

Cynthia Schoolar Williams, *Hospitality and the Transatlantic Imagination, 1815-1835*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. Pp. 235. \$90. ISBN 9781137340047.

Imperialism, cosmopolitanism, transatlanticism, globalization: each of these historico-theoretical themes has received a good deal of scholarly attention from Romanticists in recent decades, with the latter three arguably gaining ground on the first (and still most widely deployed) term. Now, Cynthia Schoolar Williams makes a strong case for adding 'hospitality' to this list. *Hospitality and the Transatlantic Imagination, 1815-1835* is not the first scholarly study to focus on hospitality in the Romantic era, but by gathering what may seem at first glance to be an unusual variety of topics and authors, Williams makes an original contribution to this growing sub-field.

In her formidable introduction, the author makes clear that she intends to deploy both historical and theoretical concepts of hospitality – a move that pays dividends throughout the book even as it makes her opening chapter unusually dense and extended. Williams' reasoning, however, is convincing: 'Hospitable encounters connect the ancient with the modern, the mythic with the historical, because they address a problem every culture and every household has had to solve, namely, what to do when interrupted by a knock at the door' (2). Accordingly, she pays about equal attention to theoretical conceptualizations of hospitality – most notably, Derrida's late-career investigations of hospitality as 'threshold encounters' – and to how the specific historico-political contexts of the Napoleonic Wars and their aftermath informed representations of hospitable encounters. If hospitality is a specifically English virtue, as many authors claimed at the time, then what happens when it travels overseas – especially if, as William Cobbett bitterly proclaimed, the Americans were now more hospitable than the English?

Given the centrality of the knock on the door to her original invocation of hospitality, it might seem surprising that Coleridge's 'person on business from Porlock' (from his introduction to 'Kubla Khan') makes no appearance in Williams' study. Instead, her paradigmatic example of Romantic-era scenes of hospitality is Walter Scott's invocations of various threshold encounters in *Waverley*. This move has the clear advantage of establishing a direct line of influence to two of the fiction writers she focuses on in later chapters, James Fenimore Cooper and Washington Irving, even if the implied homology between Scott's multi-layered representations of Highland-Lowland-English relations and the transatlantic, Anglo-American ones of Cooper and Irving is somewhat less than perfect.

After her introduction, Williams embarks on an ambitious chapter on Mary Shelley's fiction. She begins, as we might expect, with a reading of the Creature's encounter with the De Lacey family in *Frankenstein*, but the bulk of the chapter is devoted to a close reading of hospitality in one of Shelley's lesser-known novels, *Lodore*, which Williams smartly connects to Shelley's best-known work via the theme of 'alienated intimacy' (74). With its large cast of characters and transatlantic plot, *Lodore* provides the perfect ground for exploring what Williams calls 'trenchant questions about the possibilities of belonging, about how the threshold might be constructed, about how to enter into welcome and what barriers prevent it' (73).

The fictions by Fenimore Cooper and Irving that occupy the book's middle chapters are treated to equally sensitive, probing readings. Again, William's main choice of Cooper novel, *The Pilot*, is unconventional, but again she makes it worth our time, not only by providing enough plot details for those unfamiliar with *The Pilot* to follow her reading, but also by drawing out fruitful comparisons between this watery novel and some of its even less well-known successors in Cooper's oeuvre. Williams also pushes Cooper's novel to reveal how it both

invokes and subverts the subgenre of 'the sea novel' recently delineated by Margaret Cohen (in her *The Novel and the Sea*) among others. Irving's lighter fictions, meanwhile, prove just as substantial in Williams' subtle interpretations of their various representations of hospitality, now expanded to include the 'liberality of opinion' that Irving hoped would become part of America's modern national character (143).

The book concludes with an excellent chapter on Felicia Hemans, whose reputation during her life as a 'domestic poetess' is belied by Williams' fine readings of her poetic corpus as unexpectedly ambivalent on national matters. Noting that Hemans rarely writes about English subjects and that even her best-known 'domestic' poems, like 'The Homes of England', tend to focus on absence and loss, Williams develops a very productive working comparison of Hemans' poetry to a geo-aesthetic centrifuge: 'English subjects remain almost entirely absent . . . foreign subjects are introduced only to be flung back out to the farthest Anglophone reaches, and no native English qualities are identified beyond an abstracted freedom' (152). In a brief coda, the author notes that 'rather ironically, the texts I have been focusing on are not, for the most part, "hospitable"' (175), but by this point the astute reader will have already understood this, as well as that her scare quotes are now unnecessary. Hospitality may have been as problematic and finally impossible for the Romantics to realize as it continues to be for us today; better, then, to end with Williams' underdeveloped but suggestive late insight that realizing 'an ethics of vulnerability' (176) is probably the more pressing Romantic legacy for us to assume.

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