

**Dafydd Moore, ed., *The International Companion to James Macpherson and the Poems of Ossian*. Glasgow: Scottish Literature International, 2017. Pp. 187. £14.95. ISBN 9781908980199.**

*The International Companion to James Macpherson and the Poems of Ossian* anchors itself in a desire to ‘articulate [James] Macpherson’s career without resort to a rhetoric of the scoundrel’ (10)—a worthy endeavour, when recent scholars sometimes adopt a similar rhetoric to that of eighteenth-century critics concerning Macpherson’s nefarious (or not-so-nefarious) ancient Scottish epics. To open, Paul deGatigno focuses on Macpherson’s correspondence and draws attention to the man beyond the furore that followed *Ossian*’s publication. This sets the tone of the whole collection. The introduction and nine chapters revisit and summarise important junctions within *Ossian* scholarship, including landscapes in the poems, *Ossian*’s influence on visual aesthetics, and the relationship between Macpherson’s anti-colonialism and postcolonial readings of *Ossian*, while also formalising the diverse ways in which Macpherson influenced visual art and literature across Europe.

Although there are no subtitled sections, the essays are loosely grouped as follows: Gaelic tradition and translation practices (chapters one to four), aesthetics and European impact (chapters five to seven), and lastly the Ossianic mode and Macpherson’s historical writing (chapters eight and nine). The throughline between them is the importance of Macpherson as a figure whose vision and creativity ‘entered the cultural bloodstream of Europe’ (8). Much of what is outlined and examined here reveals how Macpherson provided the means and imagery for formulating new perspectives on nationhood. As Robert W. Rix explains, in the late eighteenth century ‘cultural prestige was now increasingly to be won through reconstructing one’s own ethnic history’ (76). Elsewhere, Gauti Kristmannsson points out that, despite Samuel Johnson’s vitriolic dismissal of Macpherson’s poems, *Ossian* is radical in terms of literary production via translation since its prose threatens ‘at least the “poetical order” of British at the time’ (48). In her re-examination of the relationship between Scottish Highland oral culture and the Fenian ballads of Ireland, Lesa Ní Mhunchaile suggests that any discussion of the different Gaelic traditions visible in *Ossian* should also acknowledge Macpherson’s important role in salvaging the literary heritage of *both* Ireland and Scotland. This point is then examined once more through the postcolonial lens and the idea of nostalgia by Cordula Lemke, who also surveys Macpherson’s employment of Gaelic folk ballads for national aims.

There is much to be said here in terms of the influence and impact of *Ossian* when thinking about national identities and pasts, and the *International Companion* sets out the foundations for further probing by scholars. A key feature of this volume is the way it highlights the European perspective within these discussions. After introducing the vast corpus of visual art influenced by Macpherson, Murdo Macdonald reminds us that the transnational impact of *Ossian* ‘re-emphasises the enduring interest of Macpherson’s text as an international phenomenon’ (104). This is certainly visible in Scandinavia, where, as Rix explains, *Ossian* influenced Danish national poet Adam Oehlenschläger to embark on his own expedition to rural Denmark (88). Sebastian Mitchell recognises that part of the universality of the poems is due to imagined Highlands, a landscape that can also ‘be dramatically relocated with both a personal and collective sense of time and place’ (74). As a result, other mountains, terrains, and cultures become mapped onto the Scottish Highlands, thus extending *Ossian*’s popularity beyond the British Isles.

The articulation of a homeland and a primitive culture or landscape remains one of the most compelling aspects of *Ossian*. As Dafydd Moore explains, *Ossian* is a product of ‘the conviction that the works of primitive cultures the world over are comparable,’ and the text ‘goes in [*sic*] to be itself key to the growth of idea about the specific and unique value of an individual nation’s indigenous culture’ (118). Even in Macpherson’s historical writing, an

Ossianic sentimentality diffuses through his Augustan approach to politics, statecraft, and war. Robert W. Jones returns to the historical writing (first mentioned in the volume by deGategno) in relation to Macpherson's correspondence. Jones suggests that 'the language of sensibility plays an increasingly active role in Macpherson's dynamically realised characters, whose clashing ambitions are the impetus for history' (130). The result is a historiography that feels Ossianic while marking the tensions and shifting governance across the British Isles; the impact of Macpherson's early success cannot be forgotten in his later writings.

This collection of essays is accessible and valuable, with each short but succinct chapter presenting readers with a thought-provoking examination of Macpherson's legacy and the value of *Ossian*. The volume situates the dominant discussions surrounding Macpherson regarding forgery, authenticity, and translation within the context of his oeuvre as a whole and his own politics. As such, within such a slender volume lies an important introduction and concentrated overview of the creation, aftermath, and legacy of Macpherson's *Ossian*.

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