

JOHN HINKS and CATHERINE ARMSTRONG, eds. *The English Urban Renaissance Revisited*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018. Pp. 239. \$119.95 (cloth). doi: 10.1017/jbr.2018.131

Inspired by a reexamination of Peter Borsay's *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in the Provincial Town 1660–1770* (1989), *The English Urban Renaissance Revisited* is a collection of essays on urban history outside of London between the late sixteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Essays purport to reassess Borsay's thesis that an "urban renaissance" emerged in post-Restoration English provincial towns, as well as to test the temporal and geographic bounds of this phenomenon. The English urban renaissance, according to Borsay, was manifested in the adoption of classically derived architectural styles and robust mechanisms of social differentiation, as well as a growing attention to leisure activities and other new cultural pursuits. Applying aspects of Borsay's thesis to historical case studies drawn from England, Scotland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Hungary, and colonial America, contributions to *The English Urban Renaissance Revisited* are informative, engaging, and densely researched.

As this geographic range suggests, the editors, John Hinks and Catherine Armstrong, undersell the volume somewhat by suggesting that the essays are all rooted in the terms of Borsay's earlier research. Instead, many of the essays address the gaps and challenge the limitations that necessarily occur in a temporally and geographically defined study such as Borsay's. In this volume's first chapter, Borsay discusses the genesis of his 1989 book (his dissertation, written in the 1970s) and identifies its blind spots, which include chronology, the possibility of regional variation, the omission of London, the focus on England (as distinct from both the British Isles and the rest of Europe), as well as his project's limited attention to gender, religion, and politics. Ostensibly the story of Borsay's 1989 monograph, this introductory piece offers a lively history of developments in urban and social history between 1970 and 2018.

The essays in *The English Urban Renaissance Revisited* will be especially enriching for those scholars of English history and literature who have been conditioned to think about urban life mainly in terms of London. In three essays, one by Ann-Marie Akehurst, one by Adrian Green, and another by Jonathan Barry and George Tatham, the authors explore the relevance of Borsay's concept in English provincial towns, while most other contributors respond directly to Borsay's self-avowed shortcomings in the areas of gender and geography. For instance, Rose Alexandra McCormack's essay, "Roaming, Riding and Racing," outlines the physical and outdoor activities undertaken specifically by women in eighteenth-century spa towns. Some of these, such as walking, are familiar, while others, such as possible donkey racing, paint a less-expected picture of leisured female life. In the chapter "Was There a Scottish Urban Renaissance?," Bob Harris argues that while some Scottish towns did undergo significant changes by the early nineteenth century, national institutions and "mentalities" (166) created distinct results. One striking feature of Harris's essay is his emphasis on the importance of improvement and modernization in Scottish urban development, sometimes accompanied by a surprising disregard for the material traces of the past. These concepts stand in contrast to Akehurst's characterization of eighteenth-century York in chapter two, as a place valued for its preservation and expression of historical continuity and national identity.

Similarly to Harris, T. C. Barnard, Zsuzsi Kiss, Clé Lesger, and Catherine Armstrong extend the geographic bounds of Borsay's thesis by applying central concepts of the urban renaissance to Ireland, Hungary, Amsterdam, and early America, respectively. These scholars show that while parallels to England can be identified in a few towns and social institutions, each place was shaped by national political, religious, or economic conditions that led to varied forms of urbanization and social differentiation, as well as to different chronologies of change. Kiss, for instance, finds resonances with Borsay's thesis in nineteenth-century Hungary, pointing out that Hungary remained a predominantly agrarian society much later

than England did. Lesger, by contrast, argues that features of an urban renaissance were visible in Amsterdam as early as the late sixteenth century. Armstrong examines plans for the purely notional Carolina colony of Azilia (it was never built) to reveal that while English entrepreneurs modified their urban ideals in response to the needs and conditions of colonial life (especially defense against native populations), they often had little practical experience of the challenges that colonial settlements faced.

If *The English Urban Renaissance Revisited* has a weakness, it is a lack of the topical and methodological coherence needed to make these individual studies truly comparative with one another. It is at times difficult to tell whether the differing impressions of urban change conveyed in each essay result from historical or material realities or from the individual terms and documentary sources a particular scholar chooses to use. But the editors' and contributors' commitment to expanding and updating the range of historiographic and methodological assumptions and influences that informed Borsay's concept of the urban renaissance nearly thirty years ago makes this diversity of approaches preferable to an enforced conformity. Each essay is methodologically consistent within itself, and many offer illuminating comparative work, as in Green's "The Big House in the English Provincial Town," where the political underpinnings and social motivations for "out-of-scale" (116) houses in Newcastle, Oundle, and Durham are carefully juxtaposed. Another strength of Green's essay, which is characteristic of the volume throughout, is a circumspect handling of the term "classicism," which, as Green notes, is anachronistic when applied to Georgian architecture. The seventeenth- and eighteenth-century term was "regular," and viewers were as likely to link the style to contemporary Italy as they were to ancient Greece or Rome.

Thus, if *The English Urban Renaissance Revisited* does not reassess the value of Borsay's thesis with a definitive conclusion, it does challenge and reapply the terms of that thesis in a collection that is engaging in its range and impressive in its scholarly discipline.

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SHEILA JOHNSON KINDRED. *Jane Austen's Transatlantic Sister: The Life and Letters of Fanny Palmer Austen*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017. Pp. 312. \$34.95 (cloth). doi: 10.1017/jbr.2018.132

Sheila Johnson Kindred's *Jane Austen's Transatlantic Sister: The Life and Letters of Fanny Palmer Austen* reveals that being able to connect your work to Jane Austen is both a blessing and a curse. On the one hand, Fanny Palmer Austen's interesting story would probably never had been told if it was not for her connection to her famous sister-in-law. However, on the other hand, while her story should stimulate further scholarship on the role of naval wives, and while it does deepen our understanding of Jane Austen's sources, Kindred struggles to tell the whole story of either. This work is a lovely picture of a life and it struggles to make a larger scholarly intervention for just that reason.

Kindred brings to life the story of Francis Palmer Austen, a native of Bermuda who married Jane Austen's favorite brother, naval captain Charles Austen. Kindred traces Fanny Austen's life chronologically through eight chapters, from her birth in Bermuda through her death in 1814, with a final chapter covering her possible influence on Jane Austen. Kindred uses these chapters to flesh out the character of Fanny Austen and to give life to the world she inhabited. The reader feels Kindred's deep affection for Fanny and those connected to her, which animates the larger stories that roll along underneath: naval life and the world of the Austens.