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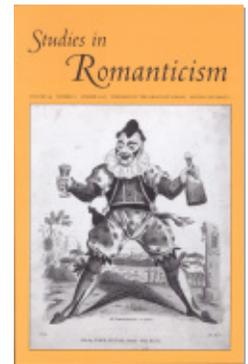
Response

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Response

JANE MOODY'S LIFE AND WORK ABOUNDED WITH JOYFULNESS, INNOVATION, surprise, love for family, friends, and colleagues, and, of course, intellectual brilliance of the highest order. It is right and fitting, then, that the essays in this memorial volume sparkle with the same qualities, and pay tribute to her "illegitimate legacy" by following in the bright pathways, both personal and professional, that she marked out for us. As her husband and her colleague, I would like to thank the authors of these essays, Kevin Gilmartin in particular, for organizing the MLA Panel and editing this volume with graceful intelligence, as well as all those many individuals so touched by Jane in the wider circles of family, friendship, and profession, for their dedication to keeping the tremendous spirit of her many legacies, "legitimate" and "illegitimate," alive and thriving.

It is impossible to summarize, embellish, or even adequately highlight the cornucopia of insights and exploratory soundings in the work of Jane and her splendid colleagues featured in this volume of *Studies in Romanticism*. However, I would like to take a stab at emphasizing just one leitmotif or motion that runs deeply and pervasively throughout Jane's writings and the fine contributions to this volume: that is what we might call the superabundant, often uproarious "border crossings" at the heart of Romantic era theater and the conversations about them enacted by Jane and her colleagues. Jeff Cox explores, for instance, the paratexts— theater reviews, toy theaters, music, theatrical venues—that are crucial to our efforts to comprehend the almost limitless contours and cultural significance of harlequinade on stage. Julie Carlson shows how the Georgian theater opened its doors and its audiences to children, and she invites us to explore the ways in which stage enchantments shaped the creative imaginations of authors such as Mary Shelley in childhood. Gillian Russell touches on this point in relation to a young Robert Southey's delight with playbills. I have also come across a similar account by Mary Russell Mitford of the incredible thrill and lifetime inspiration of seeing her first play at the age of six, in a Reading barn, standing in the front row, eyes wide, next to her equally enthralled dog, Trencher. Jane looked to her favorite critic, William Hazlitt, to foreground this lifelong, profound imaginative sustenance granted by the adventure of the Romantic era stage. In her epigraph to *Illegitimate Theatre*, Hazlitt thus emerges as the first to speak:

Our associations of admiration and delight with theatrical performers, are among our earliest recollections—among our last regrets. They are

links that connect the beginning and the end of life together; their bright and giddy career of popularity measures the arch that spans our brief existence.

(*The Times*, 25 June 1817)

Illustrating the various ways in which such a theatrical “arch” consists of both the materiality of stage performance and the ephemerality of playbills, Russell demonstrates that “print culture” and “theatricality are profoundly imbricated” in the overall history of the Romantic era stage and its strong relation to sociopolitical forces swirling both within and without the theater. Daniel O’Quinn tracks the porous flow of energies between legitimate and illegitimate theater, the intrinsic focus of Cox’s work on pantomime as well, a dismantling of theatrical hierarchies that at once upholds and tears apart cultural prejudices.

In his excellent Introduction to this volume, Kevin Gilmartin nicely pinpoints the intrinsic connection between such “border crossings” in Romantic era theater and the “dazzling range” of Jane’s expertise across a wide spectrum of “formal, aesthetic, performative, institutional, cultural, social, and political registers.” Following from this deep regard for Jane’s stunning fluidity of insight—also manifested in her multiple finesse as theater historian, literary critic, and cultural historian across the wide span of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—Gilmartin notes her fundamental, almost instinctive, capacity to spot, theorize, and interpret the minute “cross-fertilization[s]” of dramatic genres, literary and political discourses, theatrical and social institutions. She was, indeed, “a master of the unstable dialectic” that reveals in the end not a “higher synthesis” but rather “the complexity and hybridity of cultural forms” and their often disturbing relation to social, economic, and political upheaval. The essays compiled in this volume, each in their own differently inflected ways, follow Jane in such mastery of the “unstable dialectic” throughout Romantic era theater and its hybrid modes of engagement with the instabilities of revolution, reform, riots, and massive social upheaval throughout the Romantic era.

