the riggin.

All in this mottie, misty clime,

I backward mus'd on wasted time,

How I had spent my youthfu' prime,

An' done nae thing,

But stringing blethers up in rhyme,

For fools to sing.[58]

[54] Burns, '*Preface*' to Kilmarnock edition of 'Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect', in *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns, Vol. 3: Commentary*, ed. by James Kinsley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 971–973, (p. 972).
[55] Carol McGuirk, 'Burns's Two Memorials to Fergusson', in *Studies in Scottish Literature*, vol. 37: no. 1, pp. 5–23, (pp. 17–18).
[56] Ibid. p. 18.
[57] See Longinus, *On the Sublime*, pp. 107.
[58] Burns, 'The Vision', in *Burns: Poems and Songs*, pp. 80–90, (pp. 80–1), I: lines 13–24.

Significantly, it is Burns's favoured season of winter which begins the poem, as the speaker's sense of dejection is mirrored by desertion; curlers, a 'hunger'd Maukin' [hare], and the sun, all taking leave as the speaker wearied from labour is left 'lanely' in Burkean privation. However, Burns's playful craftmanship undercuts the solemnity of the scene. Leask describes the ben spence room in which the speaker broods as a 'theatre for reflection' and 'a site for cultivating poetic inwardness'.[59] Yet the orchestrated synaesthesia of sight, sound, and smell, from the 'spewing reek', and 'hoast-provokin smeek', show that it is a very modest, 'rustic' theatre which the speaker inhabits, his only audience being the interjectory 'restless rattons' who squeak. Burns's contrast of the 'glorious old Bards' with his own situation as 'poor rustic Bard unknown' is here distinguished, the 'mottie misty clime', concordant with the sublime-inducing mist of the Ossianic world, yet substituted from the supernatural to the sublunary, turbid 'smeek' which provokes his own poetic musing. Railing against his misfortune, the speaker in a seemingly final act of ironic poetic performativity arises to 'swear by a' yon starry roof' that 'I, henceforth, would be rhyme-proof / Till my last breath' (lines 33, 35–6). Despite this pastiche of the bardic tradition, Burns, who depicts his poet feeling 'all the unfitness of a Poetic heart for the struggle of a busy, bad world', situates himself within that same tradition with the appearance of his muse: 'Like you, all his consolation was his Muse'.[60]

Burns's life-long reverence for his muse is a persistent theme throughout his writing and verse. In the penultimate entry into his first commonplace book (September 1785), Burns describes how his 'poor, country Muse, who, all rustic, akward, and unpolished as she is', possesses 'more charms for me than any other of the pleasures of life beside'.[61] The complex confection of Burns's muse, repeatedly characterised, like Burns's construction of his own bardic role, as 'rustic' enacts a consolatory role as well as inspiring influence; a personified, aggrandised and yet deprecated transfiguration of his poetry:

Leeze me on rhyme! it's aye a treasure,

[59] Leask, *Burns and Pastoral*, p. 100.
–See also Martin Price who describes 'the sublime precinct' in which 'the preparations of visionary experience' are performed and a 'place where the poet is released from the swarm of sensuous detail or the swarm of people of a daylight world'. Burns's ben spence room therefore aligns with this notion of 'sublime precinct' but is clearly a pastiche, the poet being overcome as it were by 'the swarm of sensuous detail', of rats, smoke, etc., in Price, 'The Sublime Poem: Pictures and Powers' in *The Yale Review*, vol. 58, no. 2 (Winter 1969), pp. 194–202, (p. 197).
[60] Burns, 'First Commonplace Book' [September 1785], p. 67.
[61] Ibid., p. 69.

My chief, amaist my only pleasure;

At hame, a-fiel', at wark, or leisure,

The Muse, poor hizzie!

Tho' rough an' raploch be her measure,

She's seldom lazy.

Haud to the Muse, my daintie Davie:

The warl' may play you mony a shavie;

But for the Muse, she'll never leave ye,

Tho' e'er sae puir,

Na, even tho' limpin wi' the spavie

Frae door tae door.[62]

Whilst appearing intermittently throughout his oeuvre, Burns's muse is fully brought to life in 'The Vision' and her characterisation emblemises Burns's own poetic countenance. The muse is first depicted in a sentimental cast with the speaker noting her 'rustic grace', her eye which 'Beam'd keen with *honor*' and the self-aware '"hair-brain'd, sentimental trace"' which 'strongly marked' her face.[63] Burns then aligns the sentimental with the feminine in the proceeding stanza offering a protracted and burlesque blazon of her leg: 'Sae straught, sae taper, tight and clean' (line 65). Whilst the 'sheen' of her appearance provides humorous hyperbole, Burns's linguistic dexterity moves from boisterous Scots to more solemn observations in English fixating on the muse's mantle.[64] It is this '*Mantle*, large, of greenish hue', which supersedes all other observations of the muse ('my gazing wonder chiefly drew') (lines 67–68). The panorama of the mantle is introduced by the chiaroscuro of the 'lustre grand', comprising 'deep *lights* and *shades*, bold mingling' which provoke the sublime response of wonder and astonishment ('And' seem'd, to my astonish'd view') (lines 70, 69.

[62] Burns, 'Second Epistle to Davie', in *Burns: Poems and Songs*, p. 193, lines 37–48.
[63] Burns, 'The Vision', I: lines 57, 60, 55–6, p. 82.
[64] See McGuirk who describes Burn's lexicon as being a 'designed and invented' diction that combines a 'mixture of local dialect, archaic Middle Scots, dialect words of regions other than his own, sentimental idioms, and "high" English rhetoric', in *Robert Burns and the Sentimental Era*, p. xxii.

71). This raiment which provides the first digression of the poem in the '*well-known* Land*'* which the speaker observes is where Burns unfolds his vision of the sublime (line 72).

As discussed in the previous chapter, the defining instance of the Romantic sublime is the 'sublime moment' in which the participant-poet is depicted in the moment of transcendent encounter. Beattie had inaugurated this moment with Edwin shown standing sublime in view of a panoramic scene of natural grandeur. Burns is careful to set up such an instance with his poet repeatedly situated in the act of perception- 'gazing wonder', and 'my astonish'd view' (see also the opening of the second duan which situates the poet in such a position: 'With musing deep, astonish'd stare, / I view'd the heavenly-seeming *Fair*') (lines 133–134). That the primary vision of Burns's locus is directly lifted from *The Minstrel*'s supreme stanza is clear when set alongside each other:

> And oft the craggy cliff he loved to climb,
>
> When all in mist the world below was lost.
>
> What dreadful pleasure! there to stand sublime,
>
> Like shipwrecked mariner on desert coast,
>
> And view the enormous waste of vapour, tost
>
> In billows, lengthening to the horizon round,
>
> Now scooped in gulfs, with mountains now embossed!
>
> And hear the voice of mirth and song rebound,
>
> Flocks, herds, and waterfalls, along the hoar profound![65]

> Here rivers in the sea were lost;
>
> There, mountains to the skies were tost:
>
> Here, tumbling billows mark'd the coast,
>
> With surging foam:

[65] Beattie, *The Minstrel*, I: XXI. p. 11.

There, distant shone *Art's* lofty boast,

The lordly dome.[66]

In a surprisingly conspicuous move of poetic borrowing Burns's sublime elicitors of 'rivers in the sea', 'mountains to the skies', 'tumbling billows', and 'surging foam' appear directly transcribed from Beattie's 'waterfalls', 'gulfs', 'mountains now emboss'd' and 'vapour, tost / In billows'. Concordantly, the identical shared end-rhymes of 'lost', 'tost', and 'coast', confirm Burns's studied intertextual transcription. The 'emulating vigour' of Burns conspires around Beattie's poetics of the sublime, with Burns appearing to defer to the 'lofty boast' of '*Art's*' 'lordly dome' which is crucially situated 'distant', signifying once again his apostrophe to the bards: 'one who, though far inferior to your flights yet eyes your path, and with trembling wing would sometimes soar after you'.[67] Such pronounced emulation, with Burns employing Beattie's technique of connecting stanzas through anaphora, ultimately turns to innovation as Burns recalibrates the sublime for his own 'rustic' localised vision:

Here, Doon pour'd down his far-fetch'd floods;

There well-fed IRWINE stately thuds;

Auld hermit Aire staw thro' his woods,

On to the shore;

And many a lesser torrent scuds,

With seeming roar. (lines 79–84)

The ambiguous scenery of Beattie's 'north country' is transformed into an anthropomorphic celebration of the sublimity of the 'floods', 'woods' and torrents of Burns's own 'dear native country, the ancient Bailieries of Carrick, Kyle, & Cunningham'.[68] In 1785, Burns had written his own imprimatur to poetically champion the sublimity of 'the romantic woodlands & sequestered scenes' of his native Ayrshire:

> However I am pleased with the works of our Scotch Poets, particularly the excellent Ramsay, and the still more excellent Ferguson, yet I am hurt to see

[66] Burns, 'The Vision', p. 82, I: lines 73–78.
[67] Burns, 'First Commonplace Book' [September 1785], p. 67.
[68] Burns, 'First Commonplace Book' [August 1785], p. 65.

> other places of Scotland, their towns, rivers, woods, haughs, &c., immortalized in such celebrated performances, […]
>
> Yet, we have never had one Scotch Poet of any eminence, to make the fertile banks of Irvine, the romantic woodlands & sequestered scenes on Aire, and the heathy, mountainous source, & winding sweep of Doon, emulate Tay, Forth, Ettrick, Tweed, &c. this is a complaint I would gladly remedy, but Alas! I am far unequal to the task both in native genius & education. — Obscure I am, & obscure I must be, though no young Poet, nor young Soldier's heart ever beat more fondly for fame than mine.[69]

Despite the modesty topos of Burns's familiar posturing as 'unequal to the task both in native genius and education', Burns's ambitions to celebrate his homeland emerge in this and the proceeding stanzas as he orchestrates a refocusing of the sublime to the local. This is articulated on a linguistic level as Burns 'first adopts Beattie-like language, as if to say that his home scenery is as grand [sublime] as that portrayed in any high-sounding poem in English', before eschewing generalised imagery and rhetoric in favour of the personified rivers and diction of Ayrshire: 'Auld hermit Aire staw thro' his woods'.[70] In doing so Burns appears to anticipate the slight from Walter Scott that 'the sublimer passages of his 'Saturday Night', "Vision", and other poems of celebrity, always swell into the language of classic English poetry', with Burns instead returning to and relying upon the Scots of the opening stanzas to generate his own localised rendering of the sublime.[71] Whilst Burns subsequently switches to the 'language of classic English poetry' for the remainder of the poem, Leask notes that Burns's commitment to the standard habbie stanza 'keeps the reader in touch with the vernacular tradition'. [72] This is representative of the counterpoised individuation and fluidity of the sublime poetic, with Macpherson, Percy, and Beattie, all successful in cultivating sublimity in conjunction with the formal precepts of fragment, epic, ballad, and Spenserian. Burns no less so in succeeding with his own innovative conscription of the

[69] Ibid. pp. 65–6.
[70] Robertson, 'Beattie's *The Minstrel* as Missing link', pp. 247–248.
[71] Walter Scott, Review of Cromek's '*Reliques of Burns*, in *Quarterly Review* [1809], quoted by Andrew Noble in 'Robert Burns', *Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture 1776–1832*, Gen ed. Ian McCalman, pp. 439–440, (p. 440).
[72] Nigel Leask, 'Burns, Wordsworth, and the Politics of Vernacular Poetry', in *Land, Nation and Culture, 1740–1840: Thinking the Republic of Taste*, ed. Peter de Bolla, Nigel Leask, Kenneth Simpson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 202–222, (p. 208).

standard habbie from which 'rustic measures' he cultivates a localised sublimity syncretic to his own rustic bardship.

The proclamations of Burns's muse, Coila, throughout the second duan define Burns's bardic vision, and the influence of Beattie is again distinct. In a letter to Mrs Dunlop in 1788 Burns had admitted that it was from Beattie's poem in Scots *To Mr Alexander Ross at Lochlee* (1768) which featured a muse 'Scota', from which Burns 'took the idea of Coila'.[73] In an interesting case of intertextual transposition Beattie's verse epistle is addressed to the eponymous Scots poet in praise of his poem *Helenore, or The Fortunate Shepherdess*, from which Beattie adopts the muse Scota as allegory for Scotland's poetic tradition. Whilst Leask notes that 'Coila's English address evidently owes little to [Ross's] "Scota", who had exhorted *her* poet to address himself in full Doric', Beattie's own rendering of Scota offers insight into Burns's fashioning of Coila.[74] Beattie's depiction of Scota having been arisen from 'lyen wi' beffs and flegs' by Ross's poem ('Ye've set auld Scota on her legs'), promotes a desire for a resurgence of Scotland's poetic tradition: 'Her fiddle wanted strings and pegs, / Waes me! Poor Hizzie!'.[75] The poem then turns to a dithyrambic tribute to Scotland's past poets:

> Montgomery grave, and Ramsay gay,
> Dunbar, Scot, Hawthornden, and mae
> Than I can tell; for o' my fae,
> I maun break aff;
> 'Twould take a live lang simmer day
> To name the haff.[76]

Burns's 'hizzie' Coila, is set apart from 'auld Scota', in both appearance and region. Whilst Scota is national, Coila proclaims herself and her poet as 'native': 'All hail! *my own* inspired Bard! / In me thy native Muse Regard!'.[77] Coila echoes Beattie in praise of 'Scotia's Race', describing how the higher order of muses curate sublimity as they 'bind the wild, Poetic rage / in energy', with Burns now matriculating Beattie within that roster of Scotland's 'Patriot-lore': 'Hence, sweet harmonious BEATTIE sung / His "Minstrel lays;"' (lines 165–6, 171–2).

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[73] Burns, 'Letter 219. (11) to Mrs Dunlop [Mossgiel 7th March 1788]' in *The Letters of Robert Burns, Vol. 1: 1780–1789*, p. 257.
[74] Leask, footnote to *Burns and Pastoral*, p. 103.
[75] Beattie, 'To Mr Alexander Ross at Lochlee' [1768], in *The Works of James Beattie: Poetical Works*, pp. 1–4, p. 1.
[76] Ibid., p. 4.
[77] Burns, 'The Vision', p. 86, II: lines 139–140.

