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Ossian Abroad: James Macpherson and Canadian Literary Nationalism, 1830-1994

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Oscar! Chief of every youth! Thou seest how they have fallen. Be thou, like them, on earth renowned. Like them the song of bards. Terrible were their forms in battle: but calm was Ryno in the days of peace. He was like the bow of the shower seen far distant on the stream; when sun is setting on Mora, and silence on the hill of deer. Rest, youngest of my sons, rest, O Ryno, on Lena. We too shall be no more; for the warrior one day must fall.
—*James Macpherson*, Fingal, *Book V.*

Say, gentle Muse,—say, is thine influence shed
Only where Ætna rears her fiery head?
Where Virgil sung, and Tiber's waters flow;
And Ossian felt thy genial aid and glow?
Or, like the air around, whose vital power
Warms every land and breathes on every shore,
Does every clime thy kind indulgence share,
And sweet success attend each suppliant's prayer?
—*A member of the Pictou Literary and Scientific Society,* The Pictou Indians *(1847)*

Oisín, the third-century Irish bard is still known most widely as James Macpherson's "Ossian." Unfortunately, Macpherson has become synonymous with literary forgery. Published between 1760 and 1765, and allegedly collected from the folklore preserved by Highland crofters, many of Macpherson's "translations" of the epic battles of the Scottish "Ossian the son of Fingal, King of Morven" were based only loosely on what he had found in manuscripts, ballads, and traditional tales.[1] While the authenticity of *Fingal* (1762) and *Temora* (1763) was immediately challenged, it was not until 1897 that the German Celticist Ludwig Stern was able to establish Macpherson's authorship of the works (O'Halloran 69). Authentic or not, Macpherson's "translations" remained popular for much of the nineteenth century, not only in Scotland but also Britain, Germany, Ireland, and North America. Perhaps something in Macpherson's melancholy evocation of

rugged, isolated and sublime landscapes touched the hearts of emigrants and exiles; Napoleon took Cesarotti's Italian translation with him to St. Helena, and many travellers to Canada brought a reading acquaintance with Ossian to their new homes, judging by the frequency of allusions in nineteenth-century poetry, novels, and travel writing. In Canada, Ossian occupies a significant thematic position in the work of a number of emigrant poets, and in at least two modern Canadian novels.

As an elegiac portrayal of a lost, Scottish heroic age, Macpherson's work invented a sense of continuity among the distant past, recent Jacobite defeats, and a beleaguered Gaelic culture in Macpherson's present. His fabrications underscored the fragility of his culture even while perpetuating it in a new form. Viewed in a sympathetic light, Macpherson's actions look forward to similar acts of cultural preservation in both Scottish and Canadian contemporary literature. In his comparative study of Neil Gunn's novels and Alistair MacLeod's short stories, Christopher Gittings focuses on Scottish writers and writers of Scots descent, but his observations can be applied to nineteenth-century emigrant writers as well. Writers in Canada and Scotland, countries "where the cultural past has been obscured by the exclusive historiography of English imperialism," return in their fiction to "moments of disjunction" that result from emigration (Gittings 93). The characters in these short stories and novels attempt "to recover parts of themselves and their cultures through a reconstruction of the lost peoples in their ancestral pasts from the remnants of oral narrative, music, and the ruins which mark the landscape" (Gittings 95). For Scots, Irish, indigenous, and Metis cultures in Canada, history becomes less a verifiable narrative than "an absent presence" containing "intersecting and dislocating moments" (Gittings 103). In Canadian literature, Macpherson's Ossian becomes the site at which writers can explore the intersection of cultures. The ancient bard demonstrates how an imported literary form can underscore a writer's need to establish parallels between his or her own ancestral culture and any familiar detail in the new landscape in order to overcome a sense of alienation.

The imaginative reconstruction of the Scottish Ossian or the Irish Oisín in Canadian literature establishes common ground not merely between the Old and New Worlds, but between colonial and post-colonial literatures, and nineteenth- and twentieth-century writing. In order to illustrate the continuity of some themes illustrated by the presence of Ossian/Oisín in the literature of the past two centuries, it will be useful to look at the treatment of Macpherson and his Celtic bard in the following works: Standish O'Grady's *The Emigrant* (1841), Adam Kidd's *The Huron Chief* (1830),

Thomas D'Arcy McGee's poem, "The Celts" (1869), James McCarroll's novel, *Ridgeway: An Historical Romance* (1868), Agnes Maul Machar's *For King and Country: A Novel of 1812* (1874), Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners* (1975), and Jane Urquhart's *Away* (1993).

The poetry and legends associated with Ossian came from a number of written and oral sources, particularly the Irish Fionn Cycle that originated in Munster and Leinster, but eventually became part of the Gaelic oral culture of Scotland. Macpherson borrowed freely from both Scottish and Irish folk tales and from medieval manuscripts, including the twelfth-century monastic compilation of Fionn tales, the *Acallam na Senórach* (*Colloquy of the Ancients*), in which Ossian encounters the Christian St. Patrick, and defends the world view and ethos of his defunct civilisation (*Oxford Companion to Irish Literature* 5). Heroes such as Cú Chulainn from the unrelated Ulster Cycle were then added into the mix. Existing simultaneously in oral and written form, in Gaelic and English translations, Oisín's appearance in Canadian literature raises complex questions of origin and authenticity for students of colonial and post-colonial literature in Canada.

The association of specific regions with a history of fallen warriors, battle sites and ruins in both Macpherson's publications and his Irish manuscript sources provided as invaluable an example for early Canadian writers as it did for Scottish and Irish nationalists by offering heroes who were characterised by eloquence and magnanimity. Macpherson's portrait of the ancient Celts offered a literary model for writers wishing to portray non-European Canadian society, a model that promised to give the Canadian landscape a history distinct from Britain and offered indigenous heroes for the Canadian pantheon.[2] For example, in his travel account, *The Great Lone Land: A Narrative of Travel and Adventure in the North-West of America* (1872), W.F. Butler alludes to Ossian when he speculates that a natural facility for poetry arises from the local attachment formed by aboriginal cultures in North America:

> [The Indian] has learnt the lesson which the great mother Nature teaches to her sons through the voices of the night, the forest, and the solitude. This river, this mountain, this measureless meadow speak to him in a language of their own. Dwelling with them, he learns their varied tongues, and his speech becomes the echo of the beauty that lies spread around him. Every name for lake or river, for mountain or meadow, has its peculiar significance, and to tell the Indian title of such things is generally to tell the nature of them, also. Ossian never spoke with the voice of the mist-shrouded mountain or the wave-beat shores of the isles more thoroughly than does this chief of the

> Blackfeet or the Sioux speak the voices of the things of earth and air amidst which his wild life is cast. (243)

Whether they are aboriginals or ancient Celts, Butler admires non-literate peoples for their presumed ability to convey the "peculiar significance" of a place through its name or description. One of the sources Macpherson studied also provided examples of the way that the history and character of a specific place could be portrayed. The *Acallam na Senórach* featured an Irish literary tradition called the *dinnshenchas*, essentially "the lore of prominent places." The *dinnshenchas* was a poetic tradition based upon "a mentality in which the land of Ireland is perceived as being completely translated into story: each place has a history that is continuously retold" (*Oxford Companion to Irish Literature* 150). Ossian's poetry thus may have provided some of the inspiration for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century artists seeking "local colour" in their own literature.

I.

The translations Macpherson published between 1760 and 1763 appear at a crossroads of history and culture. The very success that England had in imposing its mercantile system and laws on supposedly less civilised Gaelic societies in Ireland and Highland Scotland ironically left readers nostalgic for the imagined freedom and simplicity of those same societies. As Fiona Stafford notes, "in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Europe, the need for an alternative to the polite urban society of the Enlightenment was very real" (50). Macpherson's fabrications were rapturously received because they filled this need. Stafford suggests that Macpherson's work fulfilled pressing personal and cultural needs as well.

His work was, in fact, partially a response to recent historical events that had pitted the English against the Scots:

> It is not surprising that James Macpherson should have perceived his native culture as being in danger of extinction and thus his subsequent efforts to preserve the disappearing remnants of the oral tradition should be seen in the contemporary context. Macpherson's collection of the old heroic poetry was, at least in part, an attempt to repair the damage sustained as a result of the Forty-Five. . . . [T]he aftermath of the [Jacobite] Rebellion heightened Macpherson's awareness of the vulnerability of his culture. (Stafford 44-45)

Macpherson's fear that the oral tales he collected might eventually survive only in English translations may even account in part for the sustained mel-

ancholy of the works. According to Hugh Blair, who wrote a critical introduction to the poems, "Ossian is perhaps the only poet who never relaxes or lets himself down into the light and amusing strain. . . . One keynote is struck at the beginning and supported to the end . . . the events recorded are all serious and grave, the scenery throughout, wild and romantic" (859). Blair thought this was a good thing, though other critics have taken issue not only with the authenticity but also with the all-too-pervasive Celtic gloom. Nevertheless, Ossian's dwelling on fallen chieftains and vanished glory not only provided "wild and romantic" scenes for Canadian writers wishing to present their own local regions in an interesting light, but also seemed an apt model for nationalists in Scotland and Ireland, and for emigrants from those countries who were smarting from recent English victories.

