David Duff, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of British Romanticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. xxi + 792. 14 illus. £110.00. ISBN 9780199660896.

The Oxford Handbook of British Romanticism is an extraordinary achievement both in its planning and execution. Published as part of the invaluable *Oxford Handbooks* series, this volume of over 700 pages boasts forty-six essays by experts in their specialist field concerned with aspects of what we collectively understand as 'British Romanticism', however contested that understanding might be. The *Handbook* is neatly divided into ten parts with sections detailing key subjects that enable some definition of this notoriously slippery term: 'Historical Phases'; 'Region and Nation'; 'Hierarchies'; 'Legislation'; 'Cognition'; 'Composition'; 'Publication'; 'Language'; 'Aesthetics'; concluding with, finally, 'Imports and Exports'. In many ways this volume sums up the collective endeavours, insights, and arguments of a generation or two of scholars of British Romanticism over perhaps forty years or so, now made available in this single volume. I suspect that most users of the volume will identify and sample the individual chapters in which they are interested, probably via the excellent *Oxford Handbooks Online* facility in combination with cognate databases such as *Oxford Scholarly Editions Online* and *Oxford Scholarship Online*, all transforming the ways in which we teach and research. Few may read the whole volume from cover to cover sequentially, assessing it as a complete work, as this reviewer has done in order to form a view of how the collection is mapping out the current field of British Romanticism and how this conceptualisation reflects our general understanding of the state of studies of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century literature, art, and culture, in what we think of as the Romantic Period.

David Duff, editor of the volume, sets out several key assumptions or 'major premises' in his 'Introduction' which he argues underpin the conceptualisation of Romanticism that the *Handbook* provides its readers. For Duff, Romanticism is not solely or chiefly a system of aesthetics (contested or otherwise), but more properly a 'movement […] which transformed the literary culture of Britain, and critical analysis of the nature, causes, and effects of that transformation began in the Romantic period itself (1760–1830)' (1). The dating of a period of seven decades from 1760 is thus somewhat generous, though many might prefer prolonging the end date to 1832 (the Great Reform Act) or 1837 (the accession of Victoria to the throne). Many (myself among them) also might wish to claim the decade of the 1830s as crucial for Romantic writing and aesthetics. The dramatic impact of those major, transformational political events of the American and French Revolutions is thus somewhat mitigated by mid eighteenth-century British cultural and political concerns. The *Handbook*, though parsimonious towards the later period, absorbs earlier texts, notably by Thomas Percy, James Macpherson, Thomas Gray, Laurence Sterne, and Thomas Chatterton, from the 1760s onward for its understanding of British Romanticism, thus linking early Romantic writing with eighteenth-century cultures of sensibility, orality, and Whiggism. Duff pushes back against the current critical orthodoxy, arguing that '"Romanticism" is not simply a retrospective critical construct […] but an observable phenomenon whose historical development can be traced and at least partially explained' (1). This phenomenon was also 'in the full sense, a "movement"', though one possessed of 'a contagious, mobile quality […] both in the British context and internationally' (1). It is not entirely clear here what constitutes an artistic movement in this 'full sense' or how such a movement operates and coheres over time and geography. Is the movement all-pervading or are some writers in the Romantic period excluded from its sweep or resistant to its power? Duff claims as another major premise of the *Handbook* that 'Romanticism is a contested phenomenon and an internally divided one', with 'schools, factions, demarcations, position-taking, and polemic […] emphasized throughout' (3).

The purpose of the *Handbook* is thus to show how such 'patterns came to be established' (1). Romanticism is especially characterised by forms of 'transcendentalism', yet the 'transcendental qualities of Romantic literature become more, not less remarkable, when we pay attention to the material forms in which they were transmitted' (2). This model of British Romanticism as a movement is complicated by the several 'distinct phases' which it passes through, which the very strong contextual chapters of the *Handbook* approach largely as a series of significant decades rather than generations (Nick Groom, Jon Mee, Simon Bainbridge, Kelvin Everest, Angela Esterhammer). The revolutionary decade of the 1790s and the French Revolution remains crucial, but the 1820s also assumes a new significance and importance, with 1800–1815 similarly championed as a neglected 'middle phase'. The complexity of the movement is further complicated by the insistence that British Romanticism is also constituted by a variety of 'different national and regional traditions' (2). This focus on the diversity of Romanticism in the British context is most welcome, and the *Handbook* features very generous coverage of Scottish, Irish, and Welsh writing in the period, especially Robert Burns, Sir Walter Scott, James Hogg, Edward Williams, Maria Edgeworth and many more. In addition to this 'Four Nations' critical paradigm of British Romanticism, the *Handbook* asserts that British Romanticism is 'a transnational phenomenon' with its 'own international dimension' and, 'despite the national rivalries and ideological conflicts into which it was inevitably drawn, was part of European and global Romanticism' (8). In many ways it seems that, rather as in Thomas De Quincey's famous analogy in *Suspiria de Profundis* (1845) of the palimpsest for the conscious and unconscious human mind, the *Handbook*, during its gestation, has softly layered a series of sedimentary critical constructions of Romanticism, one upon another, from earlier models of comparative criticism, 1980s historicism, 'Four Nations' paradigms, and most recently the focus on discrete decades of cultural activity.

