

KNOWING YOUR PLACE. EAST ANGLIAN LANDSCAPES AND LITERATURE

Ed. Peter Tolhurst; Foreword Richard Mabey
Norwich: Black Dog Books, 2009. 364pp. £16.99

While some books demand sustained intellectual engagement, others invite a more relaxed approach, and it is no disparagement to say that *Knowing Your Place* is among the latter.

This is an interesting anthology of extracts from a range of works which finds East Anglian landscapes in literature as a means of exploring relationships between the individual – whether native or an incomer – and place.

Knowing Your Place is structured geographically (it would benefit from the addition of a diagrammatic map though), the selections are large enough to give a feeling of each author's style, and there are some surprise inclusions: neither Virginia Woolf nor John Cowper Powys is usually associated with Norfolk but, as the extracts show, both write well on the subject.

There are, however, also some surprise omissions: there is no place here for either Henry Williamson or Lilius Rider Haggard, both of whom are closely associated with the area. Dorothy L Sayers' evocative descriptions of the fens in flood (*The Nine Tailors*, 1934) would have been a useful addition, as would some of the journal entries of John Constable, the landscape painter who stood out from his contemporaries for his emotional identification with the landscape of his native Suffolk.

Both John Clare and George Crabbe receive some attention by other writers in the anthology, but the work of neither is included. This may, of course, be the result of an editorial decision to use only prose, or of a decision to focus mainly on twentieth-century writing, in which case a brief statement of editorial principles would have been helpful.

Sylvia Townsend Warner is represented by two entries, 'Great Eye Folly' (p.157ff) and 'Love in a Cold Climate' (p.182ff), each one a compilation of well-chosen extracts from essays, letters and diaries. As all of these pieces have been previously published, there are no surprises here for Warner enthusiasts, but their inclusion in this particular anthology places them in the slightly different context of geographically-centred writing.

The real problem with this anthology is a lack of information. The absence of brief author biographies is a major omission, while the lack of bibliographic information on, for example, the first extract of 'Great Eye Folly' makes 'Bathrooms Remembered' difficult to track down. Furthermore, in some cases understanding is compromised by a lack of necessary information: Warner's first reference to 'Valentine' (p.160), for example, is given the parenthetical addition of 'Ackland', but the further information of just who this person was would be helpful, particularly in view of her carefully chosen gender-ambiguous first name. Similarly, the reference in Norfolk dialect to 'Miss Maaallie' (p.183) is not explained and is thus incomprehensible to anyone who does not know that Valentine Ackland's childhood name was Molly and that she continued to be known as 'Miss Molly' in the Norfolk village of Winterton where her mother lived.

These problems notwithstanding *Knowing Your Place* is a welcome addition to the growing body of regional writing on East Anglia, and is equally at home on a bedside cabinet and on the road in Norfolk and its environs.

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