While sharing nationalist aims with the Scots, the Irish were nevertheless the loudest voices denouncing Macpherson's translations as inauthentic. They had the most to lose from Macpherson's success. Worse than the abduction of Oisín was Macpherson's gibe that "it would be as ridiculous to think that Milton's *Paradise Lost* could be wrote by a Scottish peasant as to suppose that the poems ascribed to Ossian were writ in Ireland" (qtd. in *Mere Irish* 343). Irish critics were quick to point out that Ossian, "the Scottish Homer," was not Scottish at all, but Oisín the Irish poet-warrior, the son of the legendary hero, Fionn MacCumail. They insisted that any claim to Scottish origins for the poems was based on a confusion arising from the medieval Latin term for Ireland, Scotia (O'Halloran 74). To prove the Irish origin of Oisín became "a matter of national honour" in Ireland (*Mere Irish* 346). Consequently, Macpherson's public claim that the Irish were too primitive to conceive such poetry became as much a goad as an insult. He inadvertently encouraged scholars to take a second look at Ireland's vast wealth of manuscripts and folklore that until then was regarded as the recondite preserve of a few aristocratic Irish-speaking scholars. Irish antiquaries now set about translating and publishing folklore and manuscripts to establish Oisín's lineage.

As an irritant introduced into the body of Irish scholarship, the Ossian controversy ultimately produced pearls of varying quality, in Charlotte Brooke's *Reliques of Irish Poetry* (1789), the translations of Theophilus O'Flanagan, founder and contributor to the *Transactions* of the Royal Irish Academy (1807), in Thomas Moore's early Ossianic "effusions," Lady Morgan's novel *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806), and, ultimately, in W.B. Yeats's first published book of poetry, *The Wanderings of Oisín* (1889). The works of Moore, Owenson, O'Flanagan, and Brooke are particularly relevant to

Canadian literary nationalism, as their works are acknowledged, directly or indirectly, in the Canadian writing of O'Grady, Kidd, and McGee. Moore's influence particularly was acknowledged by a significant number of writers in nineteenth-century Canada. Kidd dedicated *The Huron Chief and Other Poems* to him, McGee and McCarroll credit him with founding a literary tradition in Canada in *Canadian Ballads* and *Madeline and Other Poems* respectively, and he is an indirect influence in O'Grady's work.

Neither Moore's famous poetry nor Kidd and O'Grady's writing could have existed without the work of pre-Romantic eighteenth-century antiquarians such as the Anglo-Irish Brooke and the Gaelic-speaking O'Flanagan. The cultural gap created by the very different backgrounds of these two scholars was bridged through their involvement with a particular early form of Irish nationalism, Patriotism. Conservative in nature, and primarily Anglo-Irish in origin, this movement both preceded and in some ways evolved into the Romantic nationalism of the nineteenth century. Patriots were committed to responsible citizenship and the active improvement of society, and a moderate defence of Anglo-Irish privilege (providing the responsibilities that accompanied privilege were fulfilled) (*Mere Irish* 300). Encompassing the ideas of writers and thinkers such as Swift and Berkeley, Irish Patriots rejected traditional and Anglo-centric Tory/Whig factionalism and called for "virtue in public affairs" (*Mere Irish* 122) as a way to distinguish Irish interests from those of England. In 1782, Patriot ideas were given form in a nominally independent Irish legislature known commonly as Grattan's Parliament. To feel a sense of political responsibility to one's country presupposed a strong national identity; the writers aligned with the Patriot movement used their work to inspire the sort of local and national affection that they believed was the first step towards assuming self-government. The translations of poems attributed to Oisín in the work of Charlotte Brooke and Theophilus O'Flanagan had a specifically nationalist aim. Brooke published her work as "a Patriot endeavour in the service of her country: hoping to instil some appreciation for native Gaelic culture among the lettered Irish, and hence, to raise Ireland and its culture in the British estimate" (*Mere Irish* 363). One way of rehabilitating Irish culture after centuries of colonization was by reclaiming Ossian from Macpherson.

As late as 1844, at least one Irish-Canadian poet found it necessary for cultural, if not nationalist, reasons to argue that the Irish versions of Ossian's poetry were the authentic ones. In his long poem *The Emigrant*, Standish O'Grady paused in drawing parallels between Joseph Louis Papineau's Lower Canadian rebellion and the United Irish revolt of 1798 to

address the issue of Macpherson's forgeries. O'Grady's tendency to attach Irish historical and cultural footnotes to Canadian subject matter seems less of a digression when examined in the light of Patriot political views that he likely shared with Brooke and O'Flanagan.[3] That the selfish pursuit of private gain by politicians leads to public disorder is the common lesson that O'Grady draws from the Irish and Canadian rebellions in his poem, a sentiment held by Irish Patriots prior to the United Irish uprisings in 1798. O'Grady traces most of Ireland's contemporary misfortunes (including the departure of one Standish O'Grady) to the Act of Union and the dissolution of Grattan's Parliament in 1801. O'Grady argues that, given the opportunity, the Irish would demonstrate "virtue in public affairs" in governing their country. As Charlotte Brooke did earlier, O'Grady uses Oisín to defend the reputation of the Irish as cultivated and civilized. To illustrate that his countrymen were primarily "A faithful people and a virtuous land" (1816), he presents his own versification of an Ossianic fragment as "an uncontroverted display of Irish talent and affection, as evinced by these original poems, even from the most remote ages of Irish history." Intended to refute accusations that Irish uprisings were the evidence of Irish backwardness or barbarity, his fragment is based not on Macpherson's work but on a literal translation by "the erudite and accomplished Theophilus O'Flanagan, B.A" (O'Grady 95). O'Grady calls the reader's attention to this fact, noting that the fragment comes from "the [Ulster] tale of Deirdri (not Dartula)—a name so modified by the author of Ossian" (O'Grady 95).[4] Like O'Flanagan, a Catholic scholar at Trinity whose "unobtrusive influence spread widely through Irish antiquarianism" and who showed his own Patriot leanings by the fact that he "dedicated his translation to none other than Henry Grattan" (*Mere Irish* 425), O'Grady links the ownership of Ossian to the ongoing nationalist project that Leerssen called "the vindication of Irish civility" (*Mere Irish* 257).

While O'Grady's poem supports Irish ownership of Ossian, or Oisín, he does not resist exploiting his reader's acquaintance with Celtic gloom, popularly associated with Macpherson's fallen warriors. As a supporter of Henry Grattan and the aims of the Patriot party, O'Grady mourns the dissolution of the Irish Parliament. His elegiac treatment of former Anglo-Irish patriots echoes the cadences in which Macpherson honours fallen heroes:

> How changed the scene from those of other times
> When proudest patriots knew no foreign climes,
> And in our senate envied statesmen clung,
> To hear persuasion from a Grattan's tongue . . .

Those days are gone when Irish hearts would cheer
A Burke, a Bushe, a Ponsonby once dear
Who midst the torrent bore the thunder's shock
Where cringing placemen shuddered as they spoke;
Then Ireland famed for words, and deeds of arms,
Securely stood nor feared a world's alarms—
With allied strength, no *vassals* to a *throne*
And sought no brighter laurels than their own—
In vain we plead, thy patriot voice is crushed,
Thy minstrel's chords, thine harp itself is hushed.
(349-64)

By wrapping his description of the parliament in a cloud of Ossianic gloom, O'Grady implies that Ireland had lost not simply its independence but, more precisely, the voices of eloquent and disinterested Patriots who could defend Ireland's well-being to Britain and the world beyond by using words rather than violence

Coinciding with and in fact supported by the Patriot movement was a resurgence of pride in national Irish identity as distinct from the larger British state. One manifestation of this renewed interest in Irish culture was a mid-eighteenth-century call "to create a literature distinguishing itself by its *couleur locale* from the 'mainstream' English literature" in which "Ireland's 'natural beauties' and the 'genius of its inhabitants' rose in close conjunction with each other" (*Mere Irish* 352). O'Grady seemed willing to follow this directive in celebrating the distinctiveness of both Irish and Canadian society. His descriptions of the landscape of Quebec suggests that he continued to be disturbed by the idea that Scotland had taken the credit for Irish innovations, even while Ireland laboured to free itself from the stereotype of backwardness and rebelliousness. Contrasted to the "gigantic crags" that are "fair Scotia's boast" (813-815) is the more rolling, cultivated landscape surrounding the Quebec Ile de Orléans in the St. Laurence River, in O'Grady's day a popular recreational retreat for "care worn Cits" (695).