Whilst Burns depicts his poet as Edwin ('I saw thee seek the sounding shore'), and achieves with the ensuing stanzas' sublimity a 'virtuoso condensation of Thomson's description of Winter, Spring, Summer, and Autumn in *The Seasons*', Coila immediately disinherits her poet from such lineage, 'Thou canst not learn nor can I show, / To paint with *Thomson's* landscape glow' (lines 247–248).[78] In doing so, Burns cunningly exhibits himself for comparison whilst also carving out his own distinct poetic persona as 'rustic Bard' with Coila's concurrent deferment as being of the 'lower Orders' of muses which serve and inspire 'The humbler ranks of Human-kind, / The rustic Bard, the lab'ring hind' (lines 176–177).

It is within these 'humbler ranks of Human-kind' from which Burns's bardship consistently emerges, conforming to a poetics that maintains a 'lowly' sublime, 'common' to all, which next to 'unrivall'd Rose' and monarchical oak, yet 'grows' distinct (lines 176, 254, 253, 257). In his later poem 'Epistle to Dr. Blacklock' (1789), Burns commemorates this attitude with the 'complex fusion' of the sentimental and the sublime again evident:

> To make a happy fireside clime
> To weans and wife,
> That's the true *Pathos* and *Sublime*
> Of Human life.—[79]

The opening stanzas of 'The Vision' are hereby recast. The 'lanely' speaker sitting by the 'fireside clime' is unhappy with his condition and so makes ready to condemn his nature as poet (line 13). Therefore, Coila admonishes the poet at the denouement of the poem to 'no longer mourn thy fate is hard / Thus poorly low!' because this '*humble sphere*', is the very threshold from which the poet gains access to the sublime (as seen in the mantle) and is able to uphold and fulfil his calling as 'A *rustic Bard*' (lines 141–2, 264). In doing so, Burns promotes an egalitarian 'Vision' of the sublime which (with however much contrived modesty), resists and supplants the esoteric dominancy of the 'glorious old bards' and 'hoary sages' (line 163). Dafydd Moore contends that the sublime and the 'cultural movements it privileges […] condemn themselves to obsolescence', because by 'its very wildness and lack of positive definition mean it is of limited relevance to the world of "everyday reality": against all the odds it becomes a luxury'.[80] Conversely, Burns anchors his bardic persona in

[78] King, *James Beattie's The Minstrel and the Origins of Romantic Autobiography*, p. 56.
–See also McGuirk who reads lines 211–228 as being '*The Seasons* in brief', in *Robert Burns and the Sentimental Era*, p. 40.
[79] Burns, 'Epistle to Dr. Blacklock', in *Burns: Poems and Songs*, pp. 388–390, (p. 390), lines 51–54.
[80] Dafydd Moore, *Enlightenment and Romance*, p. 118.

the ‘everyday reality’ of his humble, rustic sphere with the speaker of his celebrated ‘The Cotter’s Saturday Night’ articulating this directive: ‘To you I sing, in simple Scottish lays, / The *lowly train* in life’s sequester’d scene, / The native feelings strong, the guileless ways’.[81]

In 1786, unknowingly at the precipice of the critical acclaim which his Kilmarnock edition would attain for him, Burns, like the poet of ‘The Vision’, had all but forsaken his ‘lowly train in life’s sequester’d scene’. In his autobiographical letter to John Moore, Burns recalls that it was to be the last time that he would ‘sing, in simple Scottish lays’ before embarking across the Atlantic to settle indefinitely in Jamaica: ‘I had taken the last farewell of my few friends; my chest was on the road to Greenock; I had composed my last song I should ever measure in Caledonia, "The gloomy night is gathering fast"’.[82] This sorrowful ‘Farewell’ to ‘old *Coila*’s hills and dales / Her heathy moors and winding vales’ attests to Burns’s ‘native feelings strong’ as he wanders, like Edwin, ‘prest with care / Along the lonely banks of *Ayr*’:[83]

> The gloomy night is gath'ring fast,
>
> Loud roars the wild inconstant blast;
>
> Yon murky cloud is filled with rain,
>
> I see it driving o'er the plain;
>
> The hunter now has left the moor,
>
> The scatt'red coveys meet secure;
>
> While here I wander, prest with care,
>
> Along the lonely banks of *Ayr*.
>
> The Autumn mourns her rip'ning corn
>
> By early Winter's ravage torn;

[81] Burns, ‘The Cotter’s Saturday Night. Inscribed to R. A****, Esq.’ in *Burns: Poems and Songs*, pp. 116–121, (p. 116), lines 5–7.
[82] Burns, ‘Letter 125. (4) to Dr John Moore [Mauchline 2nd August 1787]’, in *The Letters of Robert Burns, Vol. 1: 1780–1789*, pp. 134–147, (p. 144).
[83] Burns, ‘The gloomy night is gath’ring fast’, in *Burns: Poems and Songs*, pp. 234–5, (pp. 234–5), lines 25–6, 7–8.

Across her placid, azure sky,

She sees the scowling tempest fly;

Chill runs my blood to hear it rave:

I think upon the stormy wave,

Where many a danger I must dare,

Far from the bonie banks of *Ayr*. (lines 1–16)

Nature is again anthropomorphised into a seemingly malevolent force, with the hunter and 'scatt'red coveys' seeking shelter from the 'sublime frisson' of wind and rain. Burns's favoured Winter provides the *genius loci* that encroaches across the 'placid, azure sky' of Autumn, the 'scowling tempest' of which provokes a physical reaction ('Chill runs my blood to hear it rave') which is mirrored by a psychological consideration of the speaker's leave-taking. Each verse is structured accordingly around this movement from nature's might to physical response then psychological examination in what Pittock describes as 'the metonymy of environment into experience'.[84] The song shifts midway to accommodate this movement with the speaker reflecting in anaphoric sequence that 'Tis not the surging billow's roar, / 'Tis not that fatal, deadly shore' which has agency, but his leaving of the 'bonie banks of *Ayr*' (lines 17–18, 24). Nature therefore conspires with the bard, the sublimity of which arbitrates sentimental reflection: 'The bursting tears my heart declare, / Farewell the bonie banks of *Ayr*!' (lines 31-2). Burns of course did not have to leave his native shores. Instead, his passion for the local scenes and stories of his beloved 'Coila' alongside his sustained commitment to 'the true *Pathos* and *Sublime* / Of Human life' would attain for him a celebrity far exceeding the 'illustrious Names unknown!' which he revered. From 'local icon' to universal acclaim, McGuirk, (despite her persistent avoidance of mention of the sublime throughout her monograph), however tacitly, touches upon recognition: 'Dialect and all, Burns in fact meets one of the best-established criteria for classic literary stature. In Longinus's words: "you should consider that to be truly beautiful and sublime which pleases all people at all times"'.[85]

In such a vein then, Burns is indeed an 'iconoclast'. One who 'destroyed the sentimental, fashionable, and artificial symbols of the rustic bard' and yet somehow 'became

[84] Pittock, 'Robert Burns and British Poetry', p. 200.
[85] McGuirk, *Robert Burns and the Sentimental Era*, p. xv.

such a symbol'.[86] His attainment of such status has been the cause of centuries of critical debate, insight, and ultimately oversight, with Marylin Gaul's summation that he was 'a genuine contemporary minstrel' and that his 'Bardship […] bore no resemblance to the literary symbol: he was convivial, lusty, irreverent, sentimental, raucous, outspoken, patriotic, sociable, and beset by problems more economic than philosophical' emblematic of the missing link in Burns studies.[87] A recent revival in criticism has largely recovered Burns from being, as Pittock aptly puts it, the 'the invisible man' of British Literature, and yet Burns remains the 'invisible poet' of the sublime.

[86] Gaull, *English Romanticism: The Human Context*, p. 266.
[87] Ibid., p. 263.

Chapter 6.

‘Forms of Bright Perfection’: Wordsworth and The Consummation of the Sublime

> Oh! bear me then to vast embowering shades,
> To twilight groves, and visionary vales;
> To weeping grottos, and prophetic glooms;
> Where angel forms athwart the solemn dusk,
> Tremendous sweep, or seem to sweep along;
> And voices more than human, through the void
> Deep sounding, seize the enthusiastic ear?
>
> Or is this gloom too much?[1]

> Yet it cannot be doubted that a Child or an unpracticed person whose mind is possessed, by the sight of a lofty precipice, with its attire of hanging rocks and starting trees, &c., has been visited by a sense of sublimity, if personal fear and surprize or wonder have not been carried beyond certain bounds. For whatever suspends the comparing power of the mind and possesses it with a feeling or image of intense unity, without a conscious contemplation of parts, has produced that state of the mind which is the consummation of the sublime.[2]

This thesis began with an exploration of the eighteenth-century configuration of the sublime. This final chapter shall consider the work of William Wordsworth as representative of the consummation of the sublime into verse. If the poetry of his forbear Robert Burns remains overlooked, Wordsworth’s engagement with the sublime is almost inseparable from his status as Romantic poet.[3] Indeed, John Keats, was first to identify the ‘Wordsworthian sublime’, as being its own ‘stand alone’ form of sublimity in establishing it as the ‘egotistical sublime’.[4]

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[1] James Thomson, *The Seasons* [1730], ed. by James Sambrook (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981) pp. 186, 188, lines 1030–1037.
[2] William Wordsworth, ‘The Sublime and Beautiful’ in *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. by W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), vol II, pp. 349–360, (p. 353).
[3] See Adam Potkay who describes Wordsworth as ‘the touchstone figure for writing on the Romantic sublime’, in ‘The British Romantic Sublime’, in *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present*, pp. 203–216, (p. 204).
[4] John Keats, ‘To Richard Woodhouse, Tuesday 27th October 1818’, in *The Letters of John Keats*, 4th edition, ed. by Maurice Buxton Forman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952) pp. 226–228, (p. 226).

What Keats identifies in coining such a term is that it is Wordsworth's solipsistic and intensified presence within his rendering of the sublime which distinguishes his poetics. Central to the Wordsworthian articulation of sublimity is the poet's 'sense' or faculty which is both able to reason with and render the transcendent into verse. The prevailing bent of modern scholarship reads in Wordsworth's 'sense sublime' a corelative to Immanuel Kant's 'faculty of mind which surpasses every standard of Sense'. This 'supersensible faculty' Kant terms 'Reason' and is the progenitor of the sublime.[5] Recently Tim Sommer has suggested that 'The Kantian sublime gave [Wordsworth] a philosophical vocabulary to conceptualise transcendence and to envision the process of "crossing the threshold' from sensory perception to prophetic insight'.[6] What then of poetic vocabulary? Where did Wordsworth acquire his mode of poetry famed for its sublimity? Certainly not from Kant. To answer this question, this chapter endeavours to trace the development of Wordsworth's 'sense sublime', not as philosophical abstraction of reason, but as a poetic faculty and a praxis fostered and developed from the poet's schooldays. A full study of Wordsworth's corpus would exceed the bounds of one chapter, so in considering the development of the poetic of the sublime formally (as previous chapters have), this chapter examines Wordsworth's primary mode of locodescriptive poetry with consideration of generic conventions inherited from his predecessors, beginning with his youthful attempts towards his consummation of the sublime captured at both the Wye and Snowdon.

Written during his final year at Hawkshead school in 1787, *The Vale of Esthwaite* has been described as a 'an ambitious wreck which like any ruin, fragment, or clouded hill-top, teases the imagination', yet one in which Wordsworth's 'tastes and indeed the whole colour of his mind at this time are best studied'.[7] The poem is Wordsworth's first surviving attempt at his favoured locodescriptive mode of poetry and recounts the speaker's walk through a pastoral vale into a night of supernatural terror and haunting grief. Despite being unfinished,

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[5] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement* trans. by James Creed Meredith, ed. by Nicholas Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 117–118.
–See also Theresa Kelley who states, 'This faculty — not nature's might or magnitude — is the sublime', in Theresa M. Kelley, *Wordsworth's Revisionary Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) p. 29. Such interpretations stem from the kinship of Wordsworth's fragmented, unpublished essay on the sublime thought to be composed around 1811, with the theory of Kant's third *Critique* of 1790. However, Kant's *Critique* was never translated into English until 1892, nor did Wordsworth learn German during his stay in 1798 and so the main argument that Wordsworth learned Kant's theories from Coleridge remains speculative.
[6] Tim Sommer, '"Far more deeply interfused": "Tintern Abbey" between Burkean and Kantian Sublimity', in *Romanticism*, vol. 28, no. 1 (2022), pp. 12–23, (p. 16).
[7] Richard Gravil, *Wordsworth's Bardic Vocation, 1787–1842* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) p. 51.
–Mary Moorman, *William Wordsworth A Biography: The Early Years 1770–1803* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), pp. 61–2.

fragmentary, and often confused, critics such as Duncan Wu, John Turner, and Kurt Fosso have each promoted it as being 'the last and best piece of [Wordsworth's] juvenilia'.[8] Written in the octosyllabic couplets of Milton's *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* (1645), the poem encompasses a 'curious kaleidoscope' of poetic theme and intertext from Virgil, through Milton, to (as I will argue) his more immediate contemporaries such as Macpherson and Beattie.[9] Jack Vespa has recently suggested that 'the topography of scenes and texts revisited' show 'the extent to which Wordsworth's poetic voice is *veiled* or muffled by the voices of his precursors and contemporaries'.[10] Yet, to elaborate on Vespa's homonymic wordplay it is this *veil*, which like Coila's mantle, allows for an overview of the young poet's studied map of poetic tradition, one which converges strikingly around the sublime.

The Vale opens with the speaker surveying the 'landskip's varied treasure'. A lark, shepherd, and cottage populate a pastoral scene of the 'green vale', 'dewy gales' and 'glassy lake'.[11] Yet, as Paul Sheats observes, Wordsworth's attention 'moves from the pastoral to the sublime, from the "pleasures of a softer kind" exemplified even for the schoolboy by "Grasmere's heavenly vale" to the "mingling storms, roaring torrents, swelling oceans, lightning and thunder" that composed the landscape of *Ossian*'.[12] Just as Coila's mantle enables sublime experience, Wordsworth employs a veil to enact the transition between the pastoral tableau of day, and the sublime spectacles of night: 'But now a thicker blacker veil / Is thrown o'er all the wavering dale' (lines 101–2). Concurrently to Coila's mantle which allows for 'The Vision' of Burns's native homeland depicted in Beattie-borrowed sublimity,

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[8] Kurt Fosso, 'A "World of Shades": Mourning, Poesis, and Community in William Wordsworth's "The Vale of Esthwaite"', in *The Modern Language Review*, vol. 93, no. 3, (1998), pp. 629–41, (p. 631).
–Duncan Wu, 'Wordsworth and Helvellyn's Womb' in *Essays in Criticism*, vol. 43 (1993) pp. 6–25.
–John Turner, *Wordsworth's Play and Politics: A Study of Wordsworth Poetry 1787–1800* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1986).

