

Duco van Oostium, *Male Authors, Female Subjects: The Wozan Within/Beyond the Borders of Henry Adams, Henry James, and Others*, Postmodern Studies 14 Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi Press, 1995. 274 pp; ISBN 90-5183-877-8, \$39

American modernists frequently sought inspiration and even identity in Europe, so it is only fitting that Duco van Oostium, a Dutch scholar who has studied and taught on both sides of the Atlantic, in a sense reinvents American modernism to us refashioned. A modernist Atlantic is itself made new through Oostium's cross-gender analyses. Focusing on men writing about 'new' women on both sides of the Atlantic in the period 1870-1920, Oostium provides a dynamic corrective to studies that approach related issues of cultural identity in isolation.

In pursuing a variety of hybridities – of cultures, gender, and modernity – Oostium's book becomes something of a hybrid itself, but does an excellent job of navigating us through what Gilbert and Gubar, whose work he addresses and takes issue with, call the 'no man's land' of feminist theory. Oostium begins with the proposition that "in a strict binary system, men's giving voice to women leads to insurmountable problems of representation," and uses this premise to recontextualize how cross-gender voices intersect with cross-cultural writings. In viewing modernism through the Dutch lens, as he calls it, Oostium introduces most American readers to the works of Multatuli and Frederik van Eeden, and their modernist representation of women and 'modes of resistance' to the constraints of masculine identity. Henry James and Adams, Multatuli and Van Eeden all not only had international preoccupations, but used cross-cultural and cross-gender ventriloquism and impersonations. (Van Eeden, for example, even sets up communes in Holland and the United States based on Thoreau's *Walden*.) In a novel few critics could hope to emulate, Oostium is able to juxtapose Multatuli's (Eduard Douwes Dekker's) *Max Havelaar*, a canonical Dutch novel about colonialism in Indonesia, with the work which inspired it, Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Through that text's doctrine of separate spheres, Oostium begins to reveal the cross-referential nature of modernist literary constructions of gender and national identities. Both texts are contrasted with James's *Wings of a Dove*, which, in its community of women, represents another 'triangulated' response to Stowe's representation of gender identity, in this case effectively from both sides of the Atlantic.