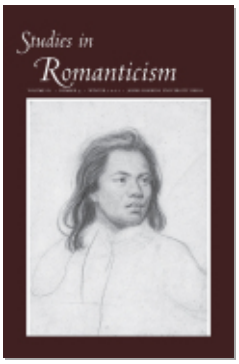
Keats's Places ed. by Richard Marggraf Turley (review)

Brian Rejack



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Book Reviews

Richard Marggraf Turley, ed. *Keats's Places*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. Pp. xvi + 305. 16 B&W illustrations. $159.99 (hardcover) / $109.99 (paper) / $84.99 (ebook).

As Richard Marggraf Turley notes in his introduction to *Keats's Places*, the poet who is the subject of this rich collection of essays has long been read as a writer deeply enmeshed in imaginative spaces, whether the bowers and hills and fields of the early poetry, or the haunted landscapes of later visions like those in the Hyperion poems. The welcome turn of this study is to locate Keats not just in relation to the figurative spaces of his poems, but also the "geophysical and cultural milieux" (2) out of which those poems emerged and through which Keats's writing and posthumous legacy have continued to circulate. Crucially, though, the essays in this collection do not lose sight of Keats's imaginative spaces. As Turley writes in the introduction, the volume "investigates the imaginative progressions through which actual locations and visionary poetic terrains enter into—and remain in—complex dialogue" (2). Scholars of Keats and Romanticism will thus find here a not-so-scanty plot of ground on which to tread in search of the poet and his many places. As Keats himself wrote, we must go "the same steps as the Author" in order to fully fathom the "fine things" we read. The contributions to Turley's collection offer many vivid maps of notable Keatsian territories, and following the poet's steps through these winding mossy ways—with the guidance of the volume's contributors—will yield many insights for readers.

The volume is organized (loosely) chronologically, with the places associated with Keats's early career beginning the collection and chapters on Keats's final two habitations (what would become Keats House in London, and the Keats-Shelley Memorial House in Rome) bringing the book to a close. That temporal arrangement tends to map onto geographical groupings as well, so even though the book does not have actual section divisions, there are clear spatial correspondences between essay clusters that surface in the reading of them. For instance, the first few chapters tend to hover in and around Hampstead, while three chapters at the book's center focus on Keats and Charles Brown's summer 1818 walking tour in northern England, Scotland, and (briefly) Ireland. Two chapters follow on places associated with Keats's 1820 volume (Nicholas Roe's chapter on Winchester, and Grant Scott's chapter on the placement of poetry within the 1820 volume

itself), and then come the aforementioned chapters on Wentworth Place in London and on Keats's all-too-brief sojourn in Rome, chapters written by two authors who know those locations inside and out (Kenneth Page, who works as Interpretation Officer at Keats House in Hampstead, and Giuseppe Albano, who is Curator of the Keats-Shelley House in Rome).

But to return to Keats's earlier places—the first five chapters following Turley's introduction all deliver us to the scenes of Keats's vibrant urban experience as he was becoming a poet. Hrileena Ghosh's opening chapter focuses on Guy's Hospital and demonstrates the enduring effect of Keats's medical training on his life and work well beyond the time he spent there in 1815–1816. Especially illuminating is Ghosh's attention to the people with whom Keats had contact through Guy's, and how those relationships helped shape elements of his biography and his career (for instance, Ghosh's suggestion that Keats's connection to Margate could have been facilitated by a fellow medical student named Joseph Waddington). In his chapter, Greg Kucich focuses on the Hunt Circle's activities at the Vale of Health in Hampstead. In so doing Kucich makes a persuasive argument for "an alternative kind of masculinity, a brotherhood grounded in gentle amity and tender, supportive kindness . . . that prevailed at Hunt's Vale of Health cottage in 1816 and which vitally propelled Keats into the world of poetry writing" (59). Fiona Stafford's Hampstead is the one populated by specific flora ("shoots and leaves," in Stafford's playful title nodding to Lynne Truss's famous book). Illustrating the productive overlap between actual places and the imaginative bowers constructed in Keats's poetry, Stafford draws attention to the medical expertise that helped inform Keats's knowledge of botany, while also connecting specific floral imagery in Keats's early poetry (especially "I stood tip-toe") with what he would have seen on his daily travels amidst the (then) suburban environs of Hampstead. Michael O'Neill's chapter in this section ranges more widely, but focuses primarily on how the relationship between Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley (first begun and cultivated in and around Hampstead) revolves around their notions of the cultural "place" of poetry. And Turley's own contribution takes us through a fascinating survey of Keats on the move, centering on the poet's journey from London to Southampton in April 1817 and showing how Keats's writing about it "affords us insight into the creative energy of Keatsian translocations and translocutions, of the back-and-forth between place and poetry" (128).

