

Brian Rejack and Michael Theune, eds., *Keats's Negative Capability: New Origins and Afterlives*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019. Pp 291. £90. ISBN 978178941817.

Keats's Negative Capability: New Origins and Afterlives opens with a note in which Nicholas Roe reminds the reader of 'Keats's universe of uncertainties, mysteries and doubts' and warns them "to prepare to make up their minds about nothing" (xxi). 'Negative capability' originates in Keats's letter to his brothers Tom and George in 1817. This collection of essays reassesses the notion of 'Negative Capability' starting with its dubious publication and its many readings. Brian Rejack invites contributors to explore the possible meanings of the concept in Keats's work, its reception by his contemporaries, as well as by its succeeding generations of poets, writers, and artists.

The editors supply a compelling Introduction, which discusses in detail Walter Jackson Bate's influential *Negative Capability: The Intuitive Approach in Keats* (1939) and Li Ou's *Keats and Negative Capability* (2009) and concludes by reflecting on how critics have aligned Keats's concept with imaginative and sympathetic identification. The essays collected here as a whole, however, outline both new disciplinary implications and (afterlives) of Keats's concept through a reconfiguration of our understanding of Keats's poetry and letters, his authorial ambitions, his aesthetic philosophy, and his legacy.

Keats's letter on the subject of negative capability addressed to his brothers, Tom and George, is lost, nor is there any known manuscript of it, yet its text was published in 1845 in a transcription by John Jeffrey of Kentucky, the second husband of the widow of Keats's brother, George. Following Rejack's opening gambit (about Jeffrey's editorial misprisions), Brian Bates suggests another move that reveals Keats's attachment to the genre of Pantomime. He associates negative capability's aestheticism, what Bates calls 'a tragic poetic vision' (16), to the eventful reception of Mozart's 'Don Giovanni', first performed in 1817. The Harlequin on stage watched by Keats with his 'cockney' friends becomes an epitome of the 'ephebe' figure who observes pantomimes as a *mise en scene* for Keats's own speculations about poetic identity. For Bates, Keats's scene of transformation and of writing itself proceeds from 'a pantomimical capability' in 'full display' (30). With different critical emphases, Theune makes the point that negative capability is 'over-riding /-writing of natural capacity' (56). He persuasively argues that Keats's negative capability is similar to William Hazlitt's 'Natural Capacity', accounting for the poet's 'linguistically mercurial moods' (53-56).

Following Keats's female literary critics (Anne Mellor, Marjorie Levinson and Susan Wolfson), Carmen Faye Mathes, alternatively, proposes a feminist and gendered reading of negative capability. In her essay, 'Feminising Keats', Wolfson claims 'the effeminacy of Keats's character, receives fresh credit for Victorians reading his love letters' (99). Argha Banerjee's *Female Voices in Keats's Poetry* also tracks the rhetoric of weakness of masculinity and aligns it with Keats's struggles with social and psychological attitudes about gender in his own age (34).

A further female reading in this collection of essays is by Cassandra Falke. The author places Keats's 'negative certainty' in a phenomenological context, in which knowledge is gained from the self's capacities for perception and recognition. The second part of the collection sets out to exemplify negatively capable forms and Falke's contribution is a perfect illustration of these aims. Similarly, Kurtis Hessel believes that Keats's withdrawal from 'systematic thought' in his other celebrated letter (on 'the departments of knowledge') is another form of negative capability enlarging the meaning of negative capability to include poetic elements such as metaphors, symbols and allegories which dwell linguistically and epistemologically on 'the intermedium

between thought systems' (99). Emily Rohrbach proposes an anthropological reading of 'To Autumn', claiming that the ode engages in a social *passage of rite* whereby 'subject making ... is a process of becoming that requires a world in which to feel and suffer'. She concludes that 'the Keatsean subject is reducible to the body or to social identity ... sealed off from social experience' (125).

One of the closing essays, by David Sigler, is radically transformative in its discussion of negative capability and psychoanalysis. Sigler argues that negative capability served 'as a proto-psychoanalytic concept' for Romanticism, and from the start it anticipated 'clinical' aspects of psychoanalysis. He considers its reception in thinkers, such as Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan and Marion Milner, to show how, in their different fashions, their work constitutes 'Negative Psychoanalytical Capability' (231). For instance, in Milner's writing, 'Negative Capability' serves to 'help us locate a middle ground between ignorance' and 'fancied certainty' (229). In his reading of Keats and Milner, Sigler admonishes scholars of various fields to 'take seriously the challenge that literary thought might present to the psychoanalytic tradition' (231).

The collection will be essential to students and scholars of Keats as Rejack's analysis of John Jeffrey's role in transcribing 'Negative Capability' refreshes our understating of the concept. Contributors to this collection have risen to Rejack's editorial challenge and, produced prominent and diverse readings, which extend in variety across a range of critical approaches, including feminism, phenomenology, and psychoanalysis. Keats's 'Negative Capability' remains a vital concept, which continues to provoke readers and writers alike to reflect on its myriad values and virtues in the present and will continue to do so in the future.

Amina Brik
University of Manouba