The poems of Ossian

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

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Conlath and Cuthona

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CONLATH & CUTHONA:

A

POEM.

ARGUMENT.

CONLATH was the youngest of Morni's sons, and brother to the celebrated Gaul. He was in love with Cuthóna, the daughter of Rumar, when Toscar, the son of Kinfena, accompanied by Fercuth his friend, arrived from Ireland, at Mora, where Conlath dwelt. He was hospitably received, and, according to the custom of the times, feasted three days with Conlath. On the fourth he set sail, and, coasting the *island of waves,* one of the Hebrides, he saw Cuthóna hunting, fell in love with her, and carried her away, by force, in his ship. He was forced, by stress of weather, into I-thona, a desert isle. In the mean time Conlath, hearing of the rape, sailed after him, and found him on the point of sailing for the coast of Ireland. They fought; and they and their followers fell by mutual wounds. Cuthóna did not long survive: for she died of grief the third day after. Fingal, hearing of their unfortunate death, sent Stormal, the son of Moran, to bury them, but forgot to send a bard to sing the funeral song over their tombs. The ghost of Conlath comes, long after, to Ossian, to intreat him to transmit to posterity, his and Cuthóna's fame. For it was the opinion of the times, that the souls of the deceased were not happy, till their elegies were composed by a bard.

CONLATH & CUTHONA:

A POEM.

Did not Ossian hear a voice? or is it the sound of days that are no more? Often does the memory of former times, come, like the evening sun, on my soul. The noise of the chase is renewed. In thought, I lift the spear. But Ossian did hear a voice! Who art thou, son of night? The children of the feeble are asleep. The midnight wind is in my hall. Perhaps it is the shield of Fingal, that echoes to the blast. It hangs in Ossian's hall. He feels it sometimes with his hands. Yes! I hear thee, my friend! Long has thy voice been absent from mine ear! What brings thee, on thy cloud, to Ossian, son of generous Morni? Are the friends of the aged near thee? Where is Oscar, son of fame? He was often near thee, O Conlath, when the sound of battle arose.

GHOST OF CONLATH.

Sleeps the sweet voice of Cona, in the midst of his rustling hall? Sleeps Ossian in his hall, and his friends without their fame? The sea rolls round dark I-thona.[i] Our tombs are not seen in our isle. How long shall our fame be unheard, son of resounding Selma?

OSSIAN.

O that mine eyes could behold thee! Thou sittest, dim on thy cloud! Art thou like the mist of Lano? An half-extinguished meteor of fire? Of what are the skirts of thy robe? Of what is thine airy bow? He is gone on his blast, like the shade of a wandering cloud. Come from thy wall, O harp! Let me hear thy sound. Let the light of memory arise on I-thona. Let me behold again my friends! And Ossian does behold his friends, on the dark-blue isle. The cave of Thona appears, with its mossy rocks and bending trees. A stream roars at its mouth. Toscar bends over its course. Fercuth is sad by his side. Cuthóna[k] sits at a distance and weeps.

[i] I-thona, *island of waves;* one of the uninhabited western isles.

[k] Cuthóna, the daughter of Rumar, whom Toscar had carried away by force.

Does the wind of the waves deceive me? Or do I hear them speak?

TOSCAR.

The night was stormy. From their hills the groaning oaks came down. The sea darkly-tumbled beneath the blast. The roaring waves climbed against our rocks. The lightning came often, and shewed the blasted fern. Fercuth! I saw the ghost who embroiled the night.[1] Silent he stood, on that bank. His robe of mist flew on the wind. I could behold his tears. An aged man he seemed, and full of thought!

FERCUTH.

It was thy father, O Toscar! He foresees some death among his race. Such was his appearance on Crómla, before the great [m] Ma-ronnan fell. Erin, of hills of grass; how pleasant are thy vales! Silence is near thy blue streams. The sun is on thy fields. Soft is the

[1] It was long thought, in the north of Scotland, that storms were raised by the ghosts of the deceased. This notion is still entertained by the vulgar; for they think that whirlwinds, and sudden squalls of wind, are occasioned by spirits, who transport themselves, in that manner, from one place to another.

