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## Strange, Stranger and Estrangement

English Visitors to Scotland in Early Nineteenth-century Fiction

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# *Strange, Stranger and Estrangement*

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Much Romantic-era fiction is based on the trope of strangeness and familiarity. The Waverley-like wanderer is thrown into confusion when he encounters the exotic flora and fauna that thrive on the periphery of his united kingdom. However, less well-known – but deserving equal attention – is the strategy of other writers of the period who adopt and reverse the trope in a remarkable way. Not only do they explore the nature of northern Britain, but also process the narrator's reactions in order to defamiliarise his/her own views and cultural background. In other words, what is foregrounded is not simply life beyond the "stupendous barrier" – as Scott put it – but the psychology of the incomers. The writers whose work will be used to illustrate this paper are Mary Brunton, Susan Ferrier and Christian Isobel Johnstone.

- 1 I would like to begin my paper with references to two key moments in English literary history. The first comes from *Waverley* (1814). The eponymous hero has crossed the border, passed through Edinburgh and beyond, is now in chapter seven when he sees "a blue outline in the horizon" (p. 73), which is perhaps not the first colour which one associates with Scottish weather and mountains. This simply pinpoints its enormous symbolic importance, starting with the Scottish flag itself. In Perthshire, the Highlands are getting nearer until they have "swelled into huge gigantic masses, which frowned defiance over the more level country that lay beneath them. Near the bottom of this stupendous barrier, but still in the Lowland country, dwelt Cosmo Comyne Bradwardine." (p. 73) Critical attention to this fragment dwells on the stupendous barrier. In the much-used binary reading, Highlands/Lowlands, head/heart, progress/history and a host of other relationships manifest themselves to the reader, but I believe there are many more interesting things here than the critical commonplace. First of all, Scott, if he is indeed the narrator, anthropomorphises the mountains so that they frown with defiance. This challenges the reader to come to some kind of understanding, but presumably it forecasts Waverley's lack of understanding – even at the novel's conclusion – of the people, events and places he has encountered. This lack might arise from Waverley's own simplistic

ideology based precisely on binaries such as civilisation/primitivism; but if they have become, as I stated, critical commonplace, it is the reader-cum-critic who is also at fault because the Highlands frown defiantly at him/her, remaining, in spite of everything one expects from a Bildungsroman, a stupendous barrier. At this key moment, Scott is very clear in his politics of location: there are three at least; the RP country of Edward himself, though that is debatable too; the Lowlands and the Highlands. To him, therefore, is the mystique of a lowland rose – a white rose – any less exotic than Flora?

- 2 The second moment of defiance comes in the opening Telemachus chapter of *Ulysses* (1922). Joyce's almost Swiftian obsession with bodily secretions makes itself apparent when debunking a romantic Ireland – to borrow a phrase from Yeats – and its literary outpouring. Buck Mulligan picks up a handkerchief and states: "The bard's noserag. A new art colour for our Irish poets: snot-green. You can almost taste it, can't you?" (p. 11) The bard of the revival, or post revival, no longer emits sweet sounds from the mouth but secretes from his nose. Such provocation is added to the fact that the outsider in this case is a dreadful Sassenach, Oxford educated, who visits the National Library, speaks Gaelic; in Mulligan's words "He's English [...] and he thinks we ought to speak Irish in Ireland." (p. 21) Haines believes that history is to blame for colonialism and that both new Ireland and Britain should have one common objective: to keep their country out of the hands of German Jews. Bloom will soon make his entrance. Anti-Semitism is highlighted as a major ideological pillar of Haines's thinking. Undeniably, the fact that the most despicable person, for his rabid anti-Semitism, is simultaneously a fervent upholder of Gaelic culture whilst being an outsider reflects a complex project on Joyce's behalf. It likewise inevitably frowns defiance at the reader. Why? I believe that in both novels the reader is most likely to be an outsider, ingenuous like *Waverley* or a meddling do-gooder like Haines, and probably a member of the English reading classes. The message in Scott is quite muted, but in Joyce it is much clearer: don't make judgements about us; we'd probably be better off without you. Are we being asked to return back beyond the stupendous barrier? Are we being told our otherness prevents us from understanding what occurs? Are we being told that our lack of understanding turns us into primitive essentialists?
- 3 It would be fair to say that there is a book to be written on the extent to which the historical romance estranges its readers rather than simply entertains them. With the example of *Waverley* at hand, no one seems willing to contest the belief that its narrator informs and educates both himself and reader about Scotland, its landscape, its habitants, its language and its customs in the most positive of ways. To give some indication of this, of how ignorance rather than understanding is central to Romantic-era fiction, I will turn to three of Scott's contemporaries as test-cases: Mary Brunton, Susan Ferrier and Christian Isobel Johnstone.
- 4 Mary Brunton (1778-1818) completed two novels: *Self-Control* (1811) and *Discipline* (1814), whose titles reflect the author's deep religiosity. The little that we know about her comes from the Memoir written by her husband, Alex. It contains fascinating views on women and literature, and on Scott in particular. In the memoir we find a double-edged comment which helps us to understand her, but at the same time, subtracts from interest in her work. I suspect that one of the common literary devices used by Scott's contemporaries was to say that they were engaged in writing their novel when *Waverley* was published. Her brother, William Balfour, reports that this was indeed the case, that she sat up till she had finished the novel, which left her with an ambivalent feeling: she

