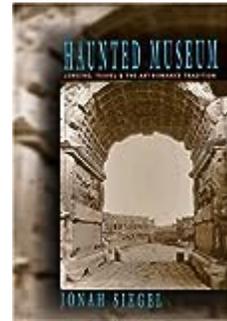




Jonah Siegel. *Haunted Museum: Longing, Travel and the Art-Romance Tradition.* Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005. x + 285 pp. \$70.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-691-12086-7.



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The Romance and Dream of the Artistic Past

Jonah Siegel's *Haunted Museum* is a provocative and imaginative examination of the art romance tradition. With origins in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, this genre continued to influence literature well into the early twentieth century. Siegel moves through several stages of the art romance tradition as it changed in relation to larger historical transformations and in relation to individual authors' varying interpretations of the past. Here the past refers specifically to the history of southern Europe, above all Italy, as a site of projected loss, nostalgia, and genius. In his preface, Siegel introduces a definition of art romance, which he gradually modifies throughout the book and will be discussed below, as he examines changing, "vexed relations among originality, convention, and passion" (p. xiii). Siegel combines literary analyses with his own innovative links among texts, bringing together Romantic, Victorian, and modern literature with Sigmund Freud's writings. Juxtaposing Freud with works of literature, Siegel offers a refreshing perspective on the father of psychoanalysis and underscores how Freud's concerns with dreams and the past contributed to the legacy of the art romance tradition.

Siegel's range of authors is wide: Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Madame de Staël, Robert Browning, Letitia Landon, Lord Byron, Sigmund Freud, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry James, E. M. Forster, Marcel Proust, and Thomas Mann. Works produced by these authors all share features fundamental to the art romance: each "describes a voyage at once toward something precious and new and toward something dangerous and old," embracing both novelty and familiarity (p. 4). Across decades and geographies, Siegel traces the art romance from a very solid base in the early nineteenth century to an attenuated and diluted residue in modern literature. In his introduction, Siegel sketches a definition of the art romance tradition using Giovanni Paolo Panini's *Views of Ancient Rome* (1757). Panini's work, Siegel contends, represented a nexus of art romance themes and structures: (1) travel, (2) luxurious display of art objects from the past, and (3) travelers' fantasies of having all of art and history at their figure tips from which to draw their own creative impulses and passions, in other words, the "perfect museum" (p. 3). The museum, Siegel explains, by rearranging and re-narrating the past—using objects dislocated from their original contexts—is haunted by the

past. Extending the image further, Siegel identifies parallels between the museum and the collector, and the South and the voyager. Experiencing the South (above all Italy) as a museum, the northern European voyager becomes a collector, who imagines the past through its art. Such a state of imagining, however, taps into a rich affective world of sensuality, dream, desire, passion, longing, and fear. The contradictory drives of desire and fear are essential to the art romance and its traveler-protagonist.

In addition to participating in the current interest in travel writing, Siegel also addresses the idea of the genius. Although it has now been thoroughly deconstructed and debased, art romance writers nonetheless found the notion of the genius powerfully attractive. Siegel also examines how the desire for the South exposed cultural differences between the northern European art romance writers—who both inherited the genius of the South and its ancient cultures and continued its traditions—and the imagined South. Aware that they were standing on the shoulders of giants, Victorian and modern authors feared that they might fall short of their genius. Siegel notes how the art romance grew out of “the two-way traffic between fiction and the culture of art” which created its own themes of conflicts between passion and convention (p. 6). In this way, Siegel links the art romance to our own notion of the visual turn in culture and our use of the visual as a lens to analyze literature and social change, connections that scholars have been exploring in the last decade or so.

Siegel shares with recent scholars an interest in exploring the interconnections between literature and art. But in his case it is not so much particular works of art, and their links to literature, that attracts his attention. Instead he is interested in what he calls art culture, a subject he explored in his earlier book *Desire and Excess* (2000). Art culture, Siegel explains, was a nineteenth-century European combination of historical and imagined notions about art’s power, cultural authority, and magical creativity. As Siegel has it, art culture also involved the rebellion and even license with which modern European artists approached their work as part of an attempt to resist social conventions. Though it makes for a heady mixture of themes and narrative structures—travel, emotional mixtures of desire and fear, art culture, history, and genius—Siegel ably retains the coherence of the genre in the early art romances he explores. At the same time, by crossing disciplinary categories of style, periodization, and national cultures—all categories across which he moves easily—and ignoring entrenched literary categories, Siegel calls into question such stylistic cate-

gories as neoclassicism, romanticism, realism, and modernism.