Diego Saglia’s essay on the “spectral spectacularity” of ghost melodramas of the 1820s focuses attention on what may be the Romantic era’s most striking single trope or image of theatrical and cultural instability—the prolific and “fluid category” of the ghost on stage, a figure who subverts “the boundaries between different dimensions”: visible and invisible, suddenly disappearing from stage through the use of technological innovations like the vampire trap; dangerously physical and gory, yet weirdly incorporeal; human to the basics of sexual lust, yet also supernatural and uncontainable. In connecting the “uncanny transitionality” of the ghost, particularly the vampire, to the pervasiveness of liminal experience on social, economic,

and political levels in post-Napoleonic war Britain—"Riots, conspiracies, institutional, and political crises, financial cataclysms and reformist aspirations . . ."—Saglia takes a central leaf from the book of Moody and reinforces its pivotal stress upon the elemental dynamic of hybridity in Romantic era theater and its gripping linkage to the perilous instabilities of the nation.

In their own distinctive but related explorations of different border crossings in Romantic era theater, each of these essays pursues, with thrills, amazement, and not infrequent hilarity, the myriad ways in which the theater's boundless energies shape, reinforce, and also undermine Romantic era modes of culture, class, fashion, nation, society, empire, gender, genre, imagination, consciousness itself. Jane, of course, pointed out the directions for many of these and other specific critical excursions (her latest work addressed the global reach of the Romantic era theater in provincial, colonial, and military venues). She also staged a model, not only in her work but also in her own mischievously antic disposition, for both the hybridity of Romantic era theater and its related supercharged sociability that proved so liberating during the time and that powers so many of our own professional and not so professional activities in this wonderful field of study.

Jane staged her first act of "illegitimate theater," as our best man, Professor Bill Sherman, often reminded us with side-splitting glee, when, as a post-graduate fellow at Girton College, Cambridge, she broke all manner of social and sartorial regulation by waltzing into a stately, though somewhat sombre, college awards function brandishing a great, red, flouncy bonnet, beyond the belief of any of the Bennett sisters and much to the consternation of her stern elders. When invited to stand for an interview before the gathered faculty of the University of York English Department, she wrested the floor from the entire department and detailed, with pointed scrupulosity, just what the department needed to do to improve. We won't mention, of course, how, as an upstart young scholar, she graciously acknowledged in print the wisdom of a draft essay on nautical theater by Jeffrey Cox and then proceeded to demolish his argument before it even got published. As Cox loves to say, "Jane was generous to a fault, but she did not suffer academic fools."

She did, however, bring us all together in conversation, imagination, innovation, and creative madness, whether through her own boundary crossing work, or through her salsa dancing instruction at a Colorado NASSR Death March party, her advocacy of illegal swimming at the same party, her instigation of what shall ever be known as "The Great Bologna Bread Roll Fight" at a NASSR conference in an elegant, private Bologna Palazzo where Napoleon had dined and where Jane convinced her Cockney table partners that they should restage an old *Commedia dell'arte* tradition by wag-

ing a food fight. Inevitably, it was not long before we began dubbing her “Illegitimate Jane,” then “Illegal Jane,” and, finally, “Queen of the Cockneys,” a title that made her publicly wince but that she privately relished. She also devoted her unlimited creative energy in her final years to the construction and magnificent implementation of the University of York’s Humanities Research Centre, which she directed with gusto, brilliance, and insurrectionary power to create a spectacular venue for inspired conversation and joyous sociability among students and colleagues from near and far.

Jane concludes *Illegitimate Theatre* with the bold claim that the virtually “uncontrollable energies” (228) and astounding physical hilarity on the Romantic era illegitimate stage could act both subversively and regeneratively to “ma[k]e possible a special kind of imaginative and political freedom . . . utterly changing the way the world could be imagined on stage” (242). Her work has inspired so many, in this volume and throughout the world, to comprehend the global reach and even on occasion to reproduce, on and off stage, such liberating, “illegitimate” action. If the motto she bestowed upon her Humanities Research Centre, quoted from Martha Nussbaum, is “Democracy Needs the Humanities,” one of the other mottos she has given us, so amply and ingeniously fulfilled in this volume, must be: “Romantic Era Studies Needs the Theater.”

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