admired it so much that she “forgot at first how much the plan interfered with her own.”  
He goes on:

I endeavoured to convince her that the bias which Waverley would give to the public taste might prove more favourable to her plan; that public curiosity would be roused by what that great master had done; that the sketches of a different observer, finished in a different style, and taken from entirely a different point of view, would only be the more attractive, because attention had previously been directed to their subject. (p. 33)

- 5 She returned to work and published her novel in December 1814. Was Balfour right or wrong in his assessment? To a certain extent he is right to say that Waverley’s knock-on effect was tremendously powerful, but what he unfortunately could not have perceived was how little attention has been paid to the entirely different point of view of Scott’s contemporaries, whether it is a question of style or point of view. For Brunton’s comment contributes to the consolidation of Scott as the master-artist whose contemporaries are merely dabblers, followers or disciples. They have no originality at all. Literary history has confirmed this. Yet, with a little more perspicacity, another story emerges. In a letter to William, dated April 21, 1815, included in the memoir, she states categorically that the Highlands were “quite the rage” (p. 39), yet this is not necessarily a sign of submission to Scott. In a similar way, when she says that in writing *Discipline* “I have ventured unconsciously on Waverley’s own ground” (p. 38) this does not signify that it is Scott’s alone for ever more. Indeed, things which are fashionable, quite the rage, come in and go out of fashion. I would argue that Brunton is perhaps reiterating the literary trope of discovery, authority and authenticity, the most famous example of which is Scott’s fishing-tackle story, which is precisely that: a story, which has been transmitted as factual at the expense of any contemporary who, like Brunton, used the same, or at least similar, devices. Second, unlike Scott, Brunton had already published a three-decker three years earlier, *Self-Control*, therefore she, unlike Scott, had no need to authenticate herself as a novelist.
- 6 *Self-Control* combines a *Clarissa*-like tale of pursuit which the Scottish narrator suffers at the hands of the dreadful English aristocracy: corrupt, bankrupt and licentious. Terrible things go on: masked balls, gambling, Turkish dances etc. However, the most frightening incident, narrated with great skill, is the assault on the female body. Mary Brunton’s moralising has several bases, but the first, which is rather different from Scott, is her belief that the ruling classes are unfit to rule; they exercise no self-control because they have no moral values, no religion. They even have to borrow money from their theoretically poorer relatives whom they despise. The sentence which follows the comment that the Highlands were the rage is followed by a series of comments on the didactic nature of fiction, applicable to both her novels. Her mentor might prefer Tory “old money” but she definitely believes that old money should cede its position to the more dynamic, vigorous middle-classes. Scott’s political allegiances are disputed, so here I am limiting myself to the belief shared by many of Scott’s contemporaries, and then most influentially by Lukács, that Scott is basically sympathetic to the plight of the poor but primarily paternalistic.
- 7 In addition, Brunton is radically different from Scott in two other aspects. The first is to use a woman as the centre of attention and plot her experiences. Whereas Waverley has no direction, Brunton’s heroine has clarity of mind and religion – and large doses of luck – which keep her out of trouble. Furthermore, the geography changes too. Instead of a southerner going north, we have a sturdy lass going south and eventually returning, safe

and sound, to her idealised Highlands, where “never friend found a traitor, nor enemy a coward.” (p. 438) Clearly, no cattle-rustling or blackmail exists here. The novel therefore predicts Scott’s own *The Heart of Midlothian* (1819), where he takes up the model of his female contemporaries.