Siegel treats European culture as a whole, although not as monolithic. For generations, Italy was “an overdetermined destination of the arts, a passionately desired space combining the prospect of erotic pleasure with the hope for intimacy with the most profound sources of culture” (p. 7). Greece was important too; however, after the Romantics, Greece did not have quite the same imaginative hold on European writers as Italy did. Rome, Venice and Florence were the most popular destinations in art romance literature. Siegel pits art romance writers’ overarching desire for the imagined European South, and all it richly contained of history and affect, against stylistic categories. In the process, he opens up new ways of thinking about the literature which he examines thoroughly.

In chapter 1, Siegel explores the foundations of the art romance and explores the conflicts and transgressive desires which characterized early art romance writing. Art romance, he argues, began with Johann Winckelmann’s *Reflections on the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks* (1755), but the genre’s literary roots lay in Johann Wolfgang Goethe’s works. Siegel thus begins his chronological mapping of the art romance with Goethe’s novel *Wilhelm Meister* (1795). *Wilhelm Meister* contained the often transgressive themes that saturated later art romance works—realism intertwined with allegory, incestuous passion, the otherworldliness of the artist (Mignon), dislocation from one’s place of origin, loss, and nostalgia. Goethe’s Mignon, as a powerful figure of insatiable longing and dislocation, embodied the South. Her character inspired subsequent art romance writers, as well as composers like Franz Schubert. In these later works Mignon, or her imagined descendents, often appeared, although she was sometimes reconfigured to add issues related to gender and class (she was a poor girl). This newly imagined Mignon, in turn, instigated debates about desire, transgression, and social conventions. Mignon exemplified the unfulfilled search in which travelers’ never reached their desired destination or object. The overriding insatiability that accompanied travelers’ quests thus created a gap between their physical and psychic destinations: they never reach their desired place or object, even when they finally arrive at the desired and dreamed of Italy.

Other defining works include Alfred Lord Tennyson’s poem, “The Palace of Art” (1832), in which the beautiful palace became unlivable for the soul because of its exces-

sive insulation from real life and actual experience. Art romance authors yoked the uncanny or shocking with the familiar, pitting desire against ordinary life, the imaginary Italy against the “real” northern Europe. These forces combined to create a cultural memory of the past, which became the theme of Freud’s writings, both in relation to his own dreams and experiences and that of his patients’ dreams and memories. In most of Siegel’s writers the desire for success and the fear of failure are twinned; they are bound up with histories’ cultural memories and anxieties.

In chapter 2 Siegel follows these threads in a series of works. In Madame de Staël’s *De l’Allemagne* (1813) Mignon reappeared as Corinne, de Staël’s doomed female genius protagonist. A figure born in Italy, who was reminiscent of Mignon, also surfaced in Letitia Landon’s popular poem “The Improvisatrice” (1824). A similar character also appeared in other works by Landon, which Siegel nicely explores in depth. Siegel also studies Byron’s *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (1812-18), in which Italy figured as a place of desire and death. Siegel looks at how Byron’s “cultured voyager driven by urges at once inexplicable and unsatisfiable,” also contributed to the art romance (p. 57). Byron’s traveler reached the physical site he desired but never satisfied his emotional intentions or desires. In their emphases on the nature of the artist, transgressive passions (either incestuous or adulterous, or in the case of Aurora Leigh, female desires for autonomy and fame), Robert Browning’s poems “Childe Roland” (1868), “The Ring and the Book” (1868-69), “Fra Lippo Lippi” (1855), along with Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s “Aurora Leigh” (1864), shaped the genre of the art romance. These texts also shared an unnerving juxtaposition of the uncanny with the familiar.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5, in part 2, all focus on Henry James. Siegel locates James between texts which shaped and created art romance and between texts which deployed the art romance in modern forms. James is the fulcrum of the book. He introduced “texts in which the centrality of the romance component is in some measure surprising” (p. 85). Like his predecessors, James focused on the artist character, on their failure, on their conflicts between passion and convention, and on the travel motif. Siegel sprinkles his exploration of several of James’s novels and short stories with considerations of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s influence on him. Siegel also devotes a full chapter to *The Golden Bowl* (1904), arguing that it combined art romance themes with stylistic features, especially in its preoccupation in the narrative with temporal speed and its focus on the site of the museum. For

James, the museum became a resonant site for art romance themes of dislocation, historical accumulation of art, and the view of the artist (or collector or connoisseur, both regular characters in James’s writings) as failing to contain or to completely own the art culture.