Since Orléan's convivial mixture of natural beauty and social pleasures puts O'Grady in mind of the companionship and musical traditions of the Irish high society that he has left behind, he is able to offer an image of Irish culture and manners to offset the popular stereotypes of ragged peasants and fiery rebels. In a poem characterised by frequent digressions from Canadian subjects, O'Grady invokes the memory of popular Irish pipers of the early nineteenth century, especially Edward Nagle (d.1816), an uillean piper from O'Grady's home county of Cork.[5] "Well might a Nagle's soul

awake" to the scenery and entertainment offered at Orleans, O'Grady writes, before installing him in a pantheon of musicians drawn from both classical and Gaelic sources:

> Blest soul of song, who best informed the tree
> To speak soft harmony when touched by thee;
> Weep all ye groves, let heavenly Orpheus now
> Wake the dark woods, and rend the mountain's brow;
> Whilst at thy presence famed Anacreon rise,
> And Pan himself invite thee to the skies,
> Let old Silenus quaff more nectared wine,
> And Ossian hail thee 'mong the powers divine. . . .
> (845-852)

Like Ossian, and like the orators of Grattan's Parliament, the Irish musicians commemorated by O'Grady are now silent. *The Emigrant* reflects a period in Ireland characterised by a lack of nationalist direction, sectarian politics, the death of Grattan and the rise of the Catholic populist politician Daniel O'Connell. O'Grady's dwelling on the ascendancy of Scottish culture makes the silencing of a coherent Irish Patriot voice more poignant:

> Harp of our Isle! And thou fair Scotia's reed
> That oft led on to many a martial deed,
> Why slumber thou, alike thy veterans gone,
> While Scotia's Pipe still leads to victory on?
> (855-858)

O'Grady thus tries to associate a Canadian landscape with the local colour and social pleasures of the new life he was attempting to build for himself in Quebec. However, in his own admission, the Canadian landscape lacked "objects . . . to engage that attention and effort of genius which might otherwise awake something of more engaging matter" (Preface). He remained too firmly attached to his native region and its heroes and artists, and so even the most beautiful Canadian landscapes merely reinforce a sense of alienation, while the Irish and Scottish rivalry over the ownership of Ossian provides an imaginative hook upon which he hangs a lengthy comparison of Ireland's lost glories and his present exile. As he assesses both the present and the past culture of Ireland, O'Grady's mood remains melancholy, since he is forced to recall not only the eclipse of the values he shared with the Patriots, but also his sense of cultural disjunction when portraying Canadian culture and politics.

II.

Oisín was a cultural source that straddled Classical and Romantic views of culture and politics. Conservative patriots alluded to him in order to mourn the loss of a parliament controlled by the protestant ascendancy. The more radical United Irishmen alluded to Macpherson's fallen heroes to commemorate comrades lost in the bloody conflicts that flared up in several regions of Ireland in the spring and summer of 1798. The ferocity on both sides of the conflict, and the especially nasty official retaliation in the form of pitch-cappings, floggings, and gibbets challenged the concept that the Irish were living in the Age of Enlightenment, and encouraged them to look to their past for a model of Irish society free from sectarian violence. Irish interest in Ossian implied "a turning away from contemporary English civilisation and the bitter religious identities of the recent Irish past" (Hutchinson 56).

The Irish-Canadian poet Adam Kidd was born in Ulster within memory of a time when his region, historically the most Gaelic province in Ireland, had borne the brunt of the United Irish rebellions and loyalist yeoman reprisals in 1798 (Campbell 89). As with O'Grady, the Canadian landscape provided moments of cultural disjunction for Kidd, who found an "imaginative correlative" between what had happened in Ireland and what was happening to the Huron in North America (Edwards 376). According to the rhetoric and ballads of United Irish writers, Britain had benefited from the sectarian divisions it had imposed between the Catholics and Dissenters who were disenfranchised in Ireland, but played off against each other by the established church and government (Thuente 239). In *The Huron Chief*, Kidd's main satirical targets are the American and English missionaries, whose attempts to convert the Huron—whom Kidd perceptively calls a "nation"(67)—introduced the fallen world of sectarianism to what he sees as a North American Eden. Allusions to Macpherson's Ossian allow Kidd to draw symbolic parallels between ancient Celts and native Canadians, who in his portrait resemble the polite warriors of Macpherson's translations. For the epigraph to *The Huron Chief*, Kidd uses Macpherson's translation of an "extempore composition" recounted to him by a highland "chief": "Where are our Chiefs of old? Where our Heroes of mighty name? / The fields of their battles are silent—scarce their mossy tombs remain!" (Explanatory Notes, 69). The choice of quotation calls attention to the ignored or neglected cultural and archaeological sites that remind European settlers of the presence of an older culture in America, while casting over the poem an elegiac gloom suitable to both Ossian's fallen heroes and a beleaguered native culture.

Kidd's attitude to Macpherson may owe something to the example set by the popular Irish novelist, Sydney Owenson (Lady Morgan), whose work he seems to have admired.[6] In her novel *The Wild Irish Girl* (1807), Morgan had supported the Irish claim to Oisín, while exploiting the reader's assumed familiarity with Macpherson's more widely known and commercially viable version (O'Halloran 92). While Kidd quotes Macpherson, he later notes that the rich and rigorously preserved oral heritage of the Huron of the village of Lorette in Quebec is passed down through the generations "with the same precision, interest, and admiration, that the Tales and exploits of Ossian and his heroes are circulated in their original purity, to this day, among the Irish" (Kidd 25n).

The interaction between the poem's unnamed narrator and his Amerindian hosts is complex, and again may have been influenced by material that Macpherson exploited in his Ossianic poems. In spite of being a member of a culture and religion that is threatening Huron national identity, the narrator comes to identify the Huron "nation" with the nation of Ireland, another obvious victim of "Europe's crimes and Europe's errors" (1078), and, like the Huron, the subject of aggressive religious proselytising that brought division instead of Christian harmony.[7] Allusions to Ossian make events in *The Huron Chief* appear to be merely the latest example of a Christian society displacing a Pagan one. In the *Acallam na Senórach*, Ossian lives with the immortal *Sidhe* in *Tir na nOg* for centuries, then returns to Ireland as a very old man. There he encounters St Patrick, the representative of the Christian culture that has supplanted his own. In *The Huron Chief*, the European narrator encounters the Huron "chieftain of the mountain" (141), described as "a hoary chief whom age delays on" (134). In this encounter the narrator, like a member of the monastic culture founded by St. Patrick, sets down in writing the oral heritage of the pagan culture whose decline he not only witnesses but unwillingly assists.[8]

Armed with the example of Ossian and the work of Irish antiquarians, emigrant writers created works that were not merely derivative, but instead constructed cultural parallels among Ireland and Scotland and Canada. One natural consequence was the revelation of similar national aspirations of people who may at first glance have appeared to have very little in common. The literary archaeology conducted by Irish scholars to uncover Gaelic Ireland inspired popular Irish poets and novelists. In turn, Lady Morgan and Thomas Moore may have inspired Adam Kidd to seek out the hidden or neglected histories suggested by the burial mounds left behind by Huron culture. That Kidd's view of indigenous peoples as "noble savages" is a limiting and inaccurate portrayal of that culture is unarguable;

however, the fact that emigrant writers found in Macpherson's depiction of wild, uncultivated landscapes and poetic inhabitants a congenial model for portraying the New World is itself significant. It suggests that emigrant poets in Canada recognised that the way to develop local affection in their Canadian readers was to call attention to the unwritten history of their new home.

III.

Although his writings about both Ireland and Canada are largely neglected, today Thomas D'Arcy McGee is widely recognized for taking the next necessary steps in bridging the gap between emigrant and Canadian-born writers in order to develop a national literature in Canada. Born in Carlingford, Co. Louth, McGee began his career as a protégé of the Irish painter, scholar, and journalist George Petrie (1790-1866), whose portraits of round towers and monastic ruins created a visual counterpart to Macpherson's poetry. McGee then joined the Irish revolutionary and cultural organization Young Ireland, which was greatly influenced by the work of German nationalist philosophers, including Karl Friedrich Schlegel. When McGee paraphrases Schlegel's dictum, "no national literature, no national life" (*The New Era*, June 17, 1857), he anticipates Yeats's phrase, "there is no nationality without literature, no literature without nationality" by nearly forty years (*Remembrance* 209). The author of *The Irish Writers of the Seventeenth Century* (1846), McGee was committed to popularising the Irish intellectual and cultural history that went on independently even in the most active era of English colonisation. In his researches into the work of Irish antiquarians, and his publicizing of their material in nationalist verse, McGee restores Ossian to the Irish by establishing what he considers the poet's correct cultural and historical context. Unlike Macpherson's Ossianic poems, "The Celts" portrays the ancient Irish as learned and moderate, rather than primitive and wild, emphasizing their artistic accomplishments rather than their martial exploits.