[9] Abbie Potts provides the most complete examination of the Miltonic influence (whilst Hartman's may be more successful) noting *The Vale*'s 'rough exercise on *Il Penseroso* and less notably, on *L'Alegro*', concluding that 'as John Milton pledged himself, under certain poetic conditions, to live with Mirth, or Melancholy, so William Wordsworth was early betrothed to Nature', in Abbie Findley Potts, *Wordsworth's Prelude: A Study of its Literary Form* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1953), p. 92.
–See also Geoffrey Hartman who suggests that from *L'Alegro* and *Il Penseroso* Wordsworth 'borrowed the opening exorcism and perhaps the ambulatory scheme', in Geoffrey H. Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry*: *1787–1814* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964) p. 76.

[10] Jack Vespa, 'Veiled Movements in *The Vale of Esthwaite*', in *The Wordsworth Circle* vol. 45, no. 1 (2014) pp. 62–65, (p. 63).

[11] William Wordsworth, *The Vale of Esthwaite* [1787], 'Text 1, Main Text', in *The Cornell Wordsworth: Early Poems and Fragments 1785– 1797* ed. by Carol Landon and Jared Curtis, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 422–472, lines 2, 6, 12, 4.

[12] Paul D. Sheats, *The Making of Wordsworth's Poetry, 1785–1798* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), p. 26.

Wordsworth's 'veil' acts as a vehicle into an Ossianic gloom configured by Burkean obscurity:

> [ ] tow'r assume
> [ ] the gloom
> [ ] glares the steeple near
> [ ] head seems to rear
> And woods and hills with hamlets graced
> [ ] flat, and seem a level waste.
> [ ] last of all the leafy train
> [The] black fir mingles with the plain.
> While hills o'er hills in gradual pride
> That swell'd along the upland side
> From the blunt baffled Vision pass
> And melt into one gloomy mass.
> While on its bosom all around
> No softly sinking vale is found,
> Save those seen faintly [ ] combine
> To form th'Horizon's broken line. (lines 103–18)

Wordsworth's 'Vision' relies on the obscurity of the descending night which obfuscates the pastoral 'woods and hills with hamlets graced', melting the 'black fir' and 'hills o'er hills' into 'one gloomy mass'. Correspondingly, Windermere, the 'glassy lake' which opens the poem, is similarly transformed into a semblance of the Ossianic: 'While winds faint rippling paint it white / The long lake lengthening stretches on the sight / While many a dark calm sleeping bay / Blends with the shore and fades away' (lines 119–122). Here, the 'winding vales' of Macpherson's epic *Temora* emerge:

> From the wood-skirted waters of Lego ascend, at times, grey-bosomed mists; when the gates of the west are closed, on the sun's eagle eye. Wide, over Lara's stream, is poured the vapor dark and deep: the moon, like a dim shield, lay swimming through its folds. With this, clothe the spirits of old their sudden gestures on the wind, when they stride, from blast to blast, along the dusky night. Often, blended with the gale, to

> some warrior's grave, they roll the mist a grey dwelling to his ghost, until the songs arise.[13]

Windermere, like Lego, is 'wood-skirted' by the 'black fir', as the night 'blends' with the darkness and wind of the nocturnal landscape. The Ossianic agency given to anthropomorphised mist is similarly replicated by Wordsworth: 'The solemn mists, dark brown or pale, / March slow and solemn down the vale;' (lines 27–8). Furthermore, the celebrated device of *Ossian* in which spirits appear in the wind and clouds is replicated in Wordsworth's couplet 'The daemons of the Storm in crouds / Glar'd through the partings of the Clouds' (as in *Fingal* 'Through the breaches of the tempest look forth the dim faces of ghosts').[14] This reliance on Ossianic imagery to provoke a semblance of the sublime shows that *Ossian* was still at this time an enduring and influential model of poetic sublimity providing the pervading gloom and ghostly apparitions of Wordsworth's early poetry.

That this is relevant to understanding Wordsworth's development of his own poetic persona during this formative period, what Richard Gravil describes as his 'bardic vocation', is apparent in the spectral figure of the bard who appears in the *Vale* and acts as guide to the poet-speaker. Having fled the ghostly apparitions of the clouds, and even 'Satan' who 'trod the hills with thundering sound', the speaker encounters '[A tall] thin Spectre' (lines 213, 214, 219). Significantly, Wordsworth's opening description of the figure is that he is blind '[Li]ke two wan wither'd leaves his eyes', before casting him as bard: 'And on his feeble arm he bore / What seem'd the poet's harp of yore' (lines 221, 227). Whilst Geoffrey Hartman relates the bard to being 'a blind visionary: a kind of Tiresias figure or, to anglicise him, the spectre of Milton,' the distinctly Ossianic sense of *The Vale* suggests that it is Wordsworth's more immediate example the blind Ossian who provides the model.[15] This is evidenced by the spectral bard's action: 'Slow round my head thrice waved his [hand] / And cleaved mine ears then swept his [lyre] / That shriek'd terrific shrill an[d] [dire] / Shudder'd the fiend. The vault a[lo]ng / Echoed the loud and dismal song' (lines 245–249). The performance of an action three times is proliferated throughout *The Poems of Ossian* and is consistently married to both the sublime and the bard. Whilst Ossian and the heroes of *Fingal* are repeatedly shown in such action: 'Ossian ascended the hill! he thrice struck his bossy shield', it is

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[13] Macpherson, 'Temora' VII. p. 279.
[14] See Landon and Curtis editors of the Cornell edition of *The Vale* who note this as 'an Ossianic image', p. 440. – Macpherson, 'Fingal' I. p. 58, this was celebrated in artwork during the period such as in *Fingal Sees the Ghosts of his Forefathers by Moonlight* (1782) by the Dutch painter Nicolai Abildgaard.
[15] Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry*, p. 89.

Temora which provides the closest examples to Wordsworth's *Vale*.[16] In the second book of *Temora,* the bards call forth the spirits of the dead in 'thrice' repeated rites: 'Thrice did the bards, at the cave of Furmono, call the soul of Colgar. They called him to the hills of his land. He heard them in his mist'.[17] Similarly, in the seventh book of *Temora* the bards feature within concordant 'winding vales': 'Thrice from the winding vales arose the voice of deaths. The harps of the bards, untouched, sound mournful over the hill'.[18] The influence of the Ossianic bard in generating the spectral guide of Wordsworth's early poem is evident, yet surprisingly it is in his later denouncement of Macpherson in which Wordsworth conclusively aligns himself with the tradition of the blind bard.

In 1815, a mature Wordsworth had written in the 'Essay, Supplementary to the Preface' of his disdain for Macpherson, as 'impudent Highlander', and for *The Poems of Ossian* as 'pretended treasures of antiquity'. Wordsworth's main contention with *Ossian* being that from his own experience as native of 'mountainous country', Macpherson's poetry was comprised of 'spurious imagery' composed of a false unity: 'In nature every thing is distinct, yet nothing defined into absolute independent singleness. In Macpherson's work, it is exactly the reverse; every thing (that is not stolen) is in this manner defined, insulated, dislocated, deadened,—yet nothing distinct'.[19] Following this is Wordsworth's contradictory statement in which he announces that although Macpherson's poems 'have been admired […] they have been wholly uninfluential upon the literature of the Country'. Recently, Tim Fulford has suggested that Wordsworth's 'Essay' shows an attempt 'to supplant the Scots as poets of rural tradition and as national bards'. [20] Yet Wordsworth's mock-salutation in the

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[16] Macpherson, 'Lathmon: A Poem', p. 176.
[17] Macpherson, 'Temora' II. p. 238.
[18] Ibid, p. 279.
–Wordsworth's familiarity with Macpherson's final epic is evidenced by his direct quotation from *Temora* in his proclamation against Macpherson in 1815: 'Open this far-famed Book! [*The Poems of Ossian*] -I have done so at random, and the beginning of the 'Epic Poem Temora,' in eight Books, presents itself. "The blue waves of Ullin roll in light." […]', in 'Essay supplementary to the Preface'.
[19] William Wordsworth 'Essay, Supplementary to the Preface' [1815], in *Wordsworth's Literary Criticism* ed. by W. J. B. Owen (London: Routledge, 1974), pp. 192–219, (pp. 206–7).
–James Heffernan argues that this false unity represents a form of false sublimity in stating: 'Unity here becomes a monotonous uniformity, a toneless aggregation of discrete objects which cannot be distinguished precisely because they have no relation', in James A. W. Heffernan, 'Wordsworth on the Sublime: The Quest for Interfusion', in *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, vol. 7. no. 4 (1967), pp. 605–16, (p. 611).
–See also Maureen McLane who offers this summation of the poet's invective: 'Wordsworth mobilizes all the tropes of nativism, nativity, of eye–witness and immediate topographical knowledge to counter the force of a poetry [*Ossian*] that had perhaps done more than any other to promote the aura of native–traditional authenticity', in McLane, *Balladeering, Minstrelsy, and British Romantic Poetry*, pp. 194–5.
[20] Fulford contends that Wordsworth's invective is aimed at both Walter Scott and James Hogg and that 'Ossian, the Scots bard, here represents the lack of precision and consequent lack of vitality not just of Macpherson's fakes but of the minstrelizing of "a whole state of society"'. I would suggest given the essay's previous focus on

‘Essay’, ‘All hail Macpherson! Hail to thee, Sire of Ossian’, is counterpoised by a more sober consideration of Macpherson’s influence in his later poem ‘Written in a Blank Leaf of Macpherson’s Ossian’ (1833), an ode with direct exhortation of the bardic tradition:

> Hail, Bards of mightier grasp! on you
> I chiefly call, the chosen Few,
> Who cast not off the acknowledged guide,
> Who faltered not, nor turned aside;
> Whose lofty genius could survive
> Privation, under sorrow thrive;
> In whom the fiery Muse revered
> The symbol of a snow-white beard,
> Bedewed with meditative tears
> Dropped from the lenient cloud of years.
> Brothers in soul! though distant times
> Produced you nursed in various climes,
> Ye, when the orb of life had waned,
> A plenitude of love retained:
> Hence, while in you each sad regret
> By corresponding hope was met,
> Ye lingered among human kind,
> Sweet voices for the passing wind,
> Departing sunbeams, loth to stop,
> Though smiling on the last hill top!
> Such to the tender-hearted maid
> Even ere her joys begin to fade;
> Such, haply, to the rugged chief
> By fortune crushed, or tamed by grief;
> Appears, on Morven's lonely shore,
> Dim-gleaming through imperfect lore,
> The Son of Fingal; such was blind

the ballad and Percy’s *Reliques*, Wordsworth is rather attempting to align himself with minstrelsy motivated primarily by poetic interests rather than nationalist ones. Tim Fulford, *Wordsworth’s Poetry, 1815–1845* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), p. 111.

Maeonides of ampler mind;
Such Milton, to the fountain head
Of glory by Urania led![21]

What is apparent are the shared invocations of Wordsworth with Scotland's contemporary bard, Robert Burns. The modesty topos of Wordsworth 'Hail, bards of mightier grasp!' echoes Burns's apostrophe to the 'glorious old Bards', in his commonplace book; 'O ye illustrious Names unknown!'.[22] Correspondingly, both Wordsworth and Burns emphasise bardic origins and ends as being in Burkean 'Privation'; 'their very names are "buried 'mongst the wreck of things"'. Each poet relates to the bard poetic sensibilities of love, (in Burns 'the meltings of Love' parallels 'A plenitude of love retained'), alongside misfortune, (Burns writes 'that you have been unfortunate in the world — unfortunate in love' echoed in Wordsworth: 'By fortune crushed'), with the main emphasis by each poet falling on characteristically Ossianic grief. Whereas Burns in his prose work reaches towards the poetic in his 'thrice' intoned 'loss'- ''he has felt the loss of his little fortune, the loss of friends, and worse than all, the loss of the woman he adored!', Wordsworth speaks of a 'lofty genius' which 'under sorrow thrive', 'bedewed with meditative tears', and ultimately 'tamed by grief' (lines 59, 60, 63, 78).[23] Furthermore, Burns's consolatory muse, the consecrating Coila of 'The Vision', is mirrored in Wordsworth by a similarly reverential 'fiery Muse' (line 59). Therefore, Wordsworth, like his predecessor Burns, can be seen to employ the same emphasis on bardic iconography in a corresponding move towards poetic self-fashioning, allying himself with the bards whom he hails as 'Brothers in soul!' (line 63). That Ossian provides the model is finalised in Wordsworth's genealogy of the blind bard which closes his poem, Ossian as 'Son of Fingal' related to 'blind Maeonides' [Homer], and Milton, a 'pantheon of poets' curiously marked by both blindness and their poetics of sublimity (lines 79, 80).[24]

Whilst Wordsworth's later poem reveals an ostensibly reluctant yet lingering attraction to the 'Spirit of Ossian', which as Maureen McLane observes, 'converts Ossian into a muse rather than a source, proposing him as spiritual forbear', it also acknowledges

[21] William Wordsworth, 'Written in a Blank Leaf of Macpherson's Ossian', in *The Cornell Wordsworth: Sonnet Series and Itinerary Poems, 1820–1845*, ed. by Geoffrey Jackson (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), pp. 610–612, (pp. 611–612), lines 53–82.
[22] Burns, 'First Commonplace Book' [September, 1785], p. 67.
[23] This is also more subtly achieved by the anthropomorphises of nature into 'the passing wind' and 'Departing sunbeams'.
[24] McLane, *Balladeering, Minstrelsy, and the Making of British Romantic Poetry*, p. 239.

