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Romantic Localities: Europe Writes Place

(Pickering and Chatto, 2010)

edited by Christoph Bode and Jacqueline Labbe

ROMANTIC LOCALITIES is a collection of sixteen essays that explore how "place" becomes a "concept" (2) in the work of Romantic-era writers. The subtitle, "Europe Writes Place," implies a larger scope than is present: these are British experiences of Britain and mainland Europe. Of the fifty countries that now form part of Europe, Britain receives the most attention, followed by Italy, France, Germany and Greece. Britons who have travelled further afield are also included. The main focus is on the concept of place formed through travellers' encounters or residents' perspectives, and the majority of the essays are on British writers' interpretations or experiences of Britain. With the exception of the essay on the Della Cruscans, there is not a strong sense within individual essays of how ideas on place in one country may have influenced those of another.

From the beginning, the volume addresses the difficulties of dissociating the study of travel from the study of place. It includes discussion of writers who travel as well as writers who fictionalize travel, and is inclusive of the different ways of conceptualizing the different aspects of travel. We have travel writing in its traditional sense, with its concentration on movement, destinations, stopping points, foreignness and the exotic; travel that involves a more overt relationship to politics through nationhood, emigration, exile, habitation, and conquest; and travel that is undertaken for educational purposes, such as the Grand Tour. Place is conceptualized, in the introduction, in terms of landscape, city, and geological structures, but the making of the Romantic landscape is the centre of attention. The collection proposes that the writers of the Romantic era "witness a new development in ideas of place and locale" (2), and that by writing about place Romantic-era writers create it—in the sense of associating a place with a particular set of cultural meanings, and in the sense of "imaginative locale-building [3]), that is, turning a location into a "locale" (3). Peter J. Kitson's essay collection, *Placing and Displacing Romanticism* (2001), with which none of the essays engages, takes a similar view, but is more overtly cognizant of the inevitable canonical issues that arise as a consequence of raising the issue of Romantic localities: "'Placing' Romanticism is … a vexed issue, impinging upon debates about taxonomies and issues of canon-formation."[1] Like Kitson's, the introductory essay in the volume under review is an enormously helpful addition to the conceptualization of place, an aspect of culture and writing that is usually subsumed into the more established field of travel writing.

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[1] Peter J. Kitson. *Placing and Displacing Romanticism*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001. 1.

Nevertheless, travel is very present in the volume. A great deal of attention is given to sightseeing as a way to understand place. Felicitas Menhard reminds us that walking is both a subject of poetry and is intimately linked to the composition of poetry. Menhard uses cinematographic metaphors to discuss Coleridge's "The Lime Tree Bower, My Prison". She suggests that Coleridge's "'zooming in' on the leaf" is a "wholly different… aesthetic experience" from that of the "panoramic, bird's eye perspective of the pedestrians" of the poem (17), but does not add anything to the already well-researched topic of pedestrian travel. Coleridge is less associated with travel than with home here. Jacqueline Labbe characterizes Coleridge by his "homeboundedness" (25), contrasting him with Wordsworth who is "the poet of place, and also of pace" (25). England and Scotland are particularly well represented in the discussions on tourism. Tom Furniss and Nicola J. Watson both discuss the impact of Scott's *The Lady of the Lake* (1810) on Scottish tourism. Furniss explores James Robertson's 1794 parish report on Callendar as a text that puts the locations associated with Scott's poem on the tourist map. Furniss argues that the literature of the tourist provides a different perspective from that of someone like Robertson, who had a "'deep' and intimate" (64) knowledge of the location. Watson takes a different direction and traces how Scott's poem transformed the locations associated with it from being places connected with generic responses to landscapes (sublime, beautiful and picturesque) to being "quintessential romantic" (67) localities "charged with specific, unique and local meaning[s]" (67). Scott's poem, she argues, draws on the discourse of travel writing, and laid itself out as "an excursion waiting to happen" (76).