"The Celts," which was written after McGee left Ireland but not published until after his death, may have been influenced by German philosopher Johann Gottfried Von Herder's critical writing on Macpherson. Herder's own interest in Ossian arose out of a concept of nationality based on the organic distinctions arising from the environment, language and history that shaped a culture. Believing "a nation's earliest most spontaneous poetry [to be] the true voice of the nation" (O'Neill 101), Herder used the example of Ossian to persuade German poets to turn away from classical

French models and draw instead on the folklore of their own country for poetic subjects. McGee's concept of the modern national poet's role is also modelled on Ossian, whom he portrays as an "inspired giant" whose art preserved an image of an Irish golden age that would provide the model for "one pupil of the past, as mighty soul'd / As in the prime / Were the fond, fair, and beautiful and bold— / They of your song sublime!" (177). McGee's belief that poetry enlarged the soul and inspired the actions of would-be nationalists may have come from his Young Ireland mentor, Charles Gavan Duffy, who wrote that "Poetry has been named the 'sister of religion'" (*The Ballad Poetry of Ireland* xxix). In McGee's poem, the forces of religion, nation, and art are united when he portrays the Celts as "western shepherd-seers" who pray "with fire-touch'd lips" (176) to the Goddess Bride, patron of fire and the hearth, and more significantly, of art and poetry.

Young Ireland leaders Duffy and Thomas Davis had argued that it was not sufficient for the Irish to know their history; they needed to imaginatively re-live significant moments in the development of their nation through painting and literature. This is likely why McGee invokes Ossian, while calling for a modern poet who could restore their history and culture to the Irish people. More than versified history, "The Celts" uses the example of Ossian to address a cultural crisis in the writer's "own time," namely a colonial occupation that has erased nearly all memories of native Irish institutions, language, and culture. Like the work of Celtic and Anglo-Irish antiquarians in the eighteenth century, "The Celts" is an act of cultural recovery. Even though the language in which Ossian wrote is inaccessible to most of McGee's readers, the poet's fame has survived "two thousand years of mist and change." Moreover, McGee's claim that Ossian survives in Irish popular culture supports his point that poetry can preserve the essential identity of a nation where history and monuments cannot. "The very name of Finn and Gaul sound strange," McGee writes, anticipating the subject of Brian Friel's play *Translations* (1981), "yet thine the same—by miscall'd lake and desecrated grange—remains and shall remain" (177). Even though "The Celts" was written after McGee emigrated, it still outlines Young Ireland's role for the poet: to achieve "the moral regeneration of the national community" and to restore "historical memory" so that he could "inspire his community to ever higher stages of development" (Hutchinson 9).

When Young Ireland split into cultural and paramilitary factions, McGee reluctantly supported the belligerent side. After their failed uprising in 1848, McGee fled arrest in Ireland. Among his emigrant compatriots

in America and then in Canada, McGee continued the Young Ireland cultural program of popularizing Irish history and culture. He set up a pro-Irish newspaper, *The American Celt*, in Boston, wrote a history of Irish settlers in North America, and chronicled Irish intellectual, military and material contributions to American and Canadian life. His writing suggests he was growing less interested in liberating Ireland from the British than in liberating Irish emigrants from ignorance and poverty in North America. Attracted to Canada after a speaking tour, McGee soon became a prominent advocate of Canadian literary nationalism. As early as the eighteen-fifties, he repeated his call for a national poet, this time one who could unite disparate nationalities within Canada through a shared historical past. He asserted that poetry had more profound and far-reaching effects than military might in preserving a nation's integrity and culture, and develops this theme in the preface of his *Canadian Ballads* (1858) when he writes, "it is, indeed, glorious to die in battle in defence of our homes or altars; but not less glorious is it to live to . . . preserve the traditions of our country" (vii-viii).

Canadian Ballads celebrated not only the Irish, but also the French, English, Scottish, and First Nations people who built the nation. Far from threatening to supplant a fledgling Canadian culture, the imported cultures of Ireland, Scotland, England, and France provided imaginative models for uncovering and immortalising defining moments in Canadian history. Even before Confederation, McGee wrote in his *New Era* article, "An Exception Answered":

> Should the nationality we desire draw near in a short time, distinct *Irishism*, like every other *ism* founded on race, will gradually dissolve in it as drift ice does in the gulf stream. . . . We believe the fragments of all old nationalities are and ought to be politically absorbed in the new, but we believe the new Patriotism itself must form the part of solvent, and by its genial and generous atmosphere mould the materials already existing on the soil. These may be by events transmuted into native forms, but they cannot be de-characterised by any abstract reasoning or preliminary setting forth of the mere grounds of change.

For McGee, the foundation of Canadian traditions on Old World cultures prevented the harmful deracination that Herder predicted would be the fate of emigrants torn from their native soils (Berlin 177). The gradual transformation of settlers into Canadian patriots came, McGee believed, from a mutual respect that arose from shared historical moments.

As the national poet who infuses historical events with the spark of imagination, Ossian appears in the work of another Irish-Canadian poet, James McCarroll, a contemporary of McGee whose work today is also largely forgotten.[9] It could be argued that McCarroll's view of nationalism is in direct opposition to McGee's, since he valorized the Fenian invasions of Canada in *Ridgeway, a Historical Romance*. Whereas McGee had dismissed his own Irish revolutionary activities as "the follies of one and twenty," McCarroll rebelled in relative old age, after he felt betrayed and abandoned by his Canadian political patron, John A. MacDonald (Peterman 28-31). Nevertheless, McCarroll uses Ossian in a way that follows the pattern set by earlier cultural nationalist programs in Ireland and Canada.

Like O'Grady and other Irish-Canadian writers, McCarroll dismisses Ossian's Scottish ancestry in his novel, *Ridgeway*: "Mac Pherson's [sic] Poems of Ossian . . . are not the real poems of Ossian, but mostly fictions fabricated by Mac Pherson himself, and containing some passages from the ancient poems" (68). Unlike McGee, who emphasized the culture and the spirituality of Ossian and the ancient Celts, McCarroll takes pains to emphasize their military skill. He portrays Ossian, "the celebrated warrior and bard," as commander of the Fenians, "a famous military force, forming the standing national militia" (68, 67). Even so, McCarroll remains more poet than soldier because he views the recovery of history and culture as the primary force uniting or inspiring Ireland to military action against a foreign aggressor. The name "Fenian" was chosen deliberately by organizations in Ireland and America who, though committed to change through force rather than words, valued its cultural associations. McCarroll values Ossian and the Fenian warriors he commands because their history is "free from any unpleasant reminiscences" (70); that is, they are distanced from sectarian division and from historically unsuccessful nationalist movements. "The name "Fenian is of very remote antiquity. . . . There seems to be nothing sectional in it. It is national in the broadest sense of the term, and primitive and forcible to intensity" (66).

Ironically, an ancient name becomes associated with a group that McCarroll hopes will set a new political course for Ireland. McCarroll writes that the "rarity of the name" was valued because it "stimulated enquiry on the part of the curious or weak nationalists . . . and moved the inquiring patriot to look into Irish history in relation to it; and in this matter a knowledge of much of the ancient greatness of Ireland became the common property of those who were formerly but slightly acquainted with such lore. The result was, thousands of the Irish became interested in relation to the past of their race; for, in connection with this name there was

that which was calculated to arouse a spirit of patriotism within them and lead them on to a further perusal of the annals of their country" (70). McCarroll's novel follows earlier cultural programs in Ireland: the ownership of Ossian vindicates Irish character, while stimulating cultural recovery and local affection in Irish readers. Still, *Ridgeway* contains a paradox that reveals the "complex and difficult" situation of both McCarroll and of any emigrant with a strong love of his home country and an active engagement with the new (Peterman 32). While a disillusioned McCarroll turned his back on Canadian politics, in his novel, Ossian once again becomes an unwitting sojourner in the New World, as Irish nationalist aspirations are played out in part on Canadian soil.

IV.

