

David Simpson, *Romanticism and the Question of the Stranger*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2013. Pp. 271. £22.50. ISBN 9780226922355.

Jane Stabler, *The Artistry of Exile: Romantic and Victorian Writers in Italy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Pp. 272. £50. ISBN 9780199590247.

The era that Romanticism opened up is *still* with us. This is owed in part to many of the period's writings that responded to the volatility and vagaries of an emerging modern culture. For the first time in literary history, alienation and fragmentation became common sentiments of reaction to the unstable years of pervasive warfare, expanding imperial boundaries, and a burgeoning global market. In their readings of Friedrich Schlegel, Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre have identified this 'modern' onslaught as the exile of the human soul from its hearth and home. Mary Favret has also described the era's involvement with 'modern wartime' as a 'dislocated experience': a 'time and times unmoored, of feeling intensified but also adrift' (9). To be sure, this widespread 'dislocating' mood took on many forms, one of which involved the period's obsession with representations of alterity and marginalization. Strangers, foreigners, exiles, hermits, vagrants, and several other figures positioned on the fringes of the dominant culture seized the literary imagination. Yet, at the same time, writers themselves expressed solidarity with the predominant disenfranchising spirit, describing personal feelings of desolation within a world, as John Keats describes in 'La Belle Dame sans Merci,' that is cold, barren, and lonely.

Despite their focus on common period themes, the two present monographs return to these Romantic issues once again, providing compelling evidence that these discourses still require significantly more attention. While Simpson's text concentrates on the stranger and strangeness in Romantic literature, Stabler's analyzes a specific mode of exile in Italy that affected the 'artistry' of two generations of nineteenth-century British writers.

Simpson situates his book among efforts by Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva and Tzvetan Todorov to 'give historical, philosophical, and sometimes polemical contexts to questions about the alien, the stranger, and the foreigner,' describing how critics have typically regarded these matters as 'modernist' concerns (3). Instead, he argues that this discourse is 'significantly romantic' because the era partook of what he calls the 'stranger syndrome' (5): a prevalent and 'coherent pattern of address to the antinomic figure of the stranger and to the reciprocally ambivalent representation of guest-host and friend-enemy relations' (14). For these reasons, Simpson believes that reckoning with the 'question of the stranger' constitutes a 'very long Romanticism' that does not in any way provide a 'pure fountain on the right thinking on the treatment of strangers' necessarily (16, 247). While Simpson in his first chapter dates this 'long Romanticism' to the 'long history of the stranger apparent in the Bible and the classics,' he finds contemporary resonances in our post 9/11 world where anxiety of 'terror' and alterity has once again risen to the fore (10). He connects this broad cultural angst with otherness to the war on and reign of 'Terror' waged during the French Revolution.

This introduction sets the stage for his wide-ranging analyses of the 'stranger syndrome' in such instances as the 'fluttering stranger' from Coleridge's 'Frost at Midnight' (1798) and the 'itinerant Malay' from Thomas de Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* that he probes in Chapter 2. As Simpson tracks the 'strange' complexities of other people throughout these texts, he also investigates the 'strangeness' of imperial commodities like 'tea, muslin, opium, and sugar' (10). In the subsequent chapter, Simpson considers Walter Scott's 'open-

mindfulness' to religious strangers in *Ivanhoe* (1820) and *The Talisman* (1825) as a function of 'Scott's refusal to represent a national project of converting strangers into familiars' (13). For Simpson, Scott's 'crusader' novels oppose otherwise 'impermeable boundaries' and 'exclusionary policies' in the British homeland (13). Simpson then turns to less conventional representations of 'strangeness' by focusing on Romantic paratexts (endnotes, footnotes, and marginalia) and translations in the next two chapters. In both cases, he analyzes language as a repository for 'forms of knowledge and figures from afar' as strange signals whose 'capacity for arousing desire or detestation cannot be known in advance' (143). In the final two chapters, Simpson explores two of Romanticism's most prominent Others: women and slaves. While reflecting on the slave trade as a 'betrayal of hospitality,' he interrogates the 'dynamic of desire and abjection' in the 'portrayal of strange women' (14). All in all, these varied enigmatic figures and phenomena offer an array of exempla that present the intensity of Romantic 'strangeness' across various social and literary domains. His diverse analysis is no doubt one of the book's greatest achievements.