The *Handbook* is strong on traditional Romantic period aesthetics and its continental European philosophical background, especially the impact of Kantian and post-Kantian aesthetics, and several essays engage with this intellectual trajectory (notably Andrew Bennett, Tim Milnes, Nicholas Halmi, Stephen Behrendt, Noel Jackson, Patrick Vincent, and James Vigus), with Thomas Keymer's chapter, 'The Subjective Turn', impressively locating Romantic aesthetics in Laurence Sterne's innovative cultivation of the literary self. The currently vibrant field of book history and the reviewing culture and profession are strongly reflected in essays by William Christie, Paul Keen, and Michael Gamer. One of the key critical sources most frequently cited is the late William St Clair's invaluable and highly influential study, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge University Press, 2004). The persistence of earlier balladry and the presence in Romanticism of various oral traditions mediated to the cultural elite are addressed by contributions from Nick Groom, Penny Fielding, Mary-Ann Constantine, Erik Simpson, and Jane Hodson. In this respect, another frequently cited influential critical text is Katie Trumpener's *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton University Press, 1997). The role of labouring writers is strongly featured, and discussions of John Clare, Burns, and Hogg are prominent, firmly cementing Clare's current canonical presence. Where, for me at least, the volume is lacking, however, is in its treatment of overseas colonialism and empire, or what we might think of as the global dimensions of British Romanticism. In the Romantic period, the heated debate over the transatlantic slave trade reached new heights, witnessing both the Abolition Act of 1807 and the Emancipation Act of 1833. The troubled legacies of colonial slavery from the period trouble the living stream of today. Although Fiona Robertson's essay, on 'Transatlantic Engagements', emphasises that 'Paul Gilroy's model of the "Black Atlantic" has been adapted to the "Red" or "Indian" Atlantic; and the human freight of the slave trade has been a constituent factor in trans-Atlanticism, which implicitly, on an ideological level, refashions the routes of trade and human trafficking' (725), the *Handbook* contains only two brief references

to Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* (1789), surely now a major period text. Surprisingly, there is no mention at all of such an important text as *The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave* (1831), nor is there any serious extended treatment of the many slave autobiographies of the period. Such writers and texts surely have a place in our study of 'British Romanticism'? In the period, Britain lost its American colonies and developed a new empire in the east. There is scant coverage of this momentous historical shift in the *Handbook* and its implications for Romantic writing and its subsequent history. The presence of Indian writers, such as the traveller, surgeon, and entrepreneur Dean Mahomed (Din Mohammed) – who opened the first Indian restaurant in London and introduced 'shampooing' and massage parlours among other things, and who published his remarkable *Travels of Dean Mahomet* in 1794, the first English language travel memoir by an Indian writer – sadly goes unmentioned. Similarly, Henry Louis Derozio, India's first national poet, who adapted Romantic models, especially Byronic, to Indian subjects and topographies, and who disseminated Western learning and science in Bengal's intellectual circles, is also not mentioned. The *Handbook* contains a sound essay on 'Orientalism' (James Watt) as a literary and cultural style, but it is written from the representational viewpoint of canonical Western writers. Several essays in the *Handbook* rightly emphasise 1814–15 and the final military defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo as a key moment for British Romantic literature and culture, but the sheer impact and pressure of the British territorial acquisitions after that date of around twenty-five percent of the world's population is less acutely felt. The Edmund Burke that features here is very much that of sublime aesthetics and the French Revolution, rather than the Burke of India and the trials of Warren Hastings, on which much recent scholarship has focused.

Overall, the *Oxford Handbook of British Romanticism* is a tremendous resource for scholars and students of the subject and one that will contribute to our teaching and research perspectives over the coming years. In many ways, through its rich and varied contributions, it represents the summary of perhaps some forty years or so of scholarly enquiry and endeavour by more than one critical generation of Romanticists which has definitively transformed the subject that many of us encountered back in our undergraduate days. Whether it will serve as a master chart suggesting new directions beyond our established routes of scholarly exploration in the study of British Romanticism over the coming decades with those troublesome yet insistent demands to 'Decolonise the Curriculum' is not as certain to this reviewer at least.

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