Ossian is among the common cultural elements and historical events that unite a collection of emigrants with equally conflicting loyalties in Agnes Maule Machar's 1874 novel, *For King and Country: a Story of 1812.* Ossian appears in the novel as a source of pride to Scottish immigrants, but Machar downplays the controversies surrounding his origins, unlike McCarroll and O'Grady. While sectarian battles and agrarian unrest were less serious concerns in Canada than in Ireland, tensions caused by factors such as the rise of Orangeism in Canada still existed. Other rivalries between Canada's "founding nations" were indicative of the newly-confederated country's growing pains, which was perhaps why Machar chose an earlier historical crisis as the focus of her patriotic novel. In it, the distinct traditions of each culture become a foundation for Canadian nationalism. Like McGee, Machar argues that emigrants' attachment to their countries of origin contains the seeds of local affection in Canada. Where McGee proposed a "new patriotism" as a "solvent" that would blend different nationalities, Machar proposes blood: the War of 1812 demands the ultimate sacrifice of several of the novel's characters. However, as in McGee's preface to *Canadian Ballads*, the transformation of emigrants into Canadians is also achieved by creative means, as seen in the character Marjorie McLeod, the over-imaginative daughter of a Scottish officer. Marjorie's enthusiasm for Macpherson's poetry inspires her to write unintentionally parodic Ossianic effusions. When General Isaac Brock, the object of Marjorie's infatuation, dies in battle, she cries herself to sleep, "her favourite Ossian beside her, open at Malvina's lament for her lost hero" (250). An example of the type of "old-time heroine" deplored by novelist Sara Jeannette Duncan, Marjorie nevertheless possesses an imag-

ination powerful enough to transform "old nationalities" into "native forms." Her interest in the lore associated with the Canadian landscape helps redirect her hereditary Jacobite loyalties. While "as intensely Highland in her feelings and sympathies as any chieftain's daughter" (133), she has an emotional attachment to any aspect of her surroundings that reminds her of sublime and storied landscapes described in "her treasured copy of Ossian":

> Many a summer hour had been dreamed away over these poems among the old whispering pines, when the wind, "soughing" among their dark boughs, seemed to breathe the wailing tones of the ancient bard. . . . Whoever might dispute the authenticity of the poems, she believed most firmly that "Fingal fought and Ossian sang;" and they opened entrancing glimpses of the old, old times of her father-land—times so dim and shadowy in the far-away past. They coloured her feelings, almost unconsciously to herself, and influenced her reception of natural influences. When she visited the Falls, she used to think how the soul of Ossian would have delighted in the roar of many waters . . . and in the Indian legend of the spirit of the thunder crouching beneath the mist and the surging waters in the awful chasm. The Indian legends, which she delighted to collect when she had an opportunity, seemed to come the nearest of anything she knew to the wild old songs; even, as she fancied, the grave sad Indians, with their silent, dignified ways, and their occasional grandeur of speech—when they did speak—must resemble to some extent the warriors of Fingal and Ossian. (116)

Machar's treatment of Macpherson in this passage supports McGee's theories of national literature and also Herder's assertion that the earliest voice of a nation survives in Ossian's poetry, its authenticity easily recognised even by those born in another country. While not quite ready to allow the indigenous cultures to speak for themselves, Marjorie, as first-generation Canadian, is at least able to use Ossian to draw imaginative and sympathetic parallels between her absent hereditary landscape, and the *genius loci* of Canada. Through the example set by Macpherson, a landscape that many Canadian writers had deplored as bereft of cultural memories or local spirits becomes imbued with historical and heroic associations by a first-generation Canadian whose perceptions have been shaped by her knowledge of her family's original home.

By the eighteen-eighties, the frequency of allusions to Ossian in Canadian poetry, fiction, and travel literature began to decline. Irish-Canadian poets such as Nicholas Flood Davin and Isabella Valancy Crawford, while writing on Irish subjects, seemed equally at home with the mythologies of other cultures, including those of aboriginal Canadians. This suggests that

McGee's exhortations that poets uncover and publicize Canadian subject matter, including the present challenges in the lives of Irish emigrants, had succeeded.[10] Canadian poets were becoming increasingly confident in writing as Canadians. Nevertheless, while interest in Ossian was declining in Canada, renewed and increasingly sophisticated philological studies conclusively repatriated him to Ireland, where his name was enlisted in the cause of the Irish Literary Revival.

V.

While necessary to a fledgling tradition of nationalist literature written in Canada, the adoption (or appropriation) of Old-World and indigenous myths and legends could crystallize into a less benign form of nationalism. When a sense of belonging becomes a sense of entitlement, a once-marginalized culture may forget both its past and the dispossessed people in its present. This cultural amnesia is of concern to many contemporary writers and critics, and is a preoccupation in two late-twentieth-century Canadian novels, *The Diviners* and *Away.* Both writers are well aware of the dark side of exclusionary nationalism characterized by twentieth-century genocides and "ethnic cleansing," but their works also endorse the acts of remembrance, imagination, and creativity necessary to a national identity. However, each writer deliberately destabilizes that identity even as she imagines it. Where nineteenth-century writers were often more concerned with establishing Ossian's authenticity in order to stake a claim for their chosen national literature, Urquhart and Laurence emphasize the multiplicity of forms in which Ossian's poems exist, and the impossibility of tracing these multiple versions to one agreed-upon source.

In *The Diviners*, allusions to the Ossianic controversy again seem appropriate in a work in which the novelist heroine interrogates her own past and her place in Canadian history: "Who has been real and who has been imagined? All have been both, it seems" (268). Among the intricate threads of the novel run the narrative of the Highland clearances that displaced Morag's ancestors, the oral history of the Metis who were in turn displaced by the emigrant Scots, and the embroidered tales that Christie and Morag create from painfully excavated family histories. Initially, Ossian's example helps Morag much as it had helped Marjorie in Machar's novel, by allowing her to feel her way towards a sense of belonging in her community and culture. As Lynn Pifer notes, "Morag gleans elements of truth from the oral accounts that she cannot find in the printed authorities." The tales that Christie tells Morag help her identify "with her own ethnic

group, the Scots" and allow her to develop "pride in her family history and herself" (Pifer 148). While the poems of Ossian come to Morag in a book belonging to Christie, he treats them as "performative" works by reading them aloud (Pifer 144). He also establishes a sense of continuity between their life and the life of their Scottish ancestors by insisting that the poems he reads to her are the "real old songs" as they had been "recited" by Highland crofters and "handed down over the generations" (73).

Morag discovers Ossian's poems just at the moment when she is in serious need of her own vindication of character. She has become increasingly aware of her low status in the narrow-minded community of Manawanka. Her teachers' disapproval of her impoverished home life is subtly linked in the novel with the school's English-dominated literary syllabus. Christie's book of Ossian's poems is rescued, like his other treasured objects, from oblivion in the town dump, where it has been consigned by the more prosperous descendants of the Scots, English, and Irish settlers who were the beneficiaries of nineteenth-century imperial expansion in Canada. But Christie dismisses the claim in the book's preface that the poems are "forgeries" by asserting that "the English were bloody liars then as now" (73). His refusal to allow an English writer the final say on what is authentic and what is forged is correct in both fact and spirit: Macpherson's first publication, *Fragments of Ancient Poetry Collected in the Highlands of Scotland* contained his translations of the Fionn and Ulster cycles that he collected from the inhabitants of the Scottish Highlands and outlying Islands. More important, the tales remembered and preserved by Scottish crofters present Morag and Christie with eloquent and heroic reflections of their distant past, when the official versions of events contained in school textbooks and military histories barely mention them at all. The poems Christie recites may not be exact transcriptions of oral tales. Moreover, even though the histories he recounts sometimes contain exaggerations and inaccuracies, they help to teach Morag, the apprentice novelist, the importance of what ordinary people experience and feel in their lives (Pifer 144).

The questions of origin and authenticity raised by Macpherson's translations point to the underlying indeterminacy that Ken Mclean sees Laurence exploiting so that she can "undermine the dominant WASP (white Anglo-Saxon Protestant) discourse of Canadian history" (McLean 98). Laurence's "privileging of the primitive over Western imperialist cultures" (McLean 98) recalls the attraction that Ossian had for nineteenth-century writers in Germany, England, Ireland, and Scotland. However, Ossian is also used subversively in *The Diviners*. The name "Clowny Macpherson,"

a character in Morag's early fiction, is a reference to Macpherson that "tends to undermine the authenticity of the tale" Morag is writing (McLean 99). At the same time, the book of Macpherson's translations that Christie shows Morag supports McLean's own claim that the novel is a centrifugal, not centripetal text in its treatment of myth.[11] If Clowny Macpherson can be seen as a trickster figure with hidden talents, then Macpherson's own elaborate ruse sheds light on Laurence's complex vision of myth and history, fact and fiction. Events that Morag records in the novel are both "all true and not true" (99), just as Macpherson's translations were both fabrication and yet based on actual tales he collected in the Highlands.

The ambiguities surrounding the origins of Ossian's poetry may even help to prevent Morag's own renewed pride in her origins from becoming an exclusive, xenophobic vision of the world in which the weak merely switch places with the oppressors when they gain strength. Even Christie's version of historical events harbours unexamined racist views of the Metis, but Morag begins to see the connections between her history and the history of all marginalized and silenced peoples. Unlike Christie, she is less interested in Ossian's poetry as a record of the martial prowess of the ancient Scots, and more in its use as a creative model for her own work. Looking at "the strange words, unknown now, lost, as it seems to all men, the words that once told of the great chariot of Cuchullin" (74), Morag is initiated into a sense of the gaps and silences in her own personal history, a realization that later helps her empathize with others.

