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# Traces of Ossianic imagery in selected piano works of Robert Schumann

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# Abstract

This research report examines the phenomenon of Ossianic poetry and its widespread, if not always palpable, impact on the cultural life of Europe. This 'trace' of Ossian extends to several piano compositions of Robert Schumann.

Divided into three sections, the first of these describes and explains the genesis of the poems, their possible political background and their wide-ranging influence throughout Europe and even North America, despite the scathing exposé of James Macpherson written by Dr. Samuel Johnson. For one-and a-half centuries the poems continued to kindle the imaginations of artists, writers and musicians in works that either directly cite Ossian or Ossianic characters in their titles or texts or are virtual clones of this spurious but popular body of literature.

Section B, 'Interlude', deals specifically with aspects of the life of Robert Schumann and engages in a hermeneutic reading of many of his musical compositions. Referring to the Derridean concept of arche-writing and 'the trace' as well as the Foucauldian theory of polysemia (1969: 123), the report offers a number of alternative interpretations of standard repertoire.

Section C highlights four works; *Exercices (Variationen über einem thema von Beethoven)*, Op. Post, *Phantasie in C major*, Op. 17, *Waldszenen*, Op. 82 and *Gesänge der Frühe*, Op. 133. It also touches on a number of other works that reveal his conscious and unconscious awareness of Ossianic imagery and narrative.

WitsETD