



Jennifer Harris and Hilary Iris Lowe, eds. *From Page to Place: American Literary Tourism and the Afterlives of Authors*



Jennifer Harris and Hilary Iris Lowe, eds. *From Page to Place: American Literary Tourism and the Afterlives of Authors*. Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2017. v, 244p., ill. ISBN 9781625342331. \$28.95.

This examination of literary tourist destinations – from birthplaces to graves and from real-life models for fictional settings to spaces where texts were written – is built upon the dictum that American literature is more than “simply a matter of words on a page” (1). Rather, it emerges from a *mélange* of “collaborative [efforts] between author, preservationist, curator, docent, reader, and tourist,” such that the sites visited by avid tourists are “functioning alternately or simultaneously as markers of community, memorials, conduits, exemplars and training grounds in ways authors themselves never imagined” (2). Because scholars cannot prescribe readers’ movements as easily as they can syllabi and curricula, literary tourism offers a unique window into American literature and “tells us about the kinds of narratives that have historically been valued in the United States” (2). Editors Harris and Lowe wisely decline to proffer a unified narrative of pilgrims’ motives but instead adapt Benedict Anderson’s “imagined communities” to conclude that each pilgrimage contributes to a sense of “shared heritage” and “ownership” of “the American narrative” (5). Yet the editors’ grounding in leisure sociology ensures that, far from being a patriotic celebration, skepticism about the sites’ commercialism predominates: despite palpable traces of capitalist development – Harris and Lowe note that “even Walden Pond has a parking lot” [6] and characterize one author’s statements about her home as “marketing gold” [7] – the tourists see what they had been *expecting* to see because their need for “affirmation” is programmed by preexisting cultural narratives (7). In one sense, the editors indulge in circular reasoning as well: the “American imaginary” (5) is reflexively defined by what is visible in these case studies, so indubitably it must be manifested by them. In another sense, Harris and Lowe simply accede to the necessarily heterogeneous nature of edited collections by allowing the topic and scope of the collection to serve as its thesis.

This accession fits the 10 chapters’ interdisciplinary scope, which enfolds American studies, comparative literature, book history, architecture, and history. The contributors research not only the practices of contemporary tourists, but also the rhetoric of literary tourism that frames their experiences and the historical shifts (particularly in technologies of travel and in definitions of authorship) that underwrote that rhetoric. Some chapters diagnose the dearth



Jennifer Harris and Hilary Iris Lowe, eds. *From Page to Place: American Literary Tourism and the Afterlives of Authors*

of tourist resources, including Jennifer Harris's work on eighteenth-century African-American poet Jupiter Hammon and Rebecca Rego Barry's on Susan and Anna Warner. More paradigmatic sites are discussed by Erin Hazard, who investigates Washington Irving's self-conscious understanding of literary tourism in relation to his own Sunnyside, and Hilary Irish Lowe, who explores the resonances of Quarry Farm for Mark Twain scholars. Some of the volume's strongest works deconstruct the normative notion of an artist's home: Klara-Stephanie Szlezák denies the singularity of Henry David Thoreau's Concord, Michelle McClellan questions why certain houses occupied by Laura Ingalls Wilder are popular tourist destinations while others are not, and Caroline Hellman explores the "repatriation" of Edith Warton's library to her carefully designed home, The Mount, to critique the "false hierarchy" that maintains that "the interest in the life of an author beyond understanding words on a page is 'middlebrow' or unsophisticated" (159). Challenging travel as a prerequisite for literary tourism, Mara Scanlon analyzes the mediated "Whitmania" of digital tourism, Ben De Bruyn turns his attention to coffee table books, and Susann Bishop - in a chapter of particular interest to SHARPists - both analyzes and presents a bibliography of tourism guides. All of these promise a bright future for the study of literary tourism, especially through the called-for creation of "a more inclusive literary itinerary" (15) that centralizes African-American authors.

Shawna Ross
Texas A&M University