Christie's book also exposes Morag to details that seem aesthetically true to her Manitoba landscape. While the Ossianic models she uses for her earliest attempts at poetry are as imported as the temperate daffodil in the Wordsworth poem that so enrages Christie,[12] they show her how to incorporate family history, local place names, and indigenous plants in her juvenile fiction:

> Morag, upstairs. Writing in her scribbler. This one is nearly full, and what it is full of is a long story about how Piper Gunn's woman, once the child was born, at the Red River, went out into the forest and built a chariot for them all, for Piper Gunn and herself and their girlchild, so they could easily move around in that country there. She cut down the trees and she carved out the chariot. It was not a wagon. It was much fancier. . . . (97)

In a manner that has fortuitous parallels with McGee's poem "The Celts," Morag's chariot is converted from an instrument of war to a poetic vehicle that enables the emigrant to orient herself and negotiate her way through the new land. The imaginary chariot is as much a product of the Canadian

landscape as it is of Scottish culture with its "seat covered in green moss (she said velvet at first but where would they get it?)" and "carvings of deer and foxes and bears . . . meadowlarks . . . tall grasses . . . spruce trees and spruce cones . . . polished stones for jewels" (97-98). Both Wordsworth's and Ossian's legacy to Morag is the realisation that poetry can be created as readily from the indigenous materials of Manitoba as it can from the Highlands or the Lake District. The transformation from emigrant to native is accomplished, as McGee asserted, as much through imagination as through politics.

McGee, Oisín, and the power of poetry (both good and bad) are at the centre of Jane Urquhart's novel *Away.* As in *The Diviners*, the presence of Oisín reveals the intersections and displacements of several cultures. Urquhart consciously connects the Romantic nationalism of the nineteenth century with contemporary concerns by juxtaposing the history and mythology of nineteenth-century Irish emigrants with what Herb Wylie calls a "twentieth-century narrative that . . . illustrate[s] the dangers of historical myopia, an expedient and fetishized preoccupation with the immediate" in "our present global capitalist era" (43). The vulnerability of the Irish culture preserved in the O'Malley family's history is emphasized by the fact that the novel is narrated by the aged Esther, the last surviving family member. At the same time, the narrative suggests the tenacity and power of oral history. As in *The Diviners*, oral culture is seen as both subject to erasure and as an important corrective to a sometimes-distorted official history of imperialism. Esther herself is aware of both the conservationist intent of her narrative and its part in a continuity of even older narratives when she compares herself to "an Irish poet from a medieval bardic school. She is aware that those men and women lay in their windowless cells for days, composing and then memorising thousands of lines, their heads wrapped in tartan cloths, stones resting on their stomachs. Esther has neither rocks nor plaids with her in this bed but shares with the old ones a focused desire. Nothing should escape" (133). The oral histories in the novel not only reveal experiences outside the margins of imperial narratives but also provide an analogy for both the fragility and persistence of memory. Memory is ultimately portrayed as more enduring than landscape itself, which can be "demolished, burned, ripped apart, or buried" (155), often in the name of commercial interests.

Oisín becomes an appropriate motif for the novel, as the oral histories, poetry, and lore of Aboriginal and Gaelic cultures are continually aligned with ecological concerns in *Away.* Moreover, Gittings's definition of emigrant culture as both familiar and disorienting anticipates one of the

novel's more suggestive images of two worlds connecting: the Venn diagrams that Esther recalls drawing at school, shading in "the place where the two circles intersected; a small dense area with white empty pools on either side" (133). Like the diagram, the O'Malley family history causes "one circle of experience to edge into the territory of another" (133), making sense of and redeeming Gittings' "empty spaces of history." The recalled absences, the "mourning for abandoned geographies" (128), become the common ground between Irish and Aboriginal cultures in the novel. Significantly, the symbol of intersecting worlds takes on the shape of "a single willow leaf lying on the page," a natural and living image of shared remembrance, which offers cultural defence against the imperialist and commercial activities that threaten both identity and environment in the novel's present.

Local affection for a specific place becomes the point at which the emigrant and native circles of experience intersect in *Away.* As a young woman, Mary was "away"—possessed by the memory of an Irish "demon lover," whose spirit, she believes, has followed her to Canada and occupies a small lake. Dismissed as superstition by her husband, Mary's reverence for the *genius loci* of her new home wins her the respect of the local Ojibway people who help hide and protect her when she abandons her family. In Ireland, Mary possessed an inborn gift for poetry and imagination, the ability to "twist a sentence into song" (75). That Mary is reunited with her supernatural lover in Canada suggests that those who are perceptive to the spirit of a place can learn to love and appreciate the inherent uniqueness, or essence, of a new land.

Like *The Huron Chief*, *Away* deplores non-reciprocal proselytising, and offers in its place a more respectful and tolerant means of sharing narratives. Exodus Crow's father had explained his people's mythology to European missionaries, but while he was expected to accept the missionaries' world-view, the missionaries scoffed at his, and thus blinded themselves to the lore that animates the country for the Ojibway. It is not by chance that Exodus recounts this experience after Mary tells him "about the poet Oisín who had disappeared into Tir na nOg, the land of the young, and who had returned centuries later to argue for the old ways and the old beliefs with he whom Oisín called Patrick of the Crooked Crozier"(179-180). The allusion to Oisín becomes a bridge between Irish and Amerindian, a connection that eventually encourages Mary to recount the "time of the stolen lands of her island, and of the disease, and of the lost language and the empty villages and how the people who once sang were now silent, how the people who once danced were now still" (184). The Irish famine thus

becomes a chilling counterpart to the smallpox and influenza epidemics, the official abolition of Aboriginal religious ceremonies, and the residential schools that became the legacy of European/Aboriginal contact. Sharing their histories allows Mary and Exodus to acknowledge "that the same trouble stayed in the hearts of both our peoples" (184-185). As in *The Huron Chief*, the oral stories that have survived all attempts at eradication allow Irish poets to establish sympathetic parallels with an equally threatened culture.

Urquhart is more explicit than Kidd is in showing the danger of idealizing Celtic or Amerindian culture. Presumably, Mary's stories of Oisín and Fionn are the direct oral inheritance of the peasants of Rathlin Island. As Christie realizes in *The Diviners*, when folklore is set down in writing it is in danger of having its authenticity judged and its forms determined by a dominant culture. Urquhart implies that the translated and written versions of Ossian's poetry helped to perpetuate a viewpoint that saw the waning of Huron and Gaelic culture as historically inevitable. For instance, the Anglo-Irish landlords Osbert and Granville Sedgewick are collectors of folklore much in the way that their father was a taxidermist of their region's fauna. They visit the homes of their tenants, who obligingly make up new ancient tales so as not to disappoint the young masters, much like Macpherson did for his eager readership. Granville composes laments no doubt influenced by Macpherson's Ossianic gloom, unintentionally "support[ing] this delicate balance of injustice and defiance on one hand and sorrow and poetry on the other" (44).

Urquhart implies that it is easier for emigrants to transform themselves into landlords than into lovers of the new land; the former transformation is caused when the Irish forget the incidents of loss that are preserved in much of their oral history. Ironically, it is the sense of past vulnerability that causes a partial failure of imagination in Liam and Eileen, Mary's children. Liam literally experiences a form of historical amnesia, recalling little of his grisly time in the coffin ships and fever sheds that were his introduction to the New World. His first memory of the new country is the imposing white "Canada House" that he sees upon disembarking (136-137). In his eagerness to deny a past that caused his family to lose their foothold on their native land, he is in danger of transforming the suggestively named Canada House into the traditional "Big House" of the Irish landlord, even though Eileen reminds him of the hidden history of aboriginal settlement and English confiscation that allows the lakeside property to pass into his hands (279).

Brian redeems himself when he marries an Irish-Ojibway squatter instead of evicting her family, but Eileen's errors are more complex and more devastating. Her predicament in some way reflects the difficulties faced by Irish nationalists in recovering a usable tradition after being separated from what Edward Said calls the "generative lineaments of the national identity" by conquest or emigration (Said 237). In *Remembrance and Imagination*, Joep Leersson acknowledges the historical and cultural voids that "invented traditions" attempt to fill: "Such phenomena testify to the scantiness of hard factual knowledge concerning the Irish past and to the deep-seated need to glorify and embellish that past, to see it in the rosy hues of romance and exoticism. . . . It is an attitude which seems to prosper in a climate where the continuity of history has been disrupted and stigmatised, and people attempt to reconstitute and revalorise it on the basis of scant data" (84-85).

