

## BOOK REVIEW

**Fair Exotics: Xenophobic Subjects in English Literature, 1720-1850.**

**Rajani Sudan. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002. 1 - 200 pp.**

Reviewed by: Syahid Juhari, Universiti Malaya  
<syahidjuhari96@gmail.com>

Rajani Sudan's work in this book offers an insight into the idea of the Romantic age by tracing its ideas to the early decades of the eighteenth century, when England was beginning its imperial march and encountering the cultures of other countries. Sudan argues that the line between xenophobia and xenodochy are blurred as the writers of this period question what is deemed too foreign, as opposed to what can be accepted into their culture.

The introduction begins with an analysis of the main character Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and his insistence on normalcy in relation to British standards of living. Although common preconceptions of eighteenth-century literature would suggest that the story embraces ideals of "rational order, regularity and the prevailing public arena" (6), Sudan reveals that it instead plays on tropes most commonly found in Romanticism. These include its usage throughout of Crusoe's journals as a means to recollect and become calm and, more importantly, its exploration of the relationship between xenophobia and xenodochy. This introduction reminds the reader that Romanticism is no longer viewed as a "self-referential celebration of art and the dehistoricized artist" (17) and paves the way for Sudan's subsequent analysis of Romantic authors whose work include the concept of the oriental.

Chapter Two discusses the work of Samuel Johnson, highlighting his understanding of the foreign and the domestic as revealed in his lexicon. Sudan then turns to *Life of Savage* which appropriates Samuel Johnson's views on British identity; by highlighting Savage's life as supposedly high culture, Johnson represents the xenophobia of eighteenth-century sensibility. Sudan then turns in Chapter Three to Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* which is different in giving himself a more minor role in comparison to that of the foreign. Sudan argues that because De Quincey places himself in subjectivity, he creates somewhat of a balance between xenodochy and xenophobia.

The next chapter focuses on Mary Wollstonecraft's revolutionary philosophical treatise, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, and her lesser-known novels, *Mary* and *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman* to suggest that these also demonstrate xenophobia. Arguing for a change of perspective in scholarship which has typically lauded Wollstonecraft for her feminism, Sudan asks if in fact one may "subvert a visibly politicized discourse to uncover disturbing alliances with other hegemonic discursive models of nationality, race, xenophobia and imperialism" (116). To Sudan, "psychosubjectivity is historically shaped" and "such shaping reproduces its own monsters: demonstrating the inevitable conflict between competing ideological standpoints" (116).

The last chapter delves into Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, furthering the previous chapter's examination of the relationship between Romanticism, nationalism, and feminism. Similar to her treatment of Wollstonecraft, Sudan's analysis of *Frankenstein* and *Villette* probes the xenophobic frame of texts more frequently studied as feminist texts. Here, the titular term, "Fair Exotics", frequently shows up to denote the different representations of the female in the stories and how they represent the driving force in both stories. Despite considering repatriation and having different experiences of foreign habitats, the female characters of both *Frankenstein* and *Villette* ultimately subject themselves to English conceptions of domesticity. As Sudan reminds us, "[w]omen, as the examples in Wollstonecraft and Shelley [also] demonstrate, come from elsewhere to complete the national household and sustain its discourse" (134).

The Afterword, with which Sudan's monograph concludes, briefly reflects on Elizabethan ideas of the fair exotic, as expressed lexically and in royal policy. It then recapitulates the way in which the preceding chapters have unpacked the interaction of foreign monstrosity with native domesticity, to conclude that "[t]he fair exotic is at once engaging and eccentric" (151), simultaneously seducing and repelling its viewer. Ultimately Sudan's work presents a fresh view of Romanticism, by examining its origins in the eighteenth century and foregrounding the imperialistic and nationalistic ideals of its authors.