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Simpson, David. *Romanticism and the Question of the Stranger*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013. Pp. x + 271. ISBN: 0-226-92236-2

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David Simpson's *Romanticism and the Question of the Stranger* offers a contextualization of the English Romantic stranger through a study of associated tropes. Simpson underscores how ancient Greek and biblical texts serve as influential sources about strangers in English Romantic literature. He then identifies a specific anxiety surrounding the stranger during this period: "With romanticism, the question of the stranger becomes more charged with anxious significance than it had been before [. . .]" (11). Simpson's numerous examples show how people can be estranged because of a difference in religion, language, class status, appearance, origins, race, and gender, to name a few. The sheer variety presents both contradictory treatments and inconsistent roles of the foreign. Strangers thus emerge as law-giving and law-breaking entities who disturb the status quo of the land and people they frequent.

From Euripides' disguised Dionysus, who tests ancient Greek hospitality, to De Quincey's surprise Malay visitor, the scope of this book affords its readers a unique introduction to the dilemmas concerning strangers throughout time. Other writers and personages that Simpson draws into this study as he narrows its focus to English Romanticism include, but are not limited to: Aeschylus, Austen, Lee Boo, Frances Burney, Coleridge, Cugoano, Diderot, Equiano, Hegel, Hemans, Honig, Kant, Keats, Omai (Mai), Owenson, Mungo Park, Robespierre, Rousseau, Scott, Shakespeare, Southey, de Staël, and Wordsworth.

The diversity of sources and resulting types of strangers in Simpson's investigation push the bounds of the word "stranger," as does his frequent and helpful reference to Derridean theories. Simpson attributes the fluidity of his study to the nature of his topic: "Thinking upon the stranger can thus produce an awareness of thought itself as a moving event, a process of adjustment or dialogue, and not a preservation of boundaries and given definitions" (9). While the logic of this investigation is often productive, it also makes apparent the most critically problematic aspect of Simpson's argumentation: his inquiry resists defining the term "stranger," and this resistance leads to conflating "stranger" not only with the neighboring but nevertheless distinct "guest" and "other," but also with the more distant "metaphor," "footnote," and "translation."

However, by considering such phenomena as "strangers," Simpson succeeds in offering an innovative means of problematizing these literary praxes via their rapport with the figure of the stranger. Accordingly, he sees metaphor as a means of drawing in the strange, translation as capable of "foreignizing" or making strange its subject matter, and footnotes as the formal strangers to the body of a page. Furthermore, Simpson's studies of portrayals of slaves and women within English Romanticism offer situations in which strangers enact the varied etymological resonances of *hostis* and *pharmakon*: strangers can be both threat and scapegoat, guest and sacrifice, poison and remedy.

Simpson's adept reading of Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight" incorporates many features of the stranger that are central to this study. It is therefore fitting that Simpson ends his book with a reference to his earlier work on this poem and its narrator: "In some ways my whole effort here has been an extended meditation on the prospect he floated for his infant son: the prospect of living by other laws, 'far other laws' than those we have" (247). According to Simpson, bringing foreign elements into an established environment enacts a destabilization that benefits the environment by providing an outsider's perspective, which "often starkly [exposes] the strangeness of the Europeans to themselves

and to their own preferred self-images” (195). Through the arrival of a stranger one may become estranged from oneself, and in turn allow enough distance for critical self-examination.

With its highly open understanding of the word “stranger,” Simpson’s study offers an intriguing variety of material for consideration of this enigmatic, paradoxical, and anxiety-producing figure, from English Romantic literature and beyond. His investigation into numerous types of strangers locates this presence in surprising and sometimes uncomfortably close sources: “The strangeness of the other [. . .] produces an estrangement of the self, or perhaps the eruption of a self that we would rather not acknowledge as our own” (213). Indeed, Simpson claims that “we still inhabit” (15) the apprehensive romantic view of the stranger, whether this foreign being issues from without or within.