Wordsworth's reverence of the bardic tradition iconised by the blind bard.[25] In this instance, Ossian functions, not so much as muse, but as guide, something which Wordsworth's early poem illustrates. The bardic spectre of *The Vale* occupies a critical role as 'grisly guide', leading the speaker on a subterranean journey into 'Black Helvellyn's inmost womb'.[26] This space becomes for Wordsworth a sublime precinct in which the 'thunderous sound' of the bard's lyre which 'shook the groaning mountain round' opens a 'massy door' into transcendent experience (lines 253–4). Here, the bard's accompanying 'horrid tale' provokes Burke's principal requisite of terror: 'While Terror shapeless rides my soul' (lines 257, 263).[27] At this climactic juncture both speaker and spectre are 'hurled' together into an obscure and visionary penumbra of shadow above shade: 'Full oft together we are hurl'd / Far Far amid the shadowy world - / [And since that hour the world unknown / The world of shades is all my own]' (lines 268–70). There is a distinct finality to this statement, Wordsworth's speaker having 'journey'd many a mile' with his spectral guide now takes ownership of the 'shadowy world' of bardic and visionary experience, staking his claim, like Macpherson, Percy, Beattie, and Burns before him. Whilst this episode in its fragmentary, inchoate state within *The Vale* is difficult to decipher, Wordsworth provides a more veridical account of this same scene in his long autobiographical poem *The Prelude*.[28]

Theresa Kelley's monograph on Wordsworth's 'revisionary aesthetics' describes *The Prelude* as presenting 'an aesthetic topography or map of individual *topoi*, those scenes of instruction where sublime disruptions take place'.[29] Functioning then as a map of aesthetic

[25] Ibid. McLane notes that here Wordsworth 'reaches an uneasy reconciliation with Ossian'.
–See also David Hill Radcliffe's balanced discussion of the poem in which he states that it is 'an attempt to retrieve Ossian by rejecting Macpherson– or to speak more precisely, be rejecting some aspects of Macpherson in order to preserve others', in Radcliffe, 'Ossian and the Genres of Culture', in *Studies in Romanticism*, vol. 31, no. 2 (Summer, 1992), pp. 213–232, (p. 230).
[26] Wordsworth, *The Vale*, lines 256, 243.
[27] For Burke's influence on Wordsworth see Samuel Monk, who notes that 'Burke's dualism survived in [Wordsworth's] mind and became one of the basic ideas in his theory of nature as a positive moral force in his own early education'. However, Monk also notes that as Wordsworth matured 'despite the vestigial remains of the Burkean aesthetic in his own mind, Wordsworth escaped completely the materialistic implications of Burke's theory […] [His] creative mind has taken the old idea and has transformed it to new uses and given it new significance', in Monk, *The Sublime*, pp. 230–231.
–See also W. J. B. Owen who considers the confluence of Burke's ideas but the discussion is limited to instances of 'doublets' of both aesthetic categories, in Owen, 'The Sublime and the Beautiful in *The Prelude*', in *The Wordsworth Circle,* vol. 4, no. 2 (Spring, 1973), pp. 67–86.
[28] In allegiance with the uniform critical consensus that favours the 1805 edition of *The Prelude* (because Wordsworth was writing in his 'prime' during this period compared to the later revised edition of 1850) this chapter will follow suit unless otherwise noted.
[29] Kelley, *Wordsworth's Revisionary Aesthetics*, p. 91.

experience, ‘spots of time’ recounted in earlier poems, in book 2 of *The Prelude* Wordsworth recalls the moment of his youthful wandering vivified in *The Vale*’s climactic scene.[30]

No difference is, and hence, from the same source,
Sublimer joy; for I would walk alone,
In storm and tempest, or in starlight nights
Beneath the quiet Heavens; and, at that time,
Have felt whate'er there is of power in sound
To breathe an elevated mood, by form
Or image unprofaned; and I would stand,
Beneath some rock, listening to sounds that are
The ghostly language of the ancient earth,
Or make their dim abode in distant winds.
Thence did I drink the visionary power;
I deem not profitless those fleeting moods
Of shadowy exultation: not for this,
That they are kindred to our purer mind
And intellectual life; but that the soul,
Remembering how she felt, but what she felt
Remembering not, retains an obscure sense
Of possible sublimity, to which
With growing faculties she doth aspire,
With faculties still growing, feeling still

[30] Potts provides the fullest account of the development of *The Prelude* from *The Vale* (although he reads Beattie, not Macpherson) stating that in the first two books of *The Prelude* Wordsworth was ‘repeating in clearer and richer terms his experience of *The Vale of Esthwaite*’, in Potts, *Wordsworth’s Prelude: A Study of its Literary Forms*, p. 68.

That whatsoever point they gain, they still

Have something to pursue.[31]

The scene schematically parallels Wordsworth's early configuration of sublime experience in *The Vale*. The poet moving through a nocturnal landscape, typified still by the Ossianic configurations of the night 'Of storm and tempest', 'distant winds' and 'ghostly language of the ancient earth', stops 'beneath some rock' mirroring the sublime precinct of 'Black Helvellyn's inmost womb' (lines 323, 330, 329, 328). Yet, Wordsworth has 'cast off the acknowledged guide' and is alone. It is not the symbolic orchestration of the thrice struck lyre which provokes transcendence but a more universal 'power in sound' sensualised in breathing the 'elevated mood' from which Wordsworth 'drink[s] the visionary power' (lines 325, 326, 331). Here, as in *The Vale*, Wordsworth attains the 'shadowy exultation' of visionary experience, although significantly it is only 'fleeting' (lines 333, 332). Furthermore, there is only an 'obscure sense' of 'possible sublimity', which whilst aspired to is not yet fully attained (lines 337–8). *The Prelude* like *The Vale* is a progress poem, and this episode developed from his formative poetry depicts the poet in youth with 'faculties still growing', still in pursuit of a visionary power found in nature yet realised in poetry (line 338).

In book 5 of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth returns to the pursuit of 'Visionary Power', and this time determines its realisation in the 'turnings intricate' of poetics:

Visionary Power

Attends upon the motions of the winds

Embodied in the mystery of words.

There darkness makes abode, and all the host

Of shadowy things do work their changes there,

As in a mansion like their proper home;

Even forms and substances are circumfused

By that transparent veil with light divine;

[31] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude, or Growth of the Poet's Mind* [1805], ed. by Ernest De Selincourt (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), book II, p. 58, lines 321–341.

And through the turnings intricate of Verse,

Present themselves as objects recognis'd,

In flashes, and with a glory scarce their own.[32]

The natural sublime is rendered again by the 'motions of the winds' which attend to visionary experience (line 620). However, this power is 'embodied' or realised in poetry, a symbiotic union, or 'shared speech' between impression and expression (line 621).[33] Wordsworth performs a paradoxical chiaroscuro between the darkness and shadow which abide in the grand 'mansion' of poetry, and a now 'transparent veil' from which the 'forms and substances' of verse are emblazoned with 'light divine' (lines 624–626). It is the movement of nature alongside the 'turnings intricate' of poetry from which recognition, and with it understanding, is attained (line 627). Wordsworth is here powerfully mediating the relationship between the world and the word in terms of sublimity, both promoting and enacting a poetics of the sublime. However, Wordsworth does not provide a *vade mecum* for enlightenment, instead obfuscating poetry in blanketing darkness, shadows, and light, conditioning what he terms 'the mystery of words' (line 621). Yet Wordsworth, like Burns in his autobiographical letter, does provide a syllabus in *The Prelude*, although an abridged one at best. Wordsworth's exemplars include Cervantes, Shakespeare, and Milton ('Labourers divine!') and whilst this supports Wordsworth's renown as 'magpie-poet, seizing any bright object that catches his eye, dropping it into his nest', there is an important omission to this canon, particularly in reference to the poet's rendering of sublime verse.[34] Examination of two interrelated and sublime moments in *The Prelude* offers insight into Wordsworth's learning.

Wordsworth's mediation of the poetic sublime is perhaps nowhere more pronounced or indeed celebrated than in book 6 of *The Prelude* which details the crossing of the Simplon Pass. Samuel Monk concludes his study of the sublime with reference to the passage stating that there has 'nowhere been given finer expression' of the 'power of sublime scenery to evoke into consciousness the apperception of the infinite and to become an adequate symbol

[32] Ibid., book V, p. 168, lines 619–629.
[33] See John Jones for his extensive discussion on Wordsworth's reliance on the 'motions of the winds' from which he contends that 'Wordsworth brings art and nature together in terms of a shared speech'. The wind being 'the means of visionary power; of effective understanding reached through movement and life […]', in John Jones, *The Egotistical Sublime: A History of Wordsworth's Imagination* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1954), p. 102.
[34] Ibid., p. 23.

of the infinite'.[35] Concurrently, Thomas Weiskel states that 'of all the "passages of life" recorded and explored in *The Prelude*, the Simplon Pass passage in book 6 is the most spectacular', asserting that it represents the 'paradigm of Wordsworthian threshold and hence the very type of Romantic transcendence'.[36] In stating that this sample of Wordsworth's poetry represents 'the very type of Romantic transcendence', Weiskel alludes to a typology, one in which an archetype remains unearthed.[37] If this instance of sublime poetics is indeed, as Marjorie Hope Nicolson assesses, the 'artistic climax' of 'all the moods and themes poets had been trying to express' throughout the eighteenth century it is worth considering the creative lineage of such a moment.[38] Having left Cambridge for the summer break in 1790, the young Wordsworth accompanied by his friend had travelled through Europe in pursuit of the 'solitudes sublime' of the Alps.[39] Disappointed at having unknowingly traversed the Simplon pass, Wordsworth arrives at a precipice overlooking the Ravine of Arve and writing in 1804 captures the sublimity of the scene:

> The immeasurable height
> Of woods decaying, never to be decay'd,
> The stationary blasts of water-falls,
> And every where along the hollow rent
> Winds thwarting winds, bewilder'd and forlorn,
> The torrents shooting from the clear blue sky,
> The rocks that mutter'd close upon our ears,
> Black drizzling crags that spake by the way-side
> As if a voice were in them, the sick sight
> And giddy prospect of the raving stream,
> The unfetter'd clouds and region of the Heavens,
> Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light—
> Were all like workings of one mind, the features

[35] Monk, *The Sublime*, p. 232.
[36] Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime*, p. 195.
–Similarly, Marjorie Hope Nicholsen concludes her powerful study with reference to this passage stating that 'Wordsworth brought to an artistic climax all the moods and themes poets had been trying to express since the Mountain Glory dawned in England' and that 'Here is the perfect expression of "The Aesthetics of the Infinite"', in *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*, pp. 392–393.
[37] Weiskel's study does of course trace a typology of Romantic sublimity yet centred on his own psychoanalytical reading rather than that of textual transmission and poetic evolution which this thesis is concerned with.
[38] Nicholson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*, p. 392.
[39] Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, Book VI, p. 200, line 484.

Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree,
Characters of the great Apocalypse,
The types and symbols of Eternity,
Of first, and last, and midst, and without end. (lines 556–572)

In accordance with the example set by Addison, the sublimity of the scene is introduced with reference to the 'immeasurable height' which confronts the speaker. Wordsworth's artistic principle of 'similitude in dissimilitude, and dissimilitude in similitude' is at once apparent.[40] The familiar sublime elicitors of woods, waterfalls, winds, torrents, and 'Black drizzling crags' all feature within the scene but are defamiliarized into a dissimilitude of antagonistic and paradoxical states. The woods are in a contradictory mode of degeneration, whilst waterfalls are somehow blasting 'stationary', torrents of rain are impossibly 'shooting from the clear blue sky', as winds contest to their own bewilderment. It is a confounding crescendo of oxymoronic and anthropomorphistic nature, which mutters, speaks, and voices a sublime into being invoked figuratively to the human ('features of the same face'), the natural ('blossoms upon one tree'), the religious ('Characters of the great Apocalypse'), before reaching its climax in the eternal 'types and symbols' of poetry. Whilst Jonathan Wordsworth contends that 'the power of the Simplon Pass derives from Wordsworth's need to feel […] the intimate combination and unity with Nature', the violent discord of description, and the grasping use of simile which concludes the passage show that the poet ultimately fails to do so.[41] Weiskel identifies a 'genuine problem here, the tip of an iceberg' because the passage offers a 'difficult grandeur', noticing that this 'is simply not the way Wordsworth writes or thinks, not his kind of greatness'. Weiskel then surmises that 'In style as well as in thought the "I"- with its characteristic effect of making the progress of the verse the very dramatic progress of a consciousness — has disappeared'.[42] For Weiskel, as for Keats, the

[40] William Wordsworth, 'Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*' [1800], '[…] the pleasure which the mind derives from the perception of similitude in dissimilitude. This principle is the great spring of the activity of our minds and their chief feeder […] upon the accuracy with which similitude in dissimilitude, and dissimilitude in similitude are perceived, depend our *taste* and our moral feelings', in William Wordsworth and Samuel Coleridge *Lyrical Ballads 1798 and 1800*, ed. by Michael Gamer and Dahlia Porter (Toronto: Broadview Editions, 2008) pp. 171–87, (p. 182).
–I find this to be a more convincing principle at work than Theresa Kelley's suggestion of a Horatian *concordia discor*. Kelley isolates the passage in search of the beautiful, whereas when considered alongside the Snowdon episode Wordsworth appears to be deliberately rendering discord to show a failing grasp at unity (later found in Snowdon). See Kelley 'Wordsworth, Kant and the Romantic Sublime', in *Philological Quarterly* vol. 63, no. 1, (Winter 1984), pp. 130–40, (p. 135).
[41] Jonathan Wordsworth writes on the use of similes here that they 'refuse to be formal, and catch magnificently both the craving for total harmony and the distance from achieving it', in Jonathan Wordsworth *William Wordsworth: The Borders of Vision* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 33.
[42] Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime*, p. 189.

Wordsworthian sublime is solipsistically dependant on the presence of the poet. The progress of the verse is fulfilled by the progress of the poet's consciousness and seemingly vice versa.

Whilst the Simplon pass might be considered a summit for Romantic and indeed sublime composition, for Wordsworth it was not. The poet's summit is left to the concluding book of *The Prelude* and the ascent of Mt Snowdon:

> In that wild place and at the dead of night,
>
> Being over and forgotten, on we wound
>
> In silence as before. With forehead bent
>
> Earthward, as if in opposition set
>
> Against an enemy, I panted up
>
> With eager pace, and no less eager thoughts.
>
> Thus might we wear perhaps an hour away,
>
> Ascending at loose distance each from each,
>
> And I, as chanced, the foremost of the Band;
>
> When at my feet the ground appear'd to brighten,
>
> And with a step or two seem'd brighter still;
>
> Nor had I time to ask the cause of this.
>
> For instantly a Light upon the turf
>
> Fell like a flash: I looked about, and lo!
>
> The Moon stood naked in the Heavens, at height
>
> Immense above my head,[43]

Wordsworth's ascent is paced by repetition. Anticipation is built by the internal repetition of 'eager' paralleled with the enjambed repetition of the brightening ground (line 32). This is then dramatically concluded by the trochaic consonance of 'Fell like a flash: I' which propels the Bathsheba apparition of the moon (line 40). The passage conspicuously mirrors that of

[43] Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, Book XIII, p. 472, lines 27–42.