- 8 What, then, is the point of this exercise in literary reversals? I believe there are two which merit our consideration. Why does she use a woman’s voice and a woman as heroic centre? In part, it is a nostalgic glance back at the fiction “by a lady” of the latter decades of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century which Scott will do so much to eliminate. Second, its insistence on using England rather than the Highlands as the battleground challenges the *Waverley* parameter. To readers south of Perthshire or Manchester, what is estranged is the English establishment. For her, the English country-house is simply a den of vice. To a moderate, logical reader, Brunton’s England has more in common with pre-revolutionary France than anywhere else, in the sense that English culture, whether in plays, novels or cook-books, associates excess with France; what would Restoration comedy be without a fop? In the case of Mary Brunton, the Scottish values that could rescue a diseased ruling-class are not republican but presbyterian. Her Highlands are as much – if not more – a spiritual reserve than a natural one. Vice should be kept out as much as possible; it should not be allowed to pass the stupendous barrier.
- 9 Susan Ferrier (1782-1854) published *Marriage* a few years later, in 1818. The book can become rather confusing because it is often difficult to keep track of its enormous gallery of characters who tend to be types from a contemporary *Commedia dell’arte* rather than fictional characters or real people; hence we have the vain female, the religious female, maiden aunts, bossy women who henpeck their husbands, sensible women, the bluestocking and so on, who all have different ideas and experiences of marriage. However, the one I would like to examine first is Juliana, a name with a Rousseau-like origin. She turns out to be a bad mother, flippant and irresponsible, as we shall see, but Ferrier, when introducing her as a marriageable young girl, shows her very much as a victim of patriarchy:

The Earl [her father] was too much engrossed by affairs of importance, to pay much attention to any thing so perfectly insignificant as the mind of his daughter. Her person he had predetermined should be entirely at his disposal, and therefore he contemplated with delight the uncommon beauty which already distinguished it; not with the fond partiality of parental love, but with the heartless satisfaction of a crafty politician. (p. 5)

- 10 This is a strident affirmation of the female body as property at the disposal of its owner. Her refusal to marry the husband he proposes angers him immensely. She is upset that she is supposed to marry an ugly man, who, to her horror, is almost as old as her father. He is greatly irritated that her unworldliness prevents her from seeing what is for him the most obvious fact of life for people of their class: marriage is principally for the aggrandisement of property. Her belief in the romantic nature of marriage comes from her excessive reading of novels written “by a lady”. Her delight at the prospect of elopement fulfils the most romantic possibility fiction offers in its most romantic of settings: Scotland.

Lady Juliana was transported with joy and begged that a letter might be instantly despatched, containing the offer of a visit: she had heard the Duchess of M. declare that nothing could be so delightful as the style of living in Scotland: the people were so frank and the manners so easy and engaging: Oh! It was delightful! (p. 6)

- 11 However, things don't turn out as expected. The gloomy castle is actually cold, draughty and gloomy. The weather doesn't correspond to Thomson's poem *The Seasons*. Her delicate stomach won't tolerate broth and the smell of herrings nauseates her. The idea of living on a "thriving farm" (p. 65) would kill her. So she returns south. Ferrier's witty debunking of images of Scotland would indicate that she belongs to that sturdy tradition that warns young ladies of the dangers of reading romances. Here, *Waverley* territory is mocked: an impressionable female, of the *Waverley* sort, finds reality is unlike the romance described by Scott in poems and fiction; rather than estrangement, she is completely alienated. Juliana complains, later in the novel:

Then, what can I do with a girl who has been educated in Scotland? She must be vulgar – all Scotchwomen are so. They have red hands and rough voices; they yawn, and blow their noses, and talk, and laugh loud, and do a thousand shocking things. Then, to hear that Scotch brogue – oh heavens! I should expire every time she opened her mouth! (p. 189)