Stabler's book turns the theme of strangeness back onto the writer, as it examines British authors who, in feeling 'forced to leave England and [choosing] to live in Italy' (vii), consider 'the intellectual gains of exile as opposed to its emotional damage,' while remaining simultaneously 'unsettled' and 'in flux' (5). In repudiating 'English society as much as [receiving] an ostracizing pressure from without' (5), the Romantic and Victorian writers of her analysis, Stabler argues, form a specific exilic identity that comprises 'part of the texture of their writing' (9). As she states, 'classical and biblical expressions of desolation feed an artistry in the Romantic period that is fascinated by depictions of abandonment, persecution, rupture, and loss ... the metaphorical ruins of paradise' (4). In her take of this common Romantic trope, Stabler sets out to connect the 'metaphorical and the literal,' contending 'exile accentuates the linguistic peculiarities of [these writers'] ... geographic estrangement from the country of birth [to foster] a new style and [alert] readers to a disconcerting blend of hybrid elements' (10). Since 'exile has always been a dialogical condition, fostering connection on the difference between here and there, then and now, presence and absence,' these authors possess a 'double vision' that is embedded specifically throughout their diverse writings (ix).

As a wonderful formal complement to its content, the book's sequence of chapters (along with mystifying titles) seems to have little to no organizing logic – an arrangement that indeed suggests the disorderly and defamiliarizing nature of exilic life and artistry. Chapter 1 grounds the book's argument in historical cases of banishment before focusing on the metaphorical condition of exile throughout time. It introduces the major players of Stabler's analysis – Byron, the Shelleys, and the Brownings – as she considers the 'isolated, interior experience of banishment' and the 'unfamiliar texture of the new locale' (x). The following chapter investigates what Stabler calls the 'twinning of literary and historical figures to shape voluntary and involuntary kinships within exile,' while Chapter 3 delves into the links between Catholic worship in Italy with sympathetic and creative art. The fourth chapter looks at Boccaccio's influence on these writers, reflecting on the role of narrative, cosmopolitanism, and sexuality in the work of the Pisan circle. Grounded in the writings of Plutarch, Chapter 5 also examines the influence of former writers as well as the role that history plays in the writing of and in exile. The subsequent chapter proposes how an exilic framework relates to 'paranoia about the judgments of a distant readership' as well as 'concerns about retributive justice ... informed by direct experience of protracted legal wrangles' (194). Finally, the last chapter explores 'the book's intermittent discussion of a distinctive poetics of exile in a conversation between English

poets (living and dead) and the unfamiliar, but gradually internalized music of their Italian surroundings' (xi).

Throughout the study, Stabler offers some refreshing qualifiers about the 'exile' of these writers. In an attempt to demystify it as a complex 'category,' she helpfully states that 'a systematic desynonymization of the categories of the exile, refugee, and émigré is impossible to sustain except in the most general terms, as their imaginative conditions overlap and run into each other' (4-5). She then proceeds to acknowledge that, for these authors, the 'condition of being in exile often intersects with the business of being on tour, and it is not always possible to separate the pleasures and pains of the two situations' (5). However, Stabler astutely asserts that, while writers like Byron and Shelley were privileged, such a status 'does not mean that their writing cannot speak to people who are less fortunate or less articulate' (16). Setting out to expand common analyses beyond the 'handful of men [writing] about exclusively imaginary, volitional loneliness' (241), Stabler succeeds at presenting the nuances of nineteenth-century exile in Italy and how the experience greatly affected these writers' multiple aesthetic endeavors.

As both books consider alterity from two distinct vantage points, they also overlap in remarkable ways. They each describe how these positions of strangeness and exile continue to speak to us today. Simpson provocatively suggests that 'the challenge of the other comes from many places and in many forms ... this is a romanticism that we still inhabit' (15). By the end of his book, he reiterates the point: 'As a "question", the stranger figures in to modes of cultural and linguistic difference in an ongoing cycle since there is 'no way to foreclose or prefigure the nature and challenge of the stranger who is always yet to come' (247). As he claims, we must continue to wrap our heads around the 'inexhaustible dialectic of desire and abjection that we have still not come to understand' (247). At the same time, Stabler notes that 'nineteenth-century efforts to deal with a crisis of identity and purpose in an unfamiliar place shape an artistry as urgent, troubling, and inspiring today as the voices of contemporary dissidents in exile' (16). Both texts underscore a long and complex Romantic era through experiences of estrangement that are found all around: indeed as much within as without.

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