Simplon, although the reflections like the clouds which await are inverted. Wordsworth descends to the Ravine of Arve just as he ascends to the summit of Snowdon, the redundant metrical and descriptive inclusion of the moon being ‘at height’ parallels the ‘immeasurable height’ of the scene of the ravine (line 41). If the poet had disappeared on Simplon, his presence here is marked by a tautology of ‘I’ (lines 31, 35, 38, 40). The distinct move to singularise himself ‘And I, as chanced, the foremost of the Band’ promotes Wordsworth into the paradigmatic role of solitary poet arrested by nature’s majesty (line 35). Reaching the summit alone, this is his vision:

> and on the shore
> I found myself of a huge sea of mist,
> Which, meek and silent, rested at my feet:
> A hundred hills their dusky backs upheaved
> All over this still Ocean, and beyond,
> Far, far beyond, the vapours shot themselves,
> In headlands, tongues, and promontory shapes.
> Into the Sea, the real Sea, that seem’d
> To dwindle, and give up its majesty.
> Usurp’d upon as far as sight could reach.
> Meanwhile, the Moon look’d down upon this shew
> In single glory, and we stood, the mist
> Touching our very feet; and from the shore
> At distance not the third part of a mile
> Was a blue chasm; a fracture in the vapour,
> A deep and gloomy breathing-place through which
> Mounted the roar of waters, torrents, streams

Innumerable, roaring with one voice.

The universal spectacle throughout

Was shaped for admiration and delight,

Grand in itself alone, but in that breach

Through which the homeless voice of waters rose,

That dark deep thoroughfare had Nature lodg'd

The Soul, the Imagination of the whole. (lines 42–65)

In contrast to the discordant imagery of Simplon, Wordsworth here presents the sublimity of the enveloping body of mist as being 'meek and silent' (line 44). Whereas the ravine had overwhelmed the poet's consciousness, leading to a loss of self-presence, here nature, yet sublime, is pictured subservient in resting 'at the feet' of the poet (line 44). In his prose work *A Guide Through the District of the Lakes* (1810) Wordsworth distinguished the Alpine sublime from his favoured native mountains:

> Amongst the Alps are few places that do not preclude feeling of tranquil sublimity. Havoc, and ruin, and desolation, and encroachment, are everywhere more or less obtruded; and it is difficult, notwithstanding the naked loftiness of the pikes, and the snow-capped summits of the mounts, to escape from the depressing sensation that the whole are in a rapid dissolution; and, were it not that the destructive agency must abate as the heights diminish, would, in time to come, be levelled with the plains.[44]

For Wordsworth, British mountains, despite being 'comparatively diminutive in size', possess 'a sense of stability and permanence that is to many minds, more grateful'.[45] Echoing Burns, Wordsworth is championing his native landscape in rendering a 'tranquil sublime' not found in Simplon but very much encountered in the 'meek and silent', and 'still Ocean' of mist on Snowdon.[46] This oceanic semblance of cloud macerates the scene, appropriating sublimity from the pathetic fallacy of the dusky-backed hyperbole of hills, and subjugating even 'the real sea' (line 49). There is, however, a 'fracture in the vapour', an abyssal chasm described

[44] William Wordsworth, 'A Guide Through the District of the Lakes' [1810], in *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, pp. 151–259, (p. 231).
[45] Ibid.
[46] Karl Kroeber notices that in book 13 of *The Prelude* 'Wordsworth's description is intensely localized (Wales, Snowdon, Bethkelet's huts)', in *Romantic Landscape Vision: Constable and Wordsworth* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1975), p. 102.

in terms borrowed from *The Vale* as a 'deep and gloomy breathing-place' (lines 56–7). From this precinct the Wordsworthian sublime emerges. The roar of synonymous aqueous envoys 'waters, torrents, streams / Innumerable' coalesce to form a euphonic unity as 'one voice' (lines 58–9). Again, this directly contrasts with the Simplon passage in which nature is depicted disharmonious and many-voiced, only seeming to be the 'workings of one mind' without achieving that 'intense unity' which for Wordsworth represents the 'consummation of the sublime'. Whilst the mist-pervasive panorama from the summit conforms to a unity of the sublime, ('universal spectacle[…] 'Grand in itself alone') it is in this breach, the 'dark deep thoroughfare' in which exists the nexus of 'Imagination', the unifying force of 'the whole' (lines 60, 62, 64–65). The reflection which follows this episode clarifies Wordsworth's vision:

> A meditation rose in me that night
> Upon the lonely Mountain when the scene
> Had pass'd away, and it appear'd to me
> The perfect image of a mighty Mind,
> Of one that feeds upon infinity, (lines 66–70)

Whilst Simon Bainbridge reads in this the definitive articulation of the Wordsworthian sublime: 'For Wordsworth, it is testimony to the Mind's own sublimity that it predominates over Nature's most sublime spectacle', it also promotes the conceptual model of the sublime which this thesis began with.[47] Nature, mind, and art are hereby formed into a synergetic circle of the infinite. Whilst the scene has parted, it is with recollection in which art, or poetry is configured, like the 'types and symbols of Eternity' of Simplon, here materialises the 'perfect image' of a sublime 'Mind' (line 69). The circle is completed, (Coleridge's ouroboros reference) because it in turn 'feeds upon infinity' (Wordsworth having considered 'the notion of infinity' as a 'modification of unity' and the 'absolute crown of the impression' of the sublime).[48] Wordsworth's extended tenet articled in the 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads*, that 'Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction, the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the

[47] Bainbridge, 'Highlands, Lakes, Wales', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Romantic Sublime*, p. 122.
[48] Wordsworth, 'The Sublime and the Beautiful', pp. 354, 357.

subject of contemplation is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind' is powerfully and convincingly substantiated.[49] Whilst for many critics the Simplon episode represents the foremost aesthetic achievement of *The Prelude*, Hartman is astute in recognising Snowdon as the 'poetic consummation' of Wordsworth, a literal and figurative summit for Romantic poetry and as the poet would envision it, a 'sublime consummation'.[50]

To arrive at a full understanding of such a consummation both poetic and sublime, it is necessary to examine further the praxis of such an instance. Despite his carefully professed singularity, the tautological 'I' of Snowdon, Wordsworth was of course not alone on the summit. Nor is this passage a singular work without poetic lineage and precedent. Indeed, if Snowdon is most prominently Wordsworthian in sublime aspect, it is also the most conspicuous example of intertextual remediation and reveals *The Prelude'*s unacknowledged archetype. Just as James Beattie's *The Minstrel* would inspire Burns's 'Vision', Wordsworth's vision atop Snowdon is likewise modelled from Beattie's supreme stanza:

> And oft the craggy cliff he loved to climb,
>
> When all in mist the world below was lost.
>
> What dreadful pleasure! there to stand sublime,
>
> Like shipwrecked mariner on desert coast,
>
> And view the enormous waste of vapour, tost
>
> In billows, lengthening to the horizon round,
>
> Now scooped in gulfs, with mountains now embossed!
>
> And hear the voice of mirth and song rebound,
>
> Flocks, herds, and waterfalls, along the hoar profound![51]

Wordsworth's analogous passage reads:

> and on the shore

[49] Wordsworth, 'Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*', p. 183.
– See Sommer, 'the poetic practice of reviving affective intensities from a temporal and emotional distance', in '"Far more deeply interfused": "Tintern Abbey" between Burkean and Kantian Sublimity', p. 19.
[50] Hartman is forthright in his praise of Snowdon stating that 'its ascent, the vision, the meditation, points to the utmost Wordsworth can achieve as poet'. However, his impressive reading of Milton as intertext foregoes recognition of the more prominent archetype, Beattie. In *Wordsworth's Poetry*, pp. 254–255.
[51] Beattie, *The Minstrel* I: XXI, p. 11.

I found myself of a huge sea of mist,

Which, meek and silent, rested at my feet:

A hundred hills their dusky backs upheaved

All over this still Ocean, and beyond,

Far, far beyond, the vapours shot themselves,

In headlands, tongues, and promontory shapes.

Into the Sea, the real Sea, that seem'd

To dwindle, and give up its majesty.

Usurp'd upon as far as sight could reach.

Meanwhile, the Moon look'd down upon this shew

In single glory, and we stood, the mist

Touching our very feet; and from the shore[52]

The palimpsestic configuration of poet on high in survey of a land lost in mist is patent. Furthermore, Wordsworth's strange emphasis on feet only becomes salient when seen as a positional play to replicate Edwin standing sublime ('and we stood'). Similarly, the conjunctive fixation on shores and seas recasts Beattie's 'shipwrecked mariner on desert coast' as Wordsworth himself. Beattie's 'voice of mirth and song' becomes the unifying vehicle to Wordworth's 'one voice'. Where Wordsworth is able to develop Beattie's poetics, is to unite his forebear's synonymous, often contradictory terms 'Fancy', 'Imagination', and 'Genius' into one unifying entity — 'Mind'. Consequently, the subtitle of *The Prelude* reads 'Growth of a Poet's Mind', a simple paraphrasing of *The Minstrel*'s — 'The Progress of Genius'. Abbie Potts, therefore, retitles *The Prelude*, and its earlier iterance *The Vale of Esthwaite* as 'the progress of a minstrel'. Potts is then explicit in stating that from Beattie, Wordsworth learns 'the art of poetry' insisting that 'Like Edwin he was himself learning to frame "forms of bright perfection"'.[53] Beattie, of course, had specified such 'forms of bright

[52] Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, XIII: lines 42–54, p. 473.
[53] Potts, *Wordsworth's Prelude: A Study of its Literary Forms*, pp. 74–5.

perfection' as being 'General ideas of excellence, the immediate archetypes of sublime imitation, both in painting and in poetry'.[54]

At this juncture it is possible to arrive at a set of prefatory conclusions. Wordsworth holds that the sublime is 'attended to' by nature but 'embodied' in poetry. It is the mind of the poet which has dominion over nature and in recollection is able to render a sublime poetics. Such a faculty, a 'sense sublime', is only fostered beyond 'the possible' through development; an experiential 'growth' from encounter with nature and with poetry.[55] Wordsworth is dependent upon such archetypes to develop this poetic faculty most actively shown in the figure of the poet standing sublime. The Snowdon passage is therefore revelatory in signalling that the principal model for such composition is Beattie. Validation for this final claim can be traced through a return to Wordsworth's early locodescriptive poetry in which Wordsworth's 'sense sublime' is developed. Modern criticism has collectively acknowledged the influence of *The Minstrel* to the final year at Hawkshead in which *The Vale* was composed when Dorothy Wordsworth had drawn such a comparison:

> In truth he was a strange and wayward wight, Fond of each gentle, etc. etc…' […] That verse of Beattie's *Minstrel* always reminds me of him, and indeed the whole character of Edwin resembles much what William was when I first knew him.[56]

Recently, Gravil has gone so far as to suggest that one stanza from *The Minstrel* in which 'Young Edwin, lighted by the evening star, / Lingering and listening, wandered down the vale', might be regarded 'as providing the inspiration for the entire *Esthwaite* enterprise'.[57] However, *The Vale* remains a flawed, fragmentary example of Wordsworth's poetic development and is admittedly uncharacteristic of his oeuvre by the Ossianic gloom which pervades its landscapes and apparitions. Despite Macpherson providing a guide in Ossian, Wordsworth's ultimate rejection is prefigured in *The Vale* in terms directly lifted from *The Minstrel*:

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[54] Beattie, footnote to canto II, stanza LVIII which reads 'From Nature's beauties variously compared / And variously combined, he learns to frame / Those forms of bright perfection, which the Bard, / While boundless hopes and boundless views inflame, / Enamour'd consecrates to never–dying fame', in 'The Minstrel', p. 62.
[55] This is articulated further by Wordsworth in his preface to *The Excursion*: 'conducts the history of the Author's *mind* to the point when he was emboldened to hope that his *faculties* were sufficiently matured for entering upon the arduous labour which he had proposed to himself', in 'Preface to *The Excursion*' [1814], in *The Cornell Wordsworth: The Excursion*, ed. by Sally Bushell, James A Butler, and Michael C. Jaye (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), pp. 38–41, (p. 38).
[56] Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Early Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, p. 93.
[57] Gravil, *Wordsworth's Bardic Vocation*, p. 51.

Adieu, ye forms of Fear that float
Wild on the shipwreck of the thought,
While fancy in a Demon's form
Rides through the clouds and swells the storm,
To thee, sweet Melancholy, blind,
The moonlight of the Poet's mind,[58]

To stand sublime in 'the moonlight of the Poet's mind' upon Snowdon, Wordsworth must deny the Ossianic, 'echoing, like Beattie himself, the traditional farewell by which the poet turns to a higher theme', and he does so in *An Evening Walk*.[59]

Written during his first years at Cambridge and published in 1793, in *An Evening Walk* Wordsworth drops the Ossianic in favour of the 'epistemological rigor' learned from his reading of John Scott's *Critical Essays on Some of the Poems of Several English Poets* (1785).[60] Significantly, Scott's criticism directly considers treatment of the sublime: 'imagination, properly directed, will not be employed in producing impossible fictions, but in exploring real existence, and selecting from it circumstances grand or beautiful, as occasion may require'.[61] Sheats notices that this instructed Wordsworth during this time by the marginalia in his copy of *Paradise Lost* which reads: 'But how much of the most valuable part of the poet's province […] how much of the real excellence of Imagination consists in the capacity of exploring the world really existing & thence selecting objects beautiful or great as the occasion may require'.[62] Correspondingly, in *An Evening Walk* the poet sets out to convey 'the history of a poet's evening', selecting from 'the infinite variety of natural appearances' that which is beautiful and sublime. Wordsworth's progression in poetic craft from his schooldays at Hawkshead is shown in the shared encounter with an oak tree. For comparison, the passage in *The Vale* reads:

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[58] 'Adieu ye lays that fancy's flowers adorn / The soft amusement of the vacant mind' the initial lines of stanza LXII from the second canto of *The Minstrel* are inscribed on *The Vale's* manuscript and clearly inform this passage, in Beattie, *The Minstrel*, II: LXII, p. 64.
[59] Potts connects the lunar vision of Snowdon with 'possibly the most revealing phrase in *The Vale of Esthwaite*' being 'the moonlight of the poet's mind', in *Wordsworth's Prelude: A Study of its Literary Forms*, pp. 92–3.

