

JEREMY ADLER AND RICHARD FARDON. *FRANZ BAERMANN STEINER: A STRANGER IN THE WORLD*. LONDON AND NEW YORK: BERGHAHN 2021. 290 P. ISBN: 9781800732704

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A stranger in the world is a befitting subtitle to Jeremy Adler and Richard Fardon's biography of Franz Baermann Steiner, a polymath known for his poetic and academic work in the fields of anthropology and politics, as well as his role as quiet contemporary to the founding figures of social anthropology. Adler and Fardon describe Steiner through his periods of influence and writing, beginning from Steiner's childhood in Karlín, Prague to his final days at Oxford. Steiner's specific alchemy of experience was one of intellectual luminance, perpetual tragedy, and displacement. Steiner's exile in the United Kingdom profoundly influenced his academic and philosophical outlook, fueling his interest in questions of identity, language, culture, and the human condition in a world besieged by political turmoil and ideological conflict. The authors paint a true-to-life portrait of Steiner as an enigmatic figure whose scholarly and literary pursuits served as a conduit between European thought and Oxford anthropology; his greater life thesis was the quest for tolerance and freedom. The authors do not seek to present a cold archaeology of Steiner's life through a dissection of his writings, rather Adler and Fardon convince the reader of Steiner's undeniable humanity by balancing analysis of the man alongside his written works.

Steiner was as touched and changed by *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moby Dick* as he was by his travels, the devastation of the Second World War, and the guilt of surviving in isolation. Steiner had no single formative age but many formative experiences, each of which the authors identify as 'patterns' that would recur and sculpt his praxis. Steiner's Judaism was a major theme of patterning; he saw his family's establishment in Prague as a specific result of the fraught history of European Jewry, and himself as a member of a people defined by their serial alienation. From youth Steiner sought ways to understand the forces that govern such divisive categorisation as well as the perspectives behind cultural cohesion and exclusion: this would naturally lead to his navigation of the world through anthropology.

In the chapter regarding Steiner's first ethnological studies of Ruthenian Gypsies, Adler and Fardon reveal Steiner to be a highly empathetic and prescient spirit who, almost a century ago, shared the ethos of contemporary anthropologists: the production of knowledge for purposes of mutual benefit, described by the authors as co-modernisation and simultaneous enfranchisement. Steiner saw himself in the situation of the Ruthenian Gypsies, who were 'an

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Oriental people living among Westerners' (59) and whose connection to mainstream communities was only through market activities. Just as his subjects of study were geographically and socially peripheral, Steiner was a constant stranger, both in his being an anthropologist before a community of study, as well in his isolation from his family and homeland as a Jew in exile. Penance and suffering dominated his thought, and Steiner sought clarity through intellectual dialogue. He saw suffering as 'the medium of time' (243) which provided the foundation of value. Religions, in turn, are social institutions created to communicate such suffering (244). Counter to the lineage of Western thought, Steiner was drawn into philosophical debate with Nietzsche and Rilke and argued that suffering was the weft of humanity; that suffering is what makes man truly human.

At the end of the book, readers will come to know Steiner as the great predecessor as well as Steiner the fellow student, friend, poet, and human being. Local readers will easily find kinship with Steiner's lament over the overly expensive books of Oxford, the cursed English weather, and the loneliness of writing. Steiner's belief in the benefaction of tolerance and pluralism is urgent in the contemporary, and is proven by his anthropology: though society has strong classifications, it holds danger – intolerance – at bay by respecting both the commonalities of our many cultures, as well as its differences. Steiner's thought occupied a critical juncture between anthropology, political activism, and poetry that is as close to an ideal model of interdisciplinarity than anything that currently exists. This is an essential reading for anthropologists and members of all social science disciplines, as well as students needing grounding in these uncertain times.

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