England's Sherwood Forest, in Stephanie Fricke's essay, is viewed straightforwardly in its purely literary sense. Fricke presents the forest, in the work of Joseph Ritson, John Hamilton Reynolds, Keats, Leigh Hunt, Peacock and Scott, as a symbol for a rural idyll, an anti-authoritarian protest, and as a "homosocial space of male bonding" (118). She is more interested in the literary legends of Robin Hood than in the forest as a place, and the reception history of the site as a literary locale is less evident in this essay than in others that associate place with writers or their works. Kristin Ott examines how literary tourism changed the perception of Scotland by concentrating on writers' visits to literary sites and, in particular, on the visits made by Dorothy and William Wordsworth and Keats to sites associated with Ossian and Burns. Ott suggests that "in Scotland tourism was book-based from the beginning" (39) and that "what drew the tourists" was "their preoccupation with myth and tradition" (40). Also significant, as Ott points out, is the growing interest in places associated with writers rather than their texts. The Wordsworths' Town End (Dove) Cottage became such a place of interest, and Polly Atkin looks at its identity as a home and how this forms part of the conception of place in their writing. William, she stresses, uses the location to create "his own mythos of home" (87), and while creating this sense of home, he feels anxious

"about being unrooted or uprooted" (90) from it. She argues that William's recollection of the cottage's former use as an inn made it signal for him "a place of community, but also intrinsically of passing-through" (90). Atkin finds that the idea of a home is challenged by its being a place for long-term guests, by its being rented, and by its being a place in which the Wordsworths lived for "only… eight and a half years" (91). I am not so convinced by the universal claim that "it does change the way we think about a home to consider whether it was owned outright or not" (91), and found myself with unanswered questions concerning local and national trends in renting, and on its cultural significance among the middle ranks.

Home is also of interest to Samantha Matthews, whose essay on the literary scrapbooks of the daughters of the Wordsworth circle brings into view an important aspect of manuscript culture and its relationship to place. Because of their limited circulation as personal collections of autograph manuscripts written especially for a particular book owner, albums are, for Matthews, "textual spaces for negotiating contemporary concerns about feminine identity in relation to home and society, as the ideological differentiation of separate spheres became more marked in the 1830s" (101). Matthews explores various aspects of the gendered significance of the album as a fundamentally female fashion that produced "a growing anxiety in the still male-dominated periodical press" (113) about a disruption in "the privacy, autonomy and working-patterns of professional authors" (113). In order to make a strong case for the distinctive quality of this set of albums, it would have been useful to have compared them with more formalized published albums by men such as Charles Heath (*The Keepsake* [1828–57]). A wider European perspective on albums would also have been an interesting addition. Research on Russian album poetry of the 1820s has, for instance, been published elsewhere by Stephanie Sandler and Judith Vowles.[2]

Half-way through the collection, we leave the shores of Britain to follow Romantic-Era travellers first to Europe and then further afield. Romantic orientalism is addressed through an essay by Silvia Mergenthal on Scott's *The Talisman* and colonial encounters are explored in Christoph Bode's essay on Georg Forster's account of Captain Cook's second voyage to the South Seas (1772–5). Angela Wright's essay aims at examining the ways in which visiting a place may change one's views on it. Wright argues that *A Journey Made in the Summer of 1794* (1795) reveals in Ann Radcliffe a more measured view of Catholicism than can be found elsewhere in her writing. This change in thinking, Wright asserts, means that Radcliffe's "portrayals of convents, and the decisions involved in taking the veil, become markedly more nuanced in her penultimate novel *The Italian* (1797)" (137)—that is, after her trip to mainland Europe. Wright's argument seems a little forced. She suggests that

[2] Stephanie Sandler and Judith Vowles, "Beginning to be a Poet: Baratynsky and Pavlova." *Russian Subjects: Empire, Nation and the Culture of the Golden Age*. Ed. Monika Greenleaf and Stephen Moeller-Sally. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1998. 151–172.