[60] See James Averill's introduction to the Cornell edition of *An Evening Walk* which discusses the influence of Scott's criticism on Wordsworth, in 'Introduction' to *The Cornell Wordsworth: An Evening Walk*, ed. by James Averill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 3–19, (pp. 6–7).
[61] This essay from Scott discusses the beauty and sublimity of Milton's *Lycidas*, in John Scott, *Critical Essays on Some of the Poems of Several English Poets : with an Account of the Life and Writings of the Author* ed. by Mr Hoole, (London: J Philips, 1785), p. 59.
[62] Sheats, *The Making of Wordsworth's Poetry*, p. 226.

While in the west the robe of day
Fades, slowly fades, from gold to grey,
The oak its boughs and foliage twines
Marked to the view in stronger lines,
Appears with foliage marked to view,
In lines of stronger, browner hue,
While every darkening leaf between,
The sky distinct and clear is seen.
But now a thicker blacker veil
Is thrown o'er all the wavering dale[63]

This scene of night descending upon the vale is then transcribed yet matured in *An Evening Walk*:

Now while the solemn evening Shadows sail,

On red slow-waving pinions down the vale,

And, fronting the bright west in stronger lines,

The oak its dark'ning boughs and foliage twines,

I love beside the glowing lake to stray,

Where winds the road along the secret bay;

By rills that tumble down the woody steeps,

And run in transport to the dimpling deeps;

Along the "wild mean'ring shore" to view[64]

In *The Vale* the oak is the final object viewed distinctly before the 'blunt baffled Vision' is overcome by the Ossianic 'gloomy mass' inspired by Macpherson's *Temora*. The oak in Wordsworth's later poem participates instead in the tightened unity of natural description that heralds the poet's inclusion within the scene. The octosyllables of *The Vale* are advanced into decasyllabic heroic couplets which synthesise poet and nature through rhyme, as the speaker

[63] Wordsworth, *The Vale*, pp. 429–30, lines 95–102.
[64] William Wordsworth, *An Evening Walk* [1793], 'The 1793 Edition, with an *Apparatus Criticus* of Variants to 1832', in *The Cornell Wordsworth: An Evening Walk*, ed. by James Averill, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984) pp. 23–80, (pp. 54, 56), lines 410–420.

is told to ‘stray’ alongside ‘the secret bay’, consolidating a sublimity of ‘woody steeps’ and ‘dimpling deeps’, in the action of observation (‘view’). In Wordsworth’s revised edition of 1836 the ‘glowing lake’ is altered to a ‘tranquil lake’ suggestive of Wordsworth’s ‘tranquil sublime’ found at Snowdon. This is supported by Wordsworth’s localising directive formatively displayed in *An Evening Walk*.

In the Fenwick Notes of 1843 Wordsworth describes the significance of the ‘image’ of the oak tree within the poem:

> This is feebly and imperfectly expressed, but I recollect distinctly the very spot where this first struck me. It was on the way between Hawkshead and Ambleside, and gave me extreme pleasure. The moment was important in my poetical history; for I date from it my consciousness of the infinite variety of natural appearances which had been unnoticed by the poets of any age or country, so far as I was acquainted with them; and I made a resolution to supply in some degree the deficiency.[65]

The oak seen when the poet was ‘at that time not over the age of 14’ is here shown to be a vocational totem determinate in Wordsworth’s poetical history. There is a visible resemblance to Burns’s similar calling as poet recorded in his commonplace book in which he decries that there has never been ‘one Scotch Poet of any eminence’ to notice ‘the fertile banks of Irvine, the romantic woodlands & sequestered scenes on Aire, and the heathy, mountainous source, & winding sweep of Doon’, prefiguring Wordsworth’s ‘resolution’ in stating ‘this is a complaint I would gladly remedy’.[66] Concurrently, just as Burns focuses on rivers (Irvine, Aire, and Doon) that are prefixed by sublime description (‘sequestered scenes’, ‘heathy, mountainous source’) Wordsworth opens *An Evening Walk* with a concurrent configuration of bodies of water paired to sublimity:

> Far from my dearest friend, ‘tis mine to rove
>
> Thro’ bare grey dell, high wood, and pastoral cove;
>
> His wizard course where hoary Derwent takes
>
> Thro’ craggs, and forest glooms, and opening lakes,

[65] William Wordsworth, ‘Note to *An Evening Walk*’, in *The Fenwick Notes of William Wordsworth*, ed. by Jared Curtis (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1993), pp. 6–7.
[66] Burns, ‘First Commonplace Book’ [August 1785], pp. 65–6.

Staying his silent waves, to hear the roar

That stuns the tremulous cliffs of high Lodore:

Where silver rocks the savage prospect chear

Of giant yews that frown on Rydale's mere

Where peace to Grasmere's lonely island leads,

To willowy hedgerows, and to emerald meads;

Leads to her bridge, rude church, and cottag'd grounds,

Her rocky sheepwalks, and her woodland bounds;

Where bosom'd deep, the shy Winander peeps

Mid clust'ring isles, and holly-sprinkl'd steeps;

Where twilight glens endear my Esthwaite's shore,

And memory of departed pleasures, more. (lines 1–16)

Wordsworth's beloved lakes, his own local river Derwent, and the waterfall Lodore are personified throughout by a studied codex of sublime figuration. In 'The Vision', Burns personifies the river Ayr as 'Auld hermit' who 'staw thro' his woods, /On to the shore;' and here the river Derwent is similarly characterised as 'hoary', whose 'wizard course' leads through the 'forest glooms' and 'twilight glens' to 'my Esthwaite's shore'; the possessive 'my' of Wordsworth vocalising the shared localising spirit with Burns as each poet champions their native waters in poetic sublimity.[67]

Whilst this illustrates Wordsworth's progression as a poet in a trajectory analogous to Burns (in superseding the ambivalent 'north country' of *The Minstrel* for a more localised poetics of the sublime), *An Evening Walk* also shows the importance of Beattie's poem to

[67] Similarly, Wordsworth includes two words in his native dialect 'intake', and 'gill' which he footnotes to draw attention to their local aspect: 'The word *intake* is local, and signifies a mountain–inclosure. Gill is also, I believe, a term confined to this country. Glen, gill, and dingle, have the same meaning'. Furthermore, the poet references Burns directly, including the word 'sugh' which he notes as 'a Scotch word, expressive, as Mr Gilpin explains it, of the sound of the motion of a stick through the air, or of wind passing through the trees. See Burns's Cotter's Saturday Night'. James Averill notes that 'this word was brought to WW's attention by William Gilpin's gloss to the poem in *Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, on Several Parts of Great Britain; Particulary the Highlands of Scotland* (London, 1789)'. p. 68.

Wordsworth's developing locodescriptive mode. Wordsworth directly references Beattie within the poem and his landscape, populated by a comparative roster of shepherds, minstrels, and hermit, is a composite of the 'embattled clouds', and 'rustling corn' of *The Minstrel*.[68] Paul Sheat's contention (discussed earlier) that John Scott's criticism had instructed Wordsworth during this formative period with his dictate of 'imagination' being 'properly directed […] in exploring real existence, and selecting from it circumstances grand or beautiful' remains a cogent one. Yet, in Edwin, the archetype for Wordsworth's apprenticeship as poet is most compellingly found:

> Meanwhile, whate'er of beautiful, or new,
>
> Sublime, or dreadful, in earth, sea, or sky,
>
> By chance, or search, was offered to his view,
>
> He scanned with curious and romantic eye.[69]

This apprenticeship is developed in Wordsworth's following piece of juvenilia, the expansive *Descriptive Sketches* which details his walking tour through Europe and the Alps. The poem marks an important moment in Wordsworth's career in which his evolving understanding, or 'sense' of sublimity is nebulously articulated. In describing the setting sun breaking through a familiar mist an emblazoned sublime is rendered:

> 'Tis storm; and hid in mist from hour to hour
> All day the floods a deeper murmur pour,
> And mournful sounds, as of a Spirit lost,
> Pipe wild along the hollow-blustering coast,
> 'Till the Sun walking on his western field
> Shakes from behind the clouds his flashing shield.
> Triumphant on the bosom of the storm,
> Glances the fire-clad eagle's wheeling form;
> Eastward, in long perspective glittering, shine
> The wood-crown'd cliffs that o'er the lake recline;

[68] Wordsworth references Beattie's line 'Down the rough slope the ponderous waggon rings', for inspiring his own 'Downward the pond'rous timber–wain resounds'. Editors of the poem have also noted 'And shades of deep embattl'd clouds were seen' (l.55), as replicating Beattie's 'And from embattled clouds emerging slow',(II:12) as well as 'Hurrying the feeding hare thro' rustling corn' (l.442) taken from 'Thro' rustling corn the hare astonish'd springs'.
[69] Beattie, *The Minstrel*, I: LVIII, p. 30.

Wide o'er the Alps a hundred streams unfold,
At once to pillars turn'd that flame with gold;[70]
Behind his sail the peasant strives to shun
The west that burns like one dilated sun,
Where in a mighty crucible expire
The mountains, glowing hot, like coals of fire.[71]

In a lengthy footnote to the scene, Wordsworth states that 'I had once given to these sketches the title of Picturesque; but the Alps are insulted in applying to them that term'.[72] Disdaining the 'cold rules of painting' (the traditional medium of the picturesque), Wordsworth states that such would produce 'a very imperfect idea' of the 'sublime features' of the scene.[73] The poet then describes his process of composition stating that 'I consulted nature and my feelings' anticipating the mandate set out in *The Prelude* that the sublime is attended to by nature yet subject to the self. This is followed by a statement on the composition's achievement of unity by the conflagration of the sublime setting: 'The ideas excited by the stormy sunset I am here describing owed their sublimity to that deluge of light, or rather of fire, in which nature had wrapped the immense forms around me; any intrusion of shade, by destroying the unity of the impression, had necessarily diminished its grandeur'.[74] This is the

[70] There is a distinct Ossianic cast to Wordsworth's verse here, particularly his description of the sun and most notably the theophany of pillar of fire.
[71] William Wordsworth, *Descriptive Sketches*, 'The 1793 Edition, with an *Apparatus Criticus* of Variants through 1832' in *The Cornell Wordsworth: Descriptive Sketches*, ed. by Eric Birdsall (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 28– 119, (pp. 70, 72), lines 332–347.
[72] Ibid., p. 72. The full note reads: 'I had once given to these sketches the title of Picturesque; but the Alps are insulted in applying to them that term. Whoever, in attempting to describe their sublime features, should confine himself to the cold rules of painting would give his reader but a very imperfect idea of those emotions which they have the irresistible power of communicating to the most impassive imaginations. The fact is, that controuling influence, which distinguishes the Alps from all other scenery, is derived from images which disdain the pencil. Had I wished to make a picture of this scene I had thrown much less light into it. But I consulted nature and my feelings. The ideas excited by the stormy sunset I am here describing owed their sublimity to that deluge of light, or rather of fire, in which nature had wrapped the immense forms around me; any intrusion of shade, by destroying the unity of the impression, had necessarily diminished its grandeur'.

[73] Philip Shaw notices that this echoes 'Burke's assessment of the limited abilities of the visual arts to capture the sublime' as Wordsworth uses the same term 'immense forms' of nature as the *Enquiry*, in Philip Shaw, 'The Sublime', in *William Wordsworth in Context*, ed. by Andrew Bennett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 283–290, (p. 284).
–See also Hartman who offers a fuller reading on the 'dominance of the eye' coinciding with the 'analytic intellect', noting that Wordsworth's eventual 'revolt against purely descriptive or ocular poetry [the antithesis to Hartman's own reading of the anagogical] should be 'attached to the influence of Edmund Burke', in *Wordsworth's Poetry*, footnote 28, to p. 113, pp. 362–3.

first instance in which the young Wordsworth can be read formulating his poetic theory on the ‘intense unity’ requisite for the consummation of the sublime.

Whilst *Descriptive Sketches* would provide an overabundant study for *The Prelude’*s sixth book, the lauded Simplon passage does not appear in the otherwise exhaustive expedition. There is however a conspicuous drafting of the Snowdon summit. In the centre of the poem Wordsworth clearly positions himself on high as Edwin stating, ‘But now with other soul I stand alone / Sublime upon this far-surveying cone’ (lines 366–7). The vision which follows is that of *The Minstrel*:

> Far stretch'd beneath the many-tinted hills
> A mighty waste of mist the valley fills,
> A solemn sea! whose vales and mountains round
> Stand motionless, to awful silence bound.
> A gulf of gloomy blue, that opens wide
> And bottomless, divides the midway tide.
> Like leaning masts of stranded ships appear
> The pines that near the coast their summits rear;
> Of cabins, woods, and lawns a pleasant shore
> Bounds calm and clear the chaos still and hoar;
> Loud thro' that midway gulf ascending, sound
> Unnumber'd streams with hollow roar profound.
> Mounts thro' the nearer mist the chaunt of birds,
> And talking voices, and the low of herds,
> The bark of dogs, the drowsy tinkling bell,
> And wild-wood mountain lutes of saddest swell.
> Think not, suspended from the cliff on high
> He looks below with undelighted eye. (lines 494–511)

The transcription of sublime figuration is direct. Beattie’s ‘enormous waste of vapour’, becomes Wordsworth’s ‘mighty waste of mist’, as does ‘along the hoar profound’ become ‘with hollow roar profound’ (lines 495, 505). Similarly, ‘Now scooped in gulfs, with mountains now embossed’, merges into the ‘mountains round’ and ‘midway gulf’ of the latter poem, with Wordsworth boldly concluding the passage in a corresponding catalogue of ‘voice’ (‘talking voices’), ‘flocks’ (‘drowsy tinkling bell’), ‘herds’ (‘the low of herds’), and

'waterfalls' ('Unnumber'd streams') (lines 496, 504, 507, 508, 507, 505). Whereas the Snowdon passage subtly reworks the central simile of *The Minstrel*'s stanza ('Like shipwrecked mariner on desert coast'), here it is almost imperiously transcribed: 'Like leaning masts of stranded ships appear' (line 500). Wordsworth's eventual stumble into Beattie's third-person narrative mode replicates the positional 'And oft the craggy cliff he loved to climb' with 'Think not, suspended from the cliff on high / He looks below with undelighted eye' (lines 510–11). However, this studied attempt to 'stand sublime' reveals more than simply the debt of archetypical 'forms of bright perfection' owed to his predecessor. If Snowdon is to be a summit of the Wordsworthian sublime, where consummation is achieved by reckoning with the poetic mind's dominion over nature, *Descriptive Sketches*, alongside *An Evening Walk*, and *The Vale of Esthwaite*, are representative of the faltering, laborious ascent.[75] The early locodescriptive works offer vital insight into the poet's formulation of the sublime and his reprocessing of imagery from his predecessors, important stages which are 'shaped for admiration and delight', and remain 'Grand in itself alone', yet still require that 'breach', for the Wordsworthian sublime to fully emerge.[76] It would be five years, 'five summers, with the length / of five long winters!' until Wordsworth would reckon with the 'dark deep thoroughfare' of his poetic mind's 'sense sublime'.