In the final two chapters, or part 3, Siegel explores the works of Sigmund Freud, E.M. Forester, Marcel Proust, and Thomas Mann. These writers made mixed use of the art romance tradition. They harkened back to the tradition, yet they also diluted it with modern preoccupations and experiences, such as homosexuality and disconcerting memories. In chapter 6, Siegel examines how as a traveler to Rome, in his life and in his dreams, Freud combined his adventures with his anxieties about success, his father, his dream subjects—as well as that of his patients—and with his children. Siegel’s inclusion of Freud, in the march of the art romance toward modernism, is an innovative stroke and Siegel’s study demonstrates the value of reading Freud as a writer, as well as an analyst. Because of his numerous allusions to classical myth and his rich reading of literature, Freud certainly merits a place within the art romance genre. Freud and other moderns did not build it, but by introducing modern emphases on such issues as dreams, sexuality, and technologies of travel, they transformed the genre’s themes. For Freud, like other modern writers, questions about the nature of desire became an issue of fundamental concern—both in their act of desiring and in their failure to satisfy their desires. According to Freud “illusion and divagation are fundamental elements on the path to meeting real and familiar needs” and to shaping/writing our past (p. 190).

In the final chapter, Siegel turns to consider the various ways in which three modern writers, Forester, Proust and Mann, pursued the relationship between “longing and arrival” (p. 202), with Venice figuring as the dominant site for Mann and Proust. In chapter 7 elements of the genre seem to have fragmented in Siegel’s analyses: speed for Forster (emphasis on means of travel—“the train, the hotel, the ferry, even the car”—p. 196); desire for Proust, whose relationship to his mother echoes Childe Harold’s; and a mixture of desire and speed for Mann, whose protagonist Aschenbach in *Death in Venice* (1912) had “the genealogical tree of a Mignon,” combining Mignon and Wilhelm, “two sides of one desire” of phlegmatic North and passionate South” (p. 215). Aschenbach the artist was “like an overgrown self-conscious Mignon, his nerves are bad and he is subject to an inexplicable longing for the South” (p. 215).

In his afterward, Siegel suggests how some of these

elements continue in novels by D. H. Lawrence, Ernest Hemingway, Graham Greene, Thomas Harris, and Patricia Highsmith. As Siegel notes, Italy also appeared in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871) as the site of the erotic. This heterogeneous list of authors reflects Siegel's own wide embrace and inclusion of varied kinds of literature. Just as he ignored historical stylistic categories, in defining the under examined art romance tradition, Siegel likewise ignores generic literary hierarchies. In the end, Siegel concludes that among its other legacies, the art romance reveals that desire is the real, not its opposite, and that history is always partly a dream. It is through the fantastic that "life is more likely to be reached" (p. 237). While Siegel risks yoking disparate genres, styles, and historical periods by linking some of them through their use of fragments of the art romance, his case for a genre is solid, sustained by his rich analyses of the early formative literature. He is careful to note

that later authors were taking up bits of the art romance; they were not simply using it as given.

In the last section of his book, Siegel makes the case that modern literature, rather than being abruptly discontinuous with its past, creates a dialectic out of its past and feels free to recall and revise the themes and motifs of the art romance from its Romantic and Victorian predecessors. In so doing, Siegel does not simplistically unify his authors. He readily acknowledges the historical and social changes that have inflected and fragmented the art romance tradition. Such changes, including modern definitions of consciousness and narrative voice, have transformed the genre's themes of desire, death, art, and Italy. In his careful balance of similarities and distinctions between the builders and the modifiers of art romance, Siegel offers a paradigmatic chronological study of how styles and genres change, revive, fragment, and vanish.

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