Radcliffe balances her sectarian portrait of the convent of the order of Clarisse ("such horrible perversions of human reason make the blood thrill and the teeth chatter")[3] with her tempered account of a more appealing teaching order of nuns. The latter are "German noblesse" who "visit their friends," "appear at balls and promenades," "wear what dresses they please, except when they chaunt in the choir," and marry "if the offer of an acceptable marriage" comes along (Radcliffe 113). These sisters are rendered acceptable because their *béguinage* style of sisterhood is more akin to general domestic life in England and because they are noblewomen who, owing to their class, their ruffs ("somewhat resembling that of Queen Elizabeth's time" [Radcliffe 113]), and their hair worn "in the English fashion" (Radcliffe 113), are less associated with the Catholic Other. Wright reads the reference to Queen Elizabeth as an example of Radcliffe not championing "the values of late eighteenth-century Protestant England above those of Catholic Germany" (138). It seems more likely that Radcliffe restyles these women as non-Catholic, than that her views on Catholics change.

James Vigus's essay on Henry Crabb Robinson's years studying in Germany (1800–1805) explores the important role of universities in Anglo-German cultural exchange. At the time of Crabb Robinson's enrollment at the University of Jena (1802), German was not extensively known by English speakers and few Anglophone students were matriculated at German universities. The essay is less about place in the physical sense and more about an intellectual environment that provides community. Vigus does an admirable job of explicating what Crabb Robinson gained philosophically and theologically from his time in Germany, but we do not get a fuller sense of how Crabb Robinson conceptualized place beyond the intriguing quotation from him with which the essay ends: "'Philosophy in Germany is an affair of Topography'" (156).

Rolf Lessenich's survey essay on Italy as a source of poetic inspiration for the Della Cruscans and J. Douglas Kneale's essay on Wordsworth's contact with Italy are useful additions to the volume, but Sophie Thomas's paper on Pompeii (rediscovered in 1748) is more ambitious. It investigates "the way particular locations in the Romantic period can operate as nodal points for the convergence of questions about materiality, representation, and presence" (169). Thomas's essay displays much of the theoretical sophistication shown in Jacqueline Labbe's essay, especially in its approach towards the ambiguities associated with space. Thomas sees the "frozen" (169) city of Pompeii as a cultural palimpsest as well as a landscape. She traces the reactions to the site in Romantic-era travel writing, letters, art, and museum models, and in the earliest panoramas of the site. Pompeii emerges as a place "caught vertiginously between an imagined completeness and an apprehension of vacancy or emptiness" (184). Thomas's interpretation captures neatly Kitson's point

[3] Ann Radcliffe, *A Journey Made in the Summer of 1794, Through Holland and the Western Frontier of Germany with a Return down the Rhine*. London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1795. 109

about place being tied to displacement in Romantic-era writing.

Central to the period, the introduction argues, are the issues of whether it is possible accurately to describe a place and the extent to which writers create a place in "writing place" (3). I found myself wondering more about the choice of place. The selection of location here, where poetry and fiction is concerned, is based on a traditional idea of Romanticism: the places are rural and are connected with the tourist destinations of Britain and Europe. William Wordsworth is referenced most often, followed by Walter Scott. The urban is much less prominent in the concept of Romantic locality that the volume develops. It would have been interesting to have seen what the great Romantic-era cities would have added to this picture: Bristol, Edinburgh, London, Paris, Weimar, Lisbon. A different picture might have emerged if more attention had been given to war or to revolution (Waterloo, the Champs de Mars, the Bastille, Santo Domingo, Peterloo), or to European views on America. Domestic spaces are touched on, but the volume is largely concerned with the outdoors, and male writers are very well represented. There is little on land rights and nothing on enclosure; John Clare, the supreme poet of place, is an important omission. Ecocriticism is referenced briefly in Polly Atkin's essay, but is largely not the theoretical framework that the essays use for engaging with the natural world. Byron is surprisingly under-represented, appearing on five pages; Scott, however, is clearly undergoing a resurgence in popularity. But in a collection addressing this kind of broad issue, it is always possible to find omissions. The book includes an excellent range of travel writing, with some contributors tackling the problem of conceptualizing the idea of the "Romantic locality" more directly than others. I found this to be an intriguing volume, full of fascinating insights into a hugely diverse number of places, with an important introductory essay that articulates the complexities of location as a concept that should be theorized as something distinct from travel writing.