Wordsworth and Coleridge's collection of poems *Lyrical Ballads* has historically been considered as momentous for the development of eighteenth-century poetics in which the two friends 'experiments' in poetry first attain the period-defining term Romantic. Whilst less than half of the twenty-seven poems included in the first volume of 1798 can be 'clearly designated as ballads', the production was largely a development of the period's revival instigated by Addison and versified by Percy.[77] Indeed, Wordsworth, in the same move of rejecting Macpherson, 'publicly avowed' that 'I do not think that there is an able writer of verse of the present day who would not be proud to acknowledge his obligations to [Percy's]

[75] Both Weiskel and Hartman defer to a similar mode of metaphoric explication in describing the poet's juvenilia as being not an ascent but 'a quest'; for Weiskel 'a quest for the source of poetic power', and for Hartman 'a quest to localize his Idea of Nature in nature', in Thomas Weiskel, *Wordsworth and the Poetry of Human Suffering* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 193.
–Geoffrey Hartman, 'Wordsworth's Descriptive Sketches and the Growth of a Poet's Mind', in *PMLA*, vol. 76, no. 5 (December 1961), pp. 519–527, (p. 520).
[76] Ibid. Hartman assesses the developmental importance of the poem in stating that there is 'no doubt that Wordsworth's sense for "powers and presence" has increased'. However, Hartman also understands that 'his sense for "powers and presences" is constantly roused, often deeply delighted, but still somehow, unsatisfied'.
[77] Daniel Cook, 'The Ballad Tradition', in *William Wordsworth in Context*, pp. 101–110, (p. 103).

the Reliques'.[78] That *Lyrical Ballads*, like *Reliques* and *Ossian* was intended to be a production of the sublime is evidenced by a letter jointly penned by both poets to their friend and publisher Joseph Cottle in which they amusingly aspire to a typographical sublimity:

> Cottle, my dear Cottle, I meant to have written you an Essay on the Metaphysics of Typography; but I have not the time. —Take a few hints without the abstruse reasons for them which I mean to favour you —18 lines a page, the lines closely printed, certainly, more closely than those of the Joan — (Oh by all means closer! W. Wordsworth) *equal ink*; & *large margins*. That is *beauty*— it may even under your immediate care mingle the sublime![79]

Following another walking tour with Dorothy in the summer of 1798, Wordsworth sent to Cottle the final poem whilst the volume was at press: 'Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798'. The poem's status as a work of sublimity has long since been established. Albert O. Wlecke's book length study, *Wordsworth and the Sublime* (1973) develops its analysis of the Wordsworthian sublime directly from consideration of the 'sense sublime' at the heart of the poem.[80] Other discussions include the work of Carl Woodring (1978), Theresa Kelley (1988), Philip Shaw (2015), and most recently Tim Sommer (2022), who each offer varied and compelling assessments of how the poem concerns 'the uses, including the misuse, of mankind's essential sublimity'.[81] Woodring's statement, which is analogous to the examinations of the body of criticism mentioned, highlights a shared oversight. That whilst the poem may propose, persuade, and ultimately achieve a universal understanding of 'mankind's' sublimity, it is throughout a deeply personal account of the sublime, and of a poet's 'sense' of it.[82]

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[78] Wordsworth, 'Essay, Supplementary to the Preface' [1815], p. 208.
[79] Quoted in 'Introduction' to *Lyrical Ballads 1798 and 1800*, ed. by Michael Gamer and Dahlia Porter, pp. 15–37, pp. 25–6.
[80] Albert O. Wlecke, *Wordsworth and the Sublime*, (Berkely: University of California Press, 1973).
[81] Carl Woodring, 'The New Sublimity in "Tintern Abbey"', in *The Evidence of the Imagination: Studies of Interactions between Life and Art in English Romantic Literature*, ed. by Donald H. Reiman, Michael C. Jaye, and Betty T. Bennet (New York: New York University Press, 1978), pp. 72–94, (p. 88).
–The other studies are each referenced throughout this chapter; Kelley, *Revisionary Aesthetics*, Shaw 'The Sublime', Sommer, '"Far more deeply interfused": "Tintern Abbey" between Burkean and Kantian Sublimity'.
[82] Wlecke comes close to such a reading stating that Wordsworth's 'sense sublime' refers to 'a very special form of self-consciousness', although his study follows Weiskel's somewhat abstruse methodology of mapping a psychoanalytical reading onto Wordsworth's poetry in favour of textual, and indeed, poetic analysis, in Albert O. Wlecke, *Wordsworth and the Sublime*, p. 8.

The poem opens with a poet's utterance: 'Five years have passed; five summers, with the length / Of five long winters! And again I hear'.[83] The repetition of numbers and the recurring colour green throughout the opening stanza are characteristic of the generic conventions of the ballad tradition Wordsworth is engaged with.[84] However, this thrice intoned vocalisation emphasised by exclamation also aligns with the bardic rites illustrated throughout *Ossian*. This signals from the outset that it is a poet's voice who speaks.[85] The double caesura of the initial line conforms to the distinction in time between the now of the poem, (1798), and the persisting then, five years past, (1793), in which the younger Wordsworth had formally begun his poetic career with the publications of *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches*. Whereas commentators have highlighted the significance of the repeating 'again' throughout the first verse paragraph of the poem as emblematic of 'the speaker's cyclical returns', and 'expansive-contrastive movements in time', such repetition is secondary, or propositional to the tautology of 'I' to which it is constantly connected.[86] As with Snowdon, the tautological 'I' of the poem foregrounds the presence of the poet, with the conjunctive 'again' here doubling the 'I' to signify the temporal lapse, whilst also generating a solipsistic echo that magnifies the poet's presence within the landscape ('And again I hear', 'Once again / Do I behold', 'when I again repose', 'Once again I see') (lines 2, 4–5, 9, 15). Within a variegated landscape of contrasting aesthetic topographies of beauty ('sweet inland murmer', 'orchard tufts') and sublimity ('steep and lofty cliffs', 'wild secluded scene'), this echoing 'I' unites the landscape both spatially and temporally (lines 4, 11, 5, 6). It is this unifying power of the poet which creates the 'tranquil sublime' of the scene chartered in the reflection 'Which on a wild secluded scene impress / Thoughts of a more deep seclusion, and connect / The landscape with the quiet of the sky' (lines 6–8). The natural provocation of the 'wild secluded scene' impresses the poet's mind to a significantly 'deeper' seclusion allowing for a unifying enjambement of tranquil sublimity. The 'quiet' of the sky, paired with the 'silence' of the smoke mirrors the 'meek and silent' mist of Snowdon, with Gravil noticing

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[83] William Wordsworth, 'Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye During a Tour, July 13, 1798', p. 142, lines 1–2.
[84] Repetition is the most prominent poetic device used throughout the poem, 'green', 'wild', 'again', 'I', 'eye', 'voice', 'mind', and 'sense'. See Colin C. Clarke's extensive discussion of the poem's repetition as being a 'principle of permutation' in *Romantic Paradox: An Essay on the Poetry of Wordsworth*, (Westport: GreenWood Publishers, 1962), pp. 45–48.
[85] Kelley arrives at a similar reading from her discussion of the 'successive acts of bounding and placement', 'these lines assert the speaker's rhetorical possession of the topography he describes and his [poetic] licence to invent it', in *Revisionary Aesthetics*, p. 58.
[86] Sheats, *The Making of Wordsworth's Poetry*, p. 233.
–Kroeber, *Romantic Landscape Vision*, p. 32.
–See also Clark, *Romantic Paradox*, p. 40.

that ‘the landscape itself becomes the perfect image of a tranquil mind’.[87] Yet, there is one critical reversal in such parallels which distinguishes the young Edwin-like Wordsworth of 1793 with the more assured poet of 1798. Throughout his juvenilia and at both Simplon and Snowdon, the speaker is purposefully positioned standing on high. Here, however, the introspective poet is positioned in ‘repose […] under this dark sycamore’ (lines 9–10). This reversal embodies the shift between natural experience and poetic composition; the poet is now in the process of composition and in the shade of the dark sycamore, a sense of visionary power is introduced; ‘And since that hour the world unknown / The world of shades is all my own’.[88]

The following stanza expands on this process of composition in the reflective mode. The ‘wild secluded scene’ is idealised by way of litotes, no longer a ‘landscape’ but now symbolised as ‘forms of beauty’, mirroring the ‘forms of bright perfection’ of his forebear, Beattie (line 25). Wordsworth’s early annotations from *Descriptive Sketches* on his process of sublime composition ‘I consulted nature and my feelings’ are then fluidly enacted with the verse progressing from nature to somatic feeling (‘Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart’) to the feeling of ‘tranquil restoration’ of the ‘purer mind’ (lines 29, 31, 30). These ‘feelings too’ inculcate ‘that blessed mood’ necessary for poetic vision:

> To them I may have owed another gift,
>
> Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood
>
> In which the burden of the mystery,
>
> In which the heavy and the weary weight
>
> Of all this unintelligible world
>
> Is lightened -- that serene and blessed mood
>
> In which the affections gently lead us on
>
> Until the breath of this corporeal frame
>
> And even the motion of our human blood

[87] Gravil, ‘Crowded with barely perceptible metaphor, [the opening lines] build a bridge between landscape and psyche, while the landscape becomes the perfect image of a tranquil mind’, in *Wordsworth’s Bardic Vocation*, p. 117.
[88] Wordsworth, *The Vale*, p. 444, lines 269–70.

Almost suspended, we are laid asleep

In body, and become a living soul;

While with an eye made quiet by the power

Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,

We see into the life of things. (lines 37–49)

Here, Wordsworth is at his most visionary. Feeling, or impression, provokes a 'mood' in which visionary power ('We see into the life of things') is awakened by the Wordsworthian requisites of tranquillity and unity ('an eye made quiet by the power/ Of harmony') (lines 38, 42, 49, 47–48). Yet, if such vision is questioned 'if this / be but a vain belief' it is confirmed by a return to nature 'How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee / Oh sylvan Wye!', continuing the cyclical procedure of the sublime in which nature, mind, and poetry revolve in completion (lines 51–2, 56–7). The chiastic structure of Wordsworth's apostrophe to the personified river Wye embodies the poetic potential of the return to nature: 'How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee / Oh sylvan Wye! Thou wanderer through the woods, / How often has my spirit turned to thee!' (lines 56–8).[89] The double exclamation and doubled action of turning towards the sublime creates a concourse through which the mature poet encounters his younger self at the sublime moment:

The picture of the mind revives again;

While here I stand, not only with the sense

Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts

That in this moment there is life and food

For future years (lines 62–66)

Wordsworth's repetition of the conjunctive 'again' and 'I' signals the temporal interlocution between the poet now and the poet then as both are here united in the act of standing sublime ('While here I stand'). That this is directly correlative to Wordsworth's poetics is accounted for by the seemingly gnostic use of language which is later developed in *The Prelude*. In standing sublime at this moment, Wordsworth is replicating his younger self in 1791 standing

[89] Kelley highlights the significance of the aesthetic depiction of the Wye, stating 'Wordsworth re-invents the Wye as a complex scene of aesthetic instruction', in *Revisionary Aesthetics*, p. 59.

on the summit of Snowdon. However, the visionary 'picture of the mind' which 'revives again' prefigures the versified sublime consummation of 'the perfect image of the mighty Mind / Of one that feeds upon infinite' of 1805. Therefore, Wordsworth is not so much visionary as prophetic in recognising that 'in this moment there is life and food [poetry] / for Future years' (line 66). It is a profound interchange between the poet then, now, and to become, a prescient interfusion of sublime poetics.

Wordsworth performs another return to nature in which he considers his youthful flights in extended locodescriptive simile: 'when like a roe / I bounded o'er the mountains by the sides / Of the deep rivers and the lonely streams' reflecting that 'nature then / […] To me was all in all' (lines 68–76). The seemingly disjunctive imprimatur which begins the penultimate verse paragraph 'I cannot paint / what then I was' (the description of the poet in youth being extended across stanzas with this notable interjection) reveals the compositional strategy intent on sublimity (lines 76–7). Wordsworth is reiterating his footnote to the Alpine sublime of *Descriptive Sketches* in which he disdains 'the pencil' [picturesque]: 'Whoever, in attempting to describe their sublime features, should confine himself to the cold rules of painting would give his reader but a very imperfect idea of those emotions which they have the irresistible power of communicating to the most impassive imaginations'. This is confirmed by the intensified sublimity of the proceeding description:

> The sounding cataract
> Haunted me like a passion; the tall rock,
> The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
> Their colours and their forms, were then to me
> An appetite, a feeling and a love
> That had no need of a remoter charm
> By thought supplied, or any interest
> Unborrowed from the eye. That time is past,
> And all its aching joys are now no more,
> And all its dizzy raptures. (lines 77–86)

Wordsworth again converges with the aesthetic preference of his predecessor Burns who had written in analogous terms about the shared 'joys' and 'raptures' of the sublime: 'There is scarcely any earthly object gives me more — I don't know if I should call it pleasure, but something which exalts me, something which enraptures me — than to walk in the sheltered side of a wood or high plantation, in a cloudy, winter day, and hear a stormy wind howling among the trees & raving o'er the plain'.[90] However, Wordsworth's depiction of the sublime here, borrowed from *The Vale* and later perfected in book 2 of *The Prelude* is essentially 'earthly', the mode of 'feeling' is depicted in its pre-stage form as somatic '*aching* joys', '*dizzy* raptures' (lines 85–6). This is extended by the switch in tense from the 'me' of youthful, physical experience, to the 'I' who has progressed from such 'earthly' vision and homonymously 'faint' poetic voice: '[…] not for this, / Faint I, nor *mourn,* nor *murmur*; other gifts / Have followed' (lines 86–8). Wordsworth's developed poetic perception is then articulated in sensory terms having 'learned to look on nature' and to hear 'the still sad music of humanity' (lines 89, 92). It is this 'sense' which emerges in the poem's culmination and Wordsworth's great credo of the sublime.