[m] Ma-ronnan was the brother of Toscar.

sound of the harp in Seláma.[n] Lovely the cry of the hunter on Crómla. But we are in dark I-thona, surrounded by the storm. The billows lift their white heads above our rocks. We tremble amidst the night.

TOSCAR.

Whither is the soul of battle fled, Fercuth, with locks of age? I have seen thee undaunted in danger: thine eyes burning with joy in the fight. Whither is the soul of battle fled? Our fathers never feared. Go; view the settling sea: the stormy wind is laid. The billows still tremble on the deep. They seem to fear the blast. Go; view the settling sea. Morning is grey on our rocks. The sun will look soon from his east; in all his pride of light! I lifted up my sails with joy, before the halls of generous Conlath. My course was by a desert isle: where Cuthóna pursued the deer. I saw her, like that beam of the sun that issues from the cloud. Her hair was on her heaving breast. She, bending forward, drew the bow. Her white arm seemed, behind her, like the snow of Crómla. Come to my soul, I said, huntress of the desert isle! But she wastes her time in

[n] Selámath, *beautiful to behold;* the name of Toscar's residence, on the coast of Ulster, near the mountain Cromla.

tears. She thinks of the generous Conlath. Where can I find thy peace, Cuthóna, lovely maid?

CUTHONA.°

A distant steep bends over the sea, with aged trees and mossy rocks. The billow rolls at its feet. On its side is the dwelling of roes. The people call it Mora. There the towers of my love arise. There Conlath looks over the sea for his only love. The daughters of the chase returned. He beheld their downcast eyes. "Where is the daughter of Rumar?" But they answered not. My peace dwells on Mora, son of the distant land!

TOSCAR.

Cuthóna shall return to her peace: to the towers of generous Conlath. He is the friend of Toscar! I have feasted in his halls! Rise, ye gentle breezes of Erin. Stretch my sails toward Mora's shores. Cuthóna shall rest on Mora; but the days of Toscar must be sad. I shall sit in my cave in the field of the sun. The blast will rustle in my trees. I shall think it is

° Cuthóna, *the mournful sound of the waves;* a poetical name given her on account of her mourning to the sound of the waves; her name in tradition is Gorm-huil, *the blue eyed maid.*

Cuthóna's voice. But she is distant far, in the halls of the mighty Conlath!

CUTHONA.

Ha! what cloud is that? It carries the ghosts of my fathers. I see the skirts of their robes, like grey and watry mist. When shall I fall, O Rumar? Sad Cuthóna foresees her death. Will not Conlath behold me, before I enter the narrow house?[p]

OSSIAN.

He shall behold thee, O maid! He comes along the heaving sea. The death of Toscar is dark on his spear. A wound is in his side! He is pale at the cave of Thona. He shews his ghastly wound. Where art thou with thy tears, Cuthóna? The chief of Mora dies. The vision grows dim on my mind. I behold the chiefs no more! But, O ye bards of future times, remember the fall of Conlath with tears. He fell before his day. Sadness darkened in his hall. His mother looked to his shield on the wall, and it was bloody.[q] She knew that her hero fell. Her sorrow was heard on Mora. Art

[p] The grave.

[q] It was the opinion of the times, that the arms left by the heroes at home, became bloody the very instant their owners were killed, though at ever so great a distance.

thou pale on thy rock, Cuthóna, beside the fallen chiefs? Night comes, and day returns, but none appears to raise their tomb. Thou frightenest the screaming fowls away. Thy tears for ever flow. Thou art pale as a watry cloud, that rises from a lake!

The sons of green Selma came. They found Cuthóna cold. They raised a tomb over the heroes. She rests at the side of Conlath. Come not to my dreams, O Conlath! Thou hast received thy fame. Be thy voice far distant from my hall; that sleep may descend at night. O that I could forget my friends: till my footsteps should cease to be seen! till I come among them with joy! and lay my aged limbs in the narrow house!