Situated more-or-less in the book's middle (if we allow a somewhat fuzzy spatial definition of "middle") are three chapters on Keats's northern tour, a welcome focus given its relative under-examination as compared with other moments in the poet's biography. One suspects the journey is overshadowed by the poetic accomplishments that follow it later in 1818 and into 1819, but as Heidi Thomson, Meiko O'Halloran, and Alexandra Paterson show, the places, events, and people connected with Keats and Brown's adventure

exert considerable influence on Keats's later writing. Thomson examines a mostly ignored bit of verse Keats wrote to his sister Fanny inspired by the figure of Meg Merrilies, a character from Walter Scott's *Guy Mannering* who became, as Thomson demonstrates, a sort of pop-culture phenomenon. Viewed through Thomson's analysis, Meg Merrilies becomes a key to unlock revelations about female figures ranging from Moneta and Mnemosyne in the Hyperion poems to the elusive figure of Autumn in Keats's last ode. O'Halloran focuses on two other notable figures deeply enmeshed in the northern landscape, and, at least from our contemporary perspective, more famous and influential ones than Meg Merrilies: William Wordsworth and Robert Burns. The disappointment of Keats's encounters with his poetic forebears (or rather, with their absences) proves formative, in O'Halloran's account, for Keats's move away from the pastoral and toward epic landscapes. Paterson similarly has epic in mind with her interest in "natural sculpture," a term used to describe Saturn and Thea in the opening of *Hyperion*, but applicable to contemporary discourse about sculptural art and its naturalness, as well as geological understandings of rock formations. We thus end this mini-cluster with sustained attention to a significant component of place (for Keats or for anyone else): the materiality of the earth itself.

A more abstract turn follows as the book's final four chapters each focus on rather distinct individual places. In what is perhaps the volume's most intriguing interpretation of "place," Grant Scott's essay examines Keats's *Lamia, Isabella, the Eve of St. Agnes, and Other Poems* and its spatial organization. In particular, Scott focuses his argument on a reading of "Ode to Psyche" via its placement at the end of a series composed of it, "Ode to a Nightingale," and "Ode on a Grecian Urn." Scott's reading of "Psyche" in this way allows him to then widen out to consider the ode's American associations through taking up Georgiana Wylie Keats as a Psyche-like figure. Nicholas Roe's essay is more firmly rooted in one place, Winchester, and it explores fascinating connections between the medieval city, King Alfred, and Keats's ideas about what constitutes a "pure" English language (i.e. beautiful and true, if not actually "genuine"). We then fittingly conclude with histories of the two places that could perhaps best be said to still function as Keats's places: the Keats House in London and the Keats-Shelley House in Rome. These institutions are vital ones for understanding Keats's continuing posthumous lives, and Kenneth Page and Giuseppe Albano do wonderful work in their respective essays to illuminate the histories of the places, while also gesturing toward the significance the two houses hold for us in the present. Upon concluding one's reading of the collection, one could do worse than to heed Shelley's 200-year-old counsel: "Go thou to Rome" (and stop in London on the way). For as much as he's been read and studied for two centuries, Keats still has more steps in which we might follow in

pursuit of further understanding. Turley's collection covers much already trodden Keatsian ground, but it does so in consistently illuminating ways while also suggesting still untrodden regions for future travelers to explore, cultivate, and then share with the rest of us.

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Claire Connolly, ed. *Irish Literature in Transition, 1780–1830*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp. xvi + 439. $110 (hardcover).

In 1991, in the three-volume *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, general editor Seamus Deane took on the mammoth task of compiling representative samples of the literary output of Ireland from ca. 600 to the contemporary moment, bringing the different linguistic and confessional groups of Ireland together under one cover (Derry: Field Day, 1991). Eleven years later, two more gargantuan volumes were added to *The Field Day Anthology*, specifically designed to address a problem in the first three volumes by focusing on texts by and about women (New York and Cork: New York University Press and Cork University Press, 2002). *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* was a national project, reflective of a period in which Irish identity was being renegotiated on the world stage and at home (the Good Friday Agreement took place in 1998 between the publication of the first three and the last two volumes). Writing in 2006 in the Introduction to the two-volume *Cambridge History of Irish Literature,* Margaret Kelleher and Philip O'Leary commented that the publication of the *Field Day Anthology* "created the anomalous situation in which Ireland now has a chronologically organised literary canon but no comprehensive literary history in light of which to think about it" (1). Accordingly, Kelleher and O'Leary set out in *Cambridge History of Irish Literature* to provide "a specifically Irish context in which to read the literary works all too often seen as curious offshoots from a normative English tradition" (3). Kelleher and O'Leary ended their Introduction by acknowledging that "A future *Cambridge History of Irish Literature* will look very different from this one" and by hoping that the editors of this future series "will not find their intellectual forebears an embarrassment" (8).

The general editors of the new six-volume *Irish Literature in Transition* series, Claire Connolly and Marjorie Howes, pick up the torch from the 2006 publication. True to the series' self-reference to "transition," however, they do so in such a way as to realign the goals of the former editors toward a future reference point. (Significantly, the editor of the volume under review here,