> And I have felt
>
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
>
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
>
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
>
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
>
> And the round ocean, and the living air,
>
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
>
> A motion and a spirit, that impels
>
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
>
> And rolls through all things. (lines 94–103)

The 'obscure sense of possible sublimity' felt when the Wordsworth of his juvenilia was yet with 'faculties still growing' is shown to have matured into a definitive 'sense sublime'. Physical feelings turn to those of 'elevated thoughts' at which moment this

[90] Burns, 'First Commonplace Book' [April, 1784], pp. 45–6.

activated sense is able to poetically achieve the ‘intense unity’ of sublime consummation by way of the poet’s cumulative use of anaphora and polysyndeton; repeating conjunctions which bind abstractions into a unified conduit. There is an absolutism to the interfusion of nature and mind; an omnipresent, omniscient power climatically versified into a repeated and reverberant ‘All’. Out of this oneness, the Wordsworthian ‘I’ emerges superimposed with his former self:

> Therefore am I still
>
> A lover of the meadows and the woods
>
> And mountains, and of all that we behold
>
> From this green earth, of all the mighty world
>
> Of eye and ear (both what they half-create
>
> And what perceive) -- well-pleased to recognise
>
> In nature and the language of the sense,
>
> The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
>
> The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
>
> Of all my moral being. (lines 103–112)

Yet ‘A lover’ of the natural and ‘earthly’ world of the senses, Wordsworth is now able to ‘recognise’ the complete sense of the sublime as being in nature, poetry (‘language of the sense’), and mind (‘anchor of my purest thoughts’).

The final stanza of ‘Tintern Abbey’ develops the form of the verse epistle of *An Evening Walk*, becoming an earnest benediction of Dorothy Wordsworth (‘And this prayer I make’) (line 122). Yet, it may also be read as a poetic ordination. The poet’s address is of the thrice intoned bardic rite ‘thou, my dearest friend, / My dear, dear friend’ (lines 116–7). That this gestures towards the spectral guide of *The Vale*, whose thrice performed action matriculates the young poet into visionary power is confirmed by anagnorisis in which the speaker recognises the semblance of his younger poetic self: ‘and in thy voice I catch / The language of my former heart, and read / My former pleasures in the shooting lights / Of thy wild eyes’ (lines 117–120). Wordsworth’s dialectic ameliorates the poetic (‘voice’, ‘language of my former heart’, ‘read’) with the sense sublime of visionary power constructed by the

pervasive synecdoche of ‘eyes’ (‘shooting lights of thy wild eyes’). The prayer itself is a calling upon nature to attend to Dorothy in a sublimity of lunar light and misty mountains which prefigures *The Prelude*’s Snowdon passage. However, Wordsworth’s switch to metaphorical language signals the shift from natural to poetic which anticipates his further capitulation of visionary power:

> Therefore let the moon
> Shine on thee in thy solitary walk,
> And let the misty mountain-winds be free
> To blow against thee. And in after-years,
> When these wild ecstasies shall be matured
> Into a sober pleasure, when thy mind
> Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms,
> Thy memory be as a dwelling-place (lines 135–142)

> Visionary Power
> Attends upon the motions of the *winds*
> Embodied in the mystery of words.
> Inhere darkness makes abode, and all the host
> Of shadowy things do work their changes there,
> As in a *mansion* like their proper home;
> Even *forms* and substances are circumfused
> By that transparent veil with light divine;
> And through the turnings intricate of Verse,
> Present themselves as objects recognis’d.

In flashes, and with a glory scarce their own.[91]

Wordsworth's prayer to his sister is an ordination to the visionary power of the sublime poet; attended to 'upon the motions of the winds' ('let the misty mountain-winds be free / to blow against thee') yet 'embodied' in poetry. The response to nature is shared, the 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' being recapitulated from Wordsworth's own 'dizzy raptures' and 'aching joys', to Dorothy's 'wild ecstasies'. Once recollected in the 'sober pleasure' of tranquillity, the mind becomes a 'dwelling place' for the poetic, a gnomic 'mansion' which in the 'shooting lights' and 'gleams' of his sister's 'wild eyes' are 'recognis'd / In flashes, and with a glory scarce their own', the 'forms of beauty', the 'lovely forms', the 'forms and substances' which are for William as are hoped for Dorothy the 'forms of bright perfection' of the poetics of the sublime. Whatever Keats's assessments of his predecessor's 'egotistical sublime' here Wordsworth is instead committed to a shared sublimity of future prospect powerfully symbolised by both brother and sister standing sublime 'We stood together' (line 152).

[91] Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, book II, p. 58, lines 321–341.

Chapter 7.

Conclusion: Devotion Shared.

> An auxiliar light
> Came from my mind, which on the setting sun
> Bestowed new splendour; the melodious birds,
> The fluttering breezes, fountains that run on
> Murmuring so sweetly in themselves, obeyed
> A like dominion, and the midnight storm
> Grew darker in the presence of my eye:
> Hence my obeisance, my devotion hence,
> And hence my transport.[1]

> As I have made several Voyages upon the Sea, I have often been tossed in Storms, and on that occasion have frequently reflected on the Descriptions of them in ancient Poets. I remember Longinus highly recommends one in Homer.[2]

This study began by promoting a circular model of the sublime in which nature, mind, and poetry, revolve, feeding impression into expression, magnifying, generating, and magnifying still more the experience of the sublime. Chapters throughout have presented recorded instances of this circular performance, such as Wordsworth quoting Beattie in hearing the 'murmurings of the sea' during a walk, or Stoddart misquoting Burns in his encounter with the 'sublime and terrific scene' of the Falls of Foyers. Rather than rely on these small moments, the directive throughout has been to trace a larger movement, perhaps not quite so simplistic or circular, but one which nevertheless feeds into itself from its own development. Beginning with Addison's seminal work in his 'Pleasures of the Imagination' series, in which

[1] Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, II: lines 387–395, p. 60.
[2] Addison, 'Spectator No. 489' [Saturday, September 20th, 1712], p. 316.

attention was shifted away from a strictly rhetorical understanding of the sublime, towards a new focus, or rather, vision, of the 'like dominion' of the natural sublime, I have attempted to show (as the author himself acknowledges above), that the power of nature and that of poetry are inextricably intertwined. That such a revelation held true throughout the earlier part of the eighteenth century is accounted for by the period's most successful theoretical summation with Edmund Burke's *Enquiry* in 1757. This pivotal moment in the discourse on the sublime, remains, however, limited by its own abstract conceptualisation of a power found immediately in the forces of nature, but only elegiacally in the passages of 'ancient Poets'. Chapter 2 then argued that James Macpherson harnessed the power of these ancient poets in his translations of Gaelic ballads, from which he conscripted the obscuring, mosaiced potential of fragmented poetry, completed into the esteemed might of the epic. The imitative styling of Macpherson's poetics reasserted the sublimity of these ancient forms with his use of Biblical parallelism and provocative profusion of metaphor. Yet Macpherson was also able to challenge the work of the ancients by rendering a poetics which shaped its landscapes and heroes in line with the period's developing fascination with the grandeur of nature. The Ossianic sublime emerged as a supernova event in which the role of the poet, iconised in Macpherson's blind bard, was promoted as archetypically essential to the genesis of sublime poetry.

The following chapter then traced a less pronounced, and certainly less recognised, poetic undercurrent which stemmed again from the exemplary work of Addison and was brought to fruition by Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient Poetry*. Percy, indebted to the imprimatur of Addison, reneged on the traditional forms of the sublime, for a simpler vessel with the ballad. Indeed, the simplicity of metre and image throughout Percy's collection show unequivocally the potential of the sublime to permeate this popular, although critically ostracised form. Essential to the ensuing success of Percy's promotion of the ballad was his matriculation of the poetic figure of the minstrel, a more contemporary, and like his choice of form, accessible figure which could compete with the new bardic vogue inaugurated by Macpherson. Yet for all Percy's otherwise successful efforts to establish the minstrel and minstrelsy within the roster of sublime poets, the absence of that vital figure throughout his collection left his work still largely unrecognised for the aesthetic provenance of its poetry. James Beattie's Edwin populated this vacancy, and the poetics of the sublime reached a notably heightened progression in *The Minstrel; or The Progress of Genius.* With nods to both Spenser's *Faerie Queen* and Macpherson's *Ossian*, Beattie drew primarily from the

work of his predecessors Addison and Percy in ameliorating the ballad and balladry within his own selection of neo-Spenserian stanza. In presenting Edwin atop a precipice, standing sublime, Beattie instigated the instance in which the poet is shown fully engaged in the experience of the sublime moment. This would provide the archetype of the paradigmatic figure of sublime poet for the period which followed, known now as the Romantic.

Acknowledged today as one of the chief promoters and exemplars for the poetic achievements of the Romantic period, Burns's vision of the sublime has remained overshadowed by his renown for the vying sentimental aspect of his work. However, Burns's intelligent acts of legerdemain throughout his prose and poetry attest to the poet's ambitions to stand alongside his predecessors, Percy and Beattie, and ultimately to compete and succeed Ossian as Scotland's national bard. The comparison is all the more vivid in terms of how Burns was able to achieve this status. Whilst Macpherson had waged a successful although controversial campaign to transmediate Gaelic ballads into supposedly 'ancient' epics and in doing so matriculate his Celtic Ossian into the roster of blind bards, Burns pursued a more 'lowly' sublime found throughout his native Ayrshire, playfully mocking his own rustic role as 'bardie'. His championship of these local scenes, his faithful crafting of the standard habbie, and his use of Scots allowed for a new vision of the sublime, one which would alter the course of poetics indefinitely. The inheritor and new captain of such a course would be William Wordsworth. I have endeavoured to show that Wordsworth's sublime was not so much 'egotistical' as poetical. A sublimity gleamed from study, emulation, and sadly ire, regarding the work of a Beattie, Burns, Percy, even a Macpherson, at the last. The poet's reverence of poetry was only outmatched by his 'devotion' to nature, and it was this 'interfusion' from which his 'sense sublime' prospered throughout his early work until attaining the summits of Simplon and Snowdon. Rather than defer to this brief summation of chapters to conclude this work, I wish to evidence such claims (as I have attempted to do throughout), with a reading of poetry, which in epitomising this project, will also draw it to its necessary conclusion.

> Nature through all conditions hath a power
>
> To consecrate, if we have eyes to see,
>
> The outside of her creatures, and to breathe
>
> Grandeur upon the very humblest face

Of human life. I felt that the array

Of outward circumstance and visible form

Is to the pleasure of the human mind

What passion makes it, that meanwhile the forms

Of Nature have a passion in themselves

That intermingles with those works of man

To which she summons him, although the works

Be mean, have nothing lofty of their own;

And that the genius of the Poet hence

May boldly take his way among mankind

Wherever Nature leads, that he hath stood

By Nature's side among the men of old,

And so shall stand for ever.[3]

The passage opens by situating nature upon a place of consecrating power, a promotion which Addison had largely initiated at the beginning of the century. In the spirit of Burns, Wordsworth speaks of this consecration of power as an impression of sublimity which can inspirit 'the very humblest face of human life'. The canticle for nature is interrupted by the inclusion of the poet, the distinctly Wordsworthian 'I' which now commands a metonymic store of poetry ('outward circumstance and visible form') and the sublime ('passion'). Two different forms are presented as initially distinct, the visible forms subject to the passion of the poet, and the forms of nature which are of inherent passion or sublimity. What follows can be read as an outline of the entire programme of this thesis- the ascent of the sublime poet. Wordsworth understands that the sublime is not subject to poetic shape or substance, as I have has also suggested- formal precepts do not qualify sublimity, the meanest ballad may contend with the loftiest epic. It is only through this synergetic 'intermingling', (in which we recognise the 'interfusion' of the poet's credo at Tintern), of nature and poetry does the 'genius of the Poet' progress (as Beattie eponymously claimed). Attaining the summit, the

[3] Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, XII: lines 282–298, p. 462.

poet stands sublime 'by Nature's side' as Edwin, and 'among the men of old' as Macpherson and Percy would have it. In a simple poem written at the grave of his predecessor, Wordsworth articulates this unifying force of nature and the coming together of sublime poets:

> True friends though diversely inclined;
>
> But heart with heart and mind with mind,
>
> Where the main fibres are entwined,
>
> Through Nature's skill,
>
> May even by contraries be joined
>
> More closely still.[4]

This study of the sublime has brought together an otherwise disparate collection of poets who either despised the other or revered them. The different modes in which they wrote are as varied as the typological occurrences which unite them. I have hoped to show that such contraries, however, can be read 'entwined' as part of a genealogy of sublime poets who each shared the same 'devotion', 'obeisance' and 'transport'. Nor is this set exclusive. A decade before Wordsworth, William Blake recognised this interfusion as a 'marriage' in stating 'Without Contraries is no progression'.[5] Nor is it a peculiarly masculine mantle as Wordsworth's dedication to his sister has shown. Indeed, Leask has proven that Dorothy far exceeded her contemporaries in capturing in prose the sublimity of the Scottish landscape.[6] Finally, this is not an ending at all, but rather, a very well-versed beginning in which the poetic outpourings of the Romantic period are seen to emerge. Yet, if the formidable studies of Monk, Nicholson, Weiskel, and others account for Wordsworth as the archetypical poet of the Romantic sublime, I have hoped on my part to show otherwise. That it was not a lonely summit on which the great poet of the Romantic period stood, but one to which he ascended

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[4] Wordsworth, 'At the Grave of Burns' [1803], in *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. with introduction and notes by Thomas Hutchinson (London: Henry Frowde, 1904), lines 43–48, p. 285.
[5] This journey into the sublime began with Blake, initiated by receiving a copy of Thomas Merton's *The Seven Story Mountain* [1948] from a monk in a small monastery in Hungary when I walked alone from Paris to Palestine at the age of 19. In that autobiography Merton studies a PhD programme on the work of Blake, and it was then in which I first encountered that great poet of the sublime. It is therefore fitting that I should close with his 'eternal' words. William Blake *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* [1793], ed. with introduction and commentary by Michael Phillips (Oxford: The Bodleian Library, 2011), line 7, p. 62.
[6] Leask describes Dorothy Wordsworth's *Recollections of a Tour Made in Scotland* as being 'perhaps the masterpiece' of all the tour journals written during this period. See for example her description of the vista from 'Inch-Devannoch' on Loch Lomond in *Recollections*, p. 88. Leask, *Stepping Westward*, pp. 206–7.

with the guidance of others from whom he inherited a poetic praxis he, and they, deemed infinite: 'The types and symbols of Eternity'.[7]

[7] Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, Book VI, p. 206, line 571.

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