

Beth Lau, Greg Kucich and Daniel Johnson, eds., *Keats's Reading / Reading Keats: Essays in Memory of Jack Stillinger*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan (Springer Nature), 2022. Pp. 362. 9 illus. £87.50. ISBN 9783030795290.

Few critics have shaped John Keats and Romantic scholarship as did Jack Stillinger (1931-2020), to whom *Keats's Reading/Reading Keats* is a fitting tribute. The book brings together essays by an exceptional roster of Keatsians, including Susan J. Wolfson, Charles J. Rzepka, Jeffrey C. Robinson, and Denise Gigante, as well as a set of 'Contemporary Poetic Responses' to Stillinger by the poet-critics Lucy Newlyn, Maureen N. McLane, and the late Michael O'Neill. Through the dual focus on who Keats read and who read Keats, the essays are unified by a concern with lines of influence and of reception.

Kelvin Everest's contribution focuses on the period between the poet's death in 1821 and the publication of Richard Monckton Milnes's *Life, Letters, and Literary Remains* of Keats in 1848, at which point Keats's 'star began a rapid rise' (241). As Everest shows, though small-scale, Keats did enjoy a serious reception before Milnes's book in the form of the 'Cambridge Apostles', a club whose members included Milnes as well as Tennyson and Arthur Hallam, and who were instrumental in keeping interest in Keats's poetry alive in the Victorian period. Subsequent essays in the book trace Keats's reception well beyond the Victorians, including in Mark Sandy's essay on a shared knot of ideas (concerning 'the contingencies of subjectivity, reality, and the chaotic flux of existence') that ties together Keats and his twentieth-century reader, Wallace Stevens.

Paul Chirico reconstructs the relation of John Clare and John Keats, who never actually met, but who both shared a publisher, and documented their views on one another's work. Though critical, each is oddly attuned to the singularity of the other's work, and they form a complementary picture of philosophic impulses; Keats, for Clare, is a classical idealist ('behind every rose bush he looks for a Venus') whilst Clare, for Keats, is too keenly an empiricist ('the Description too much prevailed over the sentiment'). Chirico's is a rich essay, and ends with a close and compelling analysis of Keats's 'This Living Hand', yet some of the most astonishing moments come from Clare himself, as when he imagines stumbling across Keats's chosen epitaph ('Here lies one whose name was writ in water') and feeling sure that he would observe 'that no common dust slept there'.

Beth Lau turns much deserved attention to the question of Keats as a reader of novels. Lau painstakingly reconstructs a sense of which novels Keats owned or was otherwise exposed to (and includes a useful appendix of works he read), but she also makes the case for novelistic impulses running through his poetry. This is welcome, not least because the epic – a genre Keats notably contributed to in the early nineteenth century – is often assumed to be a form that the novel killed off, not reinvigorated. The notion of a novelistic strain of 'romance' running through *Endymion*, which Lau notes Keats finished in the same period he read Tobias Smollett and Walter Scott, is a tantalizing prospect, and has sure implications for how we think about Keats's attempts at long-form verse narrative.

Charles J. Rzepka's essay falls into the 'Keats Reading' section of the book, and the reading in question concerns the retelling of part of Boccaccio's *Decameron* in *Isabella; or The Pot of Basil*. Rzepka pursues the poem's indelible image of the decapitated Lorenzo's head in an urn, reflecting at once on the poem's Marxist critical reception, commodity fetishism, the market value of verse, and Keats's 'Jack a lantern' poetics. John Barnard is also a reader of Keats's reading, focusing on the 'intense physicality' of Keats's metaphors of reading. Through a series of lucid readings of Keats's verse and prose, Barnard suggests that Keats's printed works 'contain potential meaning awaiting release, verbal embodiment, through a future reader' (50). That's a pleasing insight in relation to a poet who is so often caricatured as sensuous idealist or immaterialist dreamer.

Lau's helpful preface to the volume offers a brief precis of Stillinger's own critical method: 'an "excursion and return" structure in which characters begin in the actual world, mentally travel to an ideal realm only to find it incompatible with human needs, and then return to the real with an enhanced appreciation of its worth' (viii). The essays in this volume respect that recasting of the structure of the Greater Romantic lyric, drawing out the dialectics of idealism and realism, travel and retreat, wakefulness and dreaming that characterise Stillinger's reading. The result is an exciting and eclectic set of essays that stand testament to Stillinger's long and varied scholarly life. The book ends with an appendix that offers a selected (not exhaustive) bibliography of Stillinger's works; the fact that it nevertheless spans ten pages speaks to the length and illustriousness of his professional career.

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