- 12 She has gone from one exaggerated belief to its polar opposite: Scotland is no longer the land of romance but a country inhabited by clods. One version is as nonsensical as the other, but both are powerful sets of beliefs. It is to everyone's advantage that Juliana-like figures stay south of the stupendous barrier.
- 13 Ferrier's England is rather similar to Brunton's: indolence rules, morals are non-existent. *Saintsbury* (p. 314) greatly admired one character in particular in this novel, and this is the Rev. Redgill. He is red at the gills because he spends so much time eating and drinking. When asked to compare England and Scotland, he replies that Scotland is far superior to England because "One would think the whole nation [England] was upon a regimen of tea and toast." The superiority is limited to Scottish breakfasts; he adds, "[t]he people I give up – they are dirty and greedy – the country, too, is a perfect mass of rubbish – and the dinners not fit for dogs." (p. 237) Instead of other people's souls, he is concerned with his own stomach. After a ball has been going on all night, he is terribly worried about the consequences: not that a maiden's honour is at stake or an elopement might ensue; no, perhaps the cook will oversleep and his prized breakfast will be served later than it should, or even worse, not be available at all. What is this caricature in aid of? We could think briefly of Jane Austen, a writer to whom both *Saintsbury* and *Oliphant* (1882, pp. 238-249) compare Ferrier. Her Ministers of the church are mildly rambunctious, but in the end, whether the Rev. Elton in *Emma* or Rev. Collins in *Pride and Prejudice*, they have some saving grace. But for Ferrier, for whom subtlety is not really a virtue, her English Reverends have none, they are beyond the pale. This is in strong contrast to the real religion that Ferrier and Brunton believe to be the pillar of Scotland's moral superiority. However, what I have found remarkable is that neither gives much significance to ministers as male figures of authority. If true religion resides in the female, this is partly because both are greatly influenced by Mary Wollstonecraft; *Marriage* is the clearest example of this. Many of Juliana's frivolities form part of Wollstonecraft's tirade against her contemporary women: their attitude to breast-feeding, their love of dogs more than of their children, their obsession with clothes and parties, their ridiculous ideas about love and so on. To conclude, one of the many moral interpolations in *Marriage*, though this one comes from the pen of her friend Charlotte Clavering, makes this clear:

Female education was different from what it is now. Female education was little attended to, even in families of the highest rank; consequently, the ladies of those

days possess a raciness in their manners and ideas that we should vainly seek for in this age of cultivation and refinement. (p. 221)

- 14 A much more serious writer than Ferrier is Christian Isobel Johnstone (1781-1857). Although her prose is dotted with sardonic humour, she displays a clear belief that fiction should engage with political questions central to Scottish life: religion, militarism, the Highlands, are but a few. In 2003, I had the honour to edit her novel *Clan-Albin* for the Association of Scottish Literary Studies. The novel begins with the standard homage to Scott, but has two interesting additions. One, is to spotlight the didactic role of fiction, presumably a reference to Edgeworth, and the other is to highlight the importance of a female figure “who returned from France to an insular and solitary reference.” (p. 2) This is Lady Augusta, the novel’s ideologue. I presume that her importance is foregrounded in the Advertisement to remind the reader not to be too carried away by the romance and the young lovers, but instead to listen to Augusta’s words of wisdom. Augusta is Augustan, the voice of reason that goes unheard in a greedy, modern age. Johnstone is a die-hard liberal thinker, and it is therefore no surprise to find that the United States is the country of liberty and wealth to which her impoverished clansmen emigrate en masse. Whereas the young hero states that “One cannot help rejoicing that so many have reached another region, where the woods will afford that clemency and protection which are denied at home” (p. 86), she believes that these economic migrants will soon forget their roots. Chapter 11 consists of a long exposition of her ideas, which try to account for the malaise that underlies modern Scotland. Her liberal beliefs are partly the cause for her making a strong Presbyterian schoolteacher – the major actor of the Kailyard to come – a figure of ridicule, particularly as concerns belief in predestination. During a debate amongst believers of various churches, an amiable Highlander tries to be nice by saying “‘Son of God! – send us all to meet in heaven at last, Papist and Protestant.’ Buchanan’s eyes gleamed with holy zeal while he said, – ‘Impossible.’ ”(p. 75) This humorous poke at doctrine demonstrates her lack of faith in Presbyterianism and, in a most peculiar move, Johnstone allows Buchanan’s daughter to convert to Catholicism. Thus, unlike Ferrier or Brunton, religion in Scotland is not portrayed in a positive light at all. I would go farther and add that Johnstone deconstructs the Kailyard before it has been properly planted.
- 15 I used the word malaise because it is not that easy to pinpoint what exactly has gone wrong, according to Johnstone, with Scotland. In addition, Johnstone often presents opposing arguments without giving us a resolution. At the same time, from her Augustan perspective, sentimentality or turning the clock back are no alternatives at all. Jacobitism is definitely not an option for a liberal. Johnstone knows that emigration is inevitable and that the Highland estates will be taken over by incomers. Therefore, it comes as no surprise to see them as objects for scorn. They have picnics, go on walks etc. along the lines that Lady Juliana had imagined and which would become the standard perception of Balmoral. One figure in particular is singled out for ridicule and this is the nouveau riche Montague, who has the grand idea of painting his newly-acquired Scottish residence white. However, these visitors, whether characters in the book or the readers of the book, will see their own practices estranged in a mildly amusing manner. Johnstone has her venom ready for the worst of offenders: the renegade, Archibald Gordon:

He was a man between thirty and forty; of fashionable appearance and formed manners. In England he affected the Highland Chieftain; in the country the man of fashion, – one who knew life, and loved to enjoy it. His history and characters was that of hundreds in England; in the Highlands it was summed up in few words; – “He has put out fifty smokes.” (p. 135)

- 16 This individual will turn out to be the devil incarnate. It is hard to escape the conclusion that Johnstone is harking back to a period when lairds were lairds and principles were principles, and this is, to a certain extent, true. But I believe that timing is of the utmost importance. What is crucial to us as readers or scholars is the realisation that this portrait of the unscrupulous laird is written precisely at the same time that Waverley fashion and Scottish novel reading have acquired enormous cultural and economic status.
- 17 All three writers truly admired Scott: Brunton is very explicit; Ferrier's attachment to Scott is documented in her correspondence, in Scott's journal and Lockhart's biography/hagiography; Johnstone argued that Scott is a universalist outstanding in his portrayal of women characters, and therefore of greater importance to the cause of women than Edgeworth. Although the situation looks confusing and possibly contradictory, I believe a simple explanation can be offered. For all three ladies, Scott's Scotland is now out of control – the excesses of George IV's visit are just a few years off. They can laugh at its absurdities, but at the same time it is for them all a serious matter; hence reader and subject must be estranged.
- 18 Other perceptions are possible. One of the most odious would stem from the duplicitous, condescending nature of Archibald Gordon which transforms estrangement into ridicule and hate. Otherwise, readers can sit on the sidelines and observe Scotland like a spectator sport. The most brilliant example of this phenomenon comes from the pen of Margaret Oliphant in her late novel *Kirsteen* (1890). In a scene which encapsulates both Victorian stereotypes and the tourist industry as a whole, Lord John is watching a Highland dance:
- But all their impertinences were brought to a climax by Lord John, one of the family, who ought to have known better "Don't you know," he said, "it's my mother's menagerie? We have the natives once a year and make 'em dance. Wait a little till they warm to it, and then you see what you shall see." (v.1: p. 112)
- 19 Joyce's Haines, an enthusiast for Ireland and its culture is even more unsatisfactory, as his knowledge should enable him to cross the stupendous barrier but simply leads to an enormous superiority complex and the desire to tell others how they should think and act.
- 20 I would conclude by stating that whatever angle we take, the stress in Scott and his contemporaries falls on the frown and on defiance to a much greater degree than the picturesque Highlands which are so closely associated with them and their works, and consequently on estrangement rather than romantic engagement. It is impossible to fully understand any human endeavour, and crossing the stupendous barrier is never going to be an exception, but the minimum we can do is be aware of our limits and fallibility, something which neither Haines, Waverley and many other readers-cum-critics from all different perspectives have fully heeded.

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OUT NOW!!! English translation of Shaykh Abu Mus'ab as-Suri's work: Estrangement, the Strangers, and those Manifest upon the Truth, extracted from his monumental work, The Global Islamic Resistance Call. Addeddate. 2018-08-18 19:40:49. Identifier. estrangement. Identifier-ark. ark:/13960/t3b069h3w. That was the start of my deeper research into the whole case of a strange estrangement between the two countries, which have neither any direct conflict between each other, nor have they ever faced each other off in a bilateral dispute in the international arena. So what has caused this chasm between them? During the Nagorno-Karabakh war between Azerbaijan and Artsakh (also known as Nagorno-Karabakh), an ethnic Armenian territory that was granted to the newly formed state of Azerbaijan as a result of a non-perspective political decision of Joseph Stalin during the Soviet reign, Armenia support Thus, people who experience estrangement feel like a stranger to the people or society around them. Estrangement is typically understood specifically as the rejection of, or removal from, the dominant values in society (Cozzarelli and Karafa, 1998). While there is very little research on the relationship between cultural estrangement and political engagement, some evidence suggests that it is negative. Hackett and Omoto (2009) found that estrangement after an election was significantly higher in non-voters than in voters; it was also associated with low political efficacy (i.e., the belief that one has the competence and skills to engage with politics) and low intention to become politically engaged in future (e.g., to vote, to protest, to work in the community).