Born in Canada, and knowing Ireland primarily from the images and stories she learned from her disillusioned Irish father, the lonely and lovesick Eileen succumbs to a militaristic fantasy of Fenian warriors:

> The bands of wild rovers, desperate warriors for justice, and heartbroken Irish nationalists that she had concocted as a family for Aidan Lanighan were never still in her mind. They galloped over hills with the wind in their hair. . . . They ran by night with the moon on their shoulders. . . . They had in their bodies the energy of the young horses she remembered pounding recklessly through the dawn fields. . . . They were brothers-in-arms, fiercely loyal, and their arena was the new dominion. (293)

Fionn's band of outlaw warriors, the *Fianna* of Oisín's poems, would have been local heroes to the inhabitants of Rathlin Island. Like Granville Sedgewick's limited appreciation of local legends, Eileen's image of Irish heroes has been imaginatively divorced from the real tribulations and poverty of the people for whom they were a living oral tradition. Her image of Irish culture is derived from the back issues of the pro-Fenian paper *The Irish Canadian*. Its printed form reminds the reader that Eileen is relatively privileged when compared to her lover Aidan, a famine refugee raised in the slums of Montreal who cannot read. Eileen has re-fashioned Aidan as an exotic revolutionary, when it is actually McGee's vision of an inclusive future for all Canadians that fires his imagination. Her inability to see the real Aidan, and his inability or unwillingness to communicate his true ambitions to Eileen causes her to be an unwitting participant in the assassination of McGee.

Paradoxically in the novel, McGee's concept of nationhood demands that his listeners relinquish the past by picturing a country in which "there would be no factions, no revenge for old sorrows, old grievances" (337). Instead, he envisions "a sweeping territory, free of wounds, belonging to all, owned by no one" (337-338). This vision is not the same as historical amnesia, however; it requires a form of imaginative empathy that does not value the history of one culture above others. Urquhart's novel features the final public speech of D'Arcy McGee, in which he addresses his audience "not as the representative of any race and province, but as the forerunner of a generation that would inherit wholeness, a generation released from fragmentation" (338). In the novel, the speech reflects McGee's historical connection with a literary and cultural nationalism in Canada that depended upon the experiences and the diverse traditions of many founding nations, a nationalism that he described in "The Mental Outfit of the New Dominion" as "ready to learn from every other people on the condition, that the lesson when learned has been worth acquiring" (2). In "The Celts," the poet Ossian had challenged the Irish to see what was in front of their eyes: a rich cultural inheritance that had been obscured or distorted in English versions of their history. In *Away,* McGee's nationalism helps to orient Canadians in their new land: McGee, Eileen claims, "put me in my place" (350).

Even if McGee is seen as a positive force in the novel, *Away* departs from the confident construction of myths that was sometimes characteristic of nineteenth-century literary nationalism. McGee has a dream of unity that is undermined by the fact that the novel's portrait of Canadian settlement is part of a larger, age-old narrative of "the world's great leavetakings, invasions and migrations, landscapes torn from beneath the feet of the tribes. . . . And all the mourning for abandoned geographies" (128). Rather than inheriting wholeness, Esther discovers that her generation will only find its footing in the present by putting together the fragments of the past. As in *The Diviners*, the multiplicity of sources for Ossian helps to introduce indeterminacy into the novel, forcing the characters, as well as the reader, to re-examine their own notions of origins and place.

Neither Urquhart's nor Laurence's centrifugal treatment of Ossian entirely undermines our need for imaginative reconstructions of the past. The presence of Ossian/Oisín in Canadian literature provides an interesting continuity in a culture that was once that of natives and newcomers, and then one coming to terms with a post-colonial identity. Canadian literature continues to be concerned with uncovering the shared and hidden aspects of our history, just as Irish nationalists, encouraged or goaded by

the example of Macpherson's forgeries, in turn forged a literary identity out of their new-found awareness of a hidden Ireland. A contemporary model of cultural and ecological conservation has been suggested by D.M.R. Bentley, one which requires "a knowledge of Canada's past, a recognition of the uniqueness of the country's environment and peoples, and a sense of a shared future: these are the ingredients of a benign nationalism which, by honouring diversity within the Canadian community, can provide a major source of resistance to the forces of globalisation and homogenisation" (7). Viewed as imaginative artificer, Macpherson may have been spurred by a similar desire to preserve a unique national voice in an era of imperial expansion. His reconstruction of Ossian inadvertently enriched the cultures of many nations, each of which could make an authoritative case, if not for the ownership of Ossian, then for Ossian as model for a national poetry of its own.

Notes

Michael Peterman of Trent University first alerted me to the existence of James McCarroll's poetry and prose. The Irish musicologist Sean Donnelly generously shared his research on nineteenth-century pipers with me. I am also grateful to the two anonymous readers of this article for their helpful comments.

1 While *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* (1760) was based directly on Irish and Scottish manuscripts and on oral tales that Macpherson collected on a tour of the Highlands and islands in 1760, the later epic poems, *Fingal* (1762) and *Temora* (1763), were composed by Macpherson himself and bore only a slight resemblance to the original materials. To complicate matters, when Macpherson's critics demanded the Gaelic poems, he had his own writing translated into Gaelic, and handed that over instead (*The Oxford Companion to Irish Literature* 348). For more information on Macpherson's use of Scottish and Irish material, see Clare O'Halloran, "Irish Re-Creations of the Gaelic Past: The Challenge of Macpherson's Ossian" *Past and Present* 124 (1989): 69-65; and Derek S. Thomson, *The Gaelic Sources of Macpherson's "Ossian"* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1952).

2 It is not at all surprising that Scottish visitors to Canada such as Patrick Campbell, Captain of the 42nd Regiment, Edinburgh, would have a reading acquaintance with Ossian, or would be tempted in their travel writings to draw parallels between the ancient Celts and aboriginal peoples. After a conversation about religion with Joseph Brandt, Campnell noted that "his discourses brought to mind a conversation on traditionary rumours that passed between Ossian, the son of Fingal, and Patrick, the first Christian Missionary he had seen" (*Travels* 174).

3 The contradictory aspects of Standish O'Grady's life, given great clarification by Brian Trehearne's biographical research, are to some degree reconciled when he is seen as a supporter, not only of Henry Grattan, but also of the Irish Patriot cause. Identifying O'Grady as a Patriot makes it easier to understand why an Irish-born, English-speaking protestant landholder could have interest in, and sympathy with, Irish demands to be regarded as a nation distinct from England. O'Grady's excessive scorn for Joseph Louis Papineau, whom he viewed as a demagogue, could be explained in part not only by Papineau's professed admiration for the Irish-Catholic leader, Daniel O'Connell (who

was viewed with intense suspicion by protestants from O'Grady's class), but also by the fact that Papineau's followers would have appeared, in the eyes of an outraged O'Grady, to have appropriated the Patriot name when they referred to themselves as *Patriotes*.

4 In 1807, Theophilus O'Flanagan founded the Gaelic Society in Dublin. It included in its *Transactions* the first direct translations of the Irish sources for Macpherson's Ossianic poems, including "Deirdri: or, The Lamentable Fate of the Sons of Usnach," which appeared as "Darthula" in Macpherson's *Temora*. O'Flanagan wanted to draw attention to the debate over Ossian "in the hope that his own translation would enable the reader 'to judge the vast liberties taken with the original by Mr. Macpherson.'" O'Flanagan was no less scornful towards Macpherson than O'Grady, calling Macpherson's appropriation of northern Irish material a "monstrous imposition on the literary world" (O'Halloran 93).

5 O'Grady gives considerable attention to Irish pipers in his explanatory notes to *The Emigrant*. The pipes mentioned in *The Emigrant* were the Union, or *Uillean* pipes. Uillean pipers enjoyed a high stage of popularity during the times to which O'Grady alludes. According to Sean Donnelly, "Between 1780 and 1810 the pipes were being improved in a fairly rapid manner. . . . It was the pipers themselves who claimed any credit" for innovations, which may explain why O'Grady praises Nagle for having "modified the Irish pipes" (O'Grady, Notes 77). While the pipes were traditionally associated with Gaelic Ireland, they were also played by a number of "gentlemen pipers" or well-born amateur players, and many pipers had noblemen, and even bishops, as patrons (Donnelly 85). O'Grady may have chosen to celebrate this class of artists precisely for their connection to the Catholic and Protestant gentry and to Gaelic Ireland. A poem published in Cork in 1817 even makes a tantalising reference to "O'Grady, that fam'd piping Knight" (Donnelly 93), but unfortunately there appears to be no way to connect the poem to the Canadian O'Grady. The Nagle to whom O'Grady refers is almost certainly "Ned [Edward] Nagle the gentleman piper," who died in 1816 at his brother's estate, Glannamore, in Co. Cork, which O'Grady calls Glanmore (Historical Notices of Co. Cork III, 1913). The other pipers mentioned by O'Grady appear to have historical counterparts. There was a Kearns, or Kieran, or Kyran Fitzpatrick, a blind piper who played before George IV. O'Grady was perhaps confused in his reminiscences: he writes that Fitzpatrick played for George III, who never visited Ireland. While O'Grady provides no information on the O'Connor referred to in the poem, it is not implausible that he was Patrick O'Connor (d. 1818), the only prominent piper with that surname in O'Grady's lifetime. Like O'Grady, O'Connor had roots in Co. Cork, inasmuch as he was educated in Limerick. While acclaimed in his lifetime, his "memory seems to have rapidly faded in the years after his death" (Donnelly 85). In Canada, he was assured a very modest guarantee of immortality in O'Grady's poem. I have been unable to unearth any historical basis for O'Grady's account of the abduction of a piper named O'Sullivan by a captain bound for the New World. There were a number of Kerry pipers who had that surname and who were well known in the early nineteenth century. Given the folklore that surrounded pipers (many claimed their best tunes were given to them by the fairies), it is not entirely surprising that a piper might claim to have been "away" in the New World.

6 Like O'Grady, Kidd established the local colour and genius of the inhabitants of his native region by referring to local musicians, and the monuments dedicated to their memory. He seemed to feel that the graveside of the harpist Dennis Hampson (c.1695-1808), was given particular distinction by having "a marble slab, with a suitable inscription" placed over it by Lady Morgan, the novelist and friend of Thomas Moore, who had mentioned Hampson in her novel, *The Wild Irish Girl* (*The Huron Chief and Other Poems* 167).

7 In a letter to the Irish-Canadian paper *The Vindicator*, Kidd condemned the practice of

"American Methodist Preachers" intent upon "the rapid conversion of 'the neglected poor of Ireland!' . . . Do they mean to infer the neglect of Methodist Preachers among the Irish? If so, I consider it a fortunate circumstance for that country, which I am happy to claim as my parent" (*Vindicator*, December 11, 1829). Kidd claimed that both Hurons and settlers alike had been "rendered miserable by . . . religious bickerings about *British* and *American* Methodism." In a letter protesting Catholic disenfranchisement in Ireland, he looked with an envious eye at a culture he felt was free of the kinds of arbitrary sectarian divisions that had been imported from Europe to Canada: "Man is naturally kind to his fellow creature, unless poisoned by prejudice, by bigotry and ignorance. The Indian who enjoys the bounties of his wild inheritance, contends not for superiority over the brothers of his tribe—every man stands on an equal footing, until he has signalized himself by some noble achievement" (*Vindicator*, January 20, 1829).

8 For a more detailed examination of the uneasy coexistence of oral and written cultures in the nineteenth century, see Kelly McGuire, "Effacing 'Mem'ry's Page': the Agon between Orality and Literacy in Adam Kidd's *The Huron Chief*," *Canadian Poetry* 46. McGuire notes that "Kidd's poem anticipates the trend in colonial attitudes to regard the Natives as relics of a dying nation, and, subscribing to . . . 'the doomed culture theory of the nineteenth century,' to undertake extensive projects involving the collection of Native oral legends and lore. . . . The Huron tradition cannot then survive the demise of the Natives, despite even the most valiant efforts on the part of Kidd and other sympathizers to preserve the traditions in written form." While she does not identify any specific parallels between Kidd's activity and the type of cultural rehabilitation undertaken by the Patriots and later Irish nationalist groups, McGuire notes the conservationist intent of Kidd, who, "faced with the possible annihilation of the [Huron] oral culture, seeks to preserve it in the only way available to him, through its assimilation into literate modes of expression" (39).

9 The career of the poet, novelist, journalist, flautist, and composer James McCarroll (1814/15-1892) illustrates the complex hold that Irish culture and poetry had on Irish-Canadian writers. Like McGee, McCarroll balanced involvement in politics with prolific output as a poet, novelist, and journalist. While he never ran for public office, his "spirited support of the reform cause" may have eventually helped him to a position in Customs and to much-needed financial security (Peterman 15). In his "Terry Finnegan" letters, which appeared in a number of popular Toronto magazines between 1861 and 1865, his depiction of the Irish was often much more earthy and pragmatic than the heroic world portrayed in McGee's poems. The letters were addressed to McGee, Finnegan's "cousin," and commented upon the intricate and often acrimonious pre-Confederation politics of the time. Nevertheless, they revealed an intense interest in the fortunes of the country of McCarroll's birth. McCarroll admonished McGee, "whom he much admired, on how best to pursue his own political career and, most importantly, the interests of all the Irish, Protestants and Catholics alike, in the country" (Peterman 22). Unfortunately, McCarroll's satirical gift proved his downfall, as his fortunes were too closely tied to changes in government. He believed that his criticisms of Sandfield MacDonald in the press led to his loss of position of Surveyor at the Port of Toronto. His increasing support for Fenianism, and his vitriolic denunciation of government ministers and bureaucrats made him somewhat of an embarrassment to his patron, John A. MacDonald. In 1866, McCarroll moved to the United States, turning his back on Canadian politics and becoming a spy for the Fenians. Their portrait as heroic patriots in *Ridgeway* "was his literary and practical act of revenge" on MacDonald (Peterman 31).

10 Crawford's long poems *Malcolm's Katie: a Love Story* and *Hugh and Ion* indirectly examine emigrant life by celebrating the self-made pioneer. A poem that deals more specifically with Irish emigrants is "A Hungry Day," which ends with the successful

emigrant in Canada proclaiming, "all men may have the same / That owns an axe an' has a strong right arm!" (*Collected Poems*, 309). Crawford's use of Canadian, Irish and Scottish dialects in her poetry reflects both a contemporary literary fashion as well as her interest in the everyday lives of people in the present. While she appears less interested than earlier Irish-Canadian writers in mythologizing the Irish past (or in the militaristic Fionn Cycle), critics have noted how she mythologizes the story of the pioneer in Canada (see, for example, Bentley, "Introduction," *Malcolm's Katie: A Love Story*, xxxv-xxxvi; xlii-xliii; James Reaney, "Introduction," *Isabella Valancy Crawford: Collected Poems*, xix-xxi; Catherine Ross, *Dark Matrix: A Study of Isabella Valancy Crawford*, Diss., University of Western Ontario, 1975).

11 In "Dividing the Diviners," Ken McLean looks at how Laurence "problemat[izes] what she saw as the dominant historical discourse" that ignored or tried to eradicate Metis and Gaelic versions of historical events (100). While he alludes very briefly to Laurence's use of Macpherson and Ossian, the presence of Ossian's poems in diverse forms in the novel support McLean's dialogic and centrifugal reading. "The accepted view of the mythic tales that Laurence embeds in *The Diviners* is that they contribute significantly to Morag's maturation. . . . But it also needs to be noted that they are radically textualized by their conflicting versions of the past and by the highly subjective, and variable, nature of their validity" (98). The translations, as eighteenth and nineteenth-century scholars found, do not lead back to any one source any more than Morag arrives at the sense of one objective truth in reviewing the events of her life.

12 Elizabeth Waterston has commented upon the ways that the Scottish and Canadian landscape shaped Canadian literary taste in the nineteenth and early twentieth century: "Little wonder that in the nineteenth century Scottish cultural models transplanted so easily. Given our climate, Burns made more sense than Wordsworth. In the brief Canadian springtime, Canadians could relish the small detail of flower or stream, rather than the Wordsworthian vista of lake or mountain" (Waterston 203). Nevertheless, Christie's objections to Wordsworth's poetry are closer to the objections made by writers and critics examined by Karen Welberry in "Colonial and Postcolonial Deployment of 'Daffodils,'" many of whom have deplored the official pedagogical uses of Wordsworth in Britain's colonies, rather than the poem itself. For instance, the writer Meenakshi Mukherjee recalls her desire as "a schoolgirl in India to imitate English upper-class cultural models," or, as she put it, to be "daffodilized" (Welberry 32). (Morag, for her part defensively flaunts her difference in school: "The teachers hate her. Ha ha. She isn't a little flower, is why" [71]). Christie, like many post-colonial critics including Jamaica Kincaid and Albert Wendt, seems to see the daffodil in Wordsworth's poem as "metonymic of 'Englishness'" (Welberry 32), and may on an inchoate level resist the curriculum's presentation of the daffodil and of Wordsworth as benign images of England that are so much at odds with his ancestors' experience. Morag, however, eventually subverts any pedagogical aims in her school curriculum, because she does not reject either Christie's oral culture or the printed literature that she encounters. Morag's interest in Ossian does not lessen her debt to Wordsworth's writing, since his "daffodil poem" itself features the use of "a natural and local subject as deliberate as his use of 'the language really used by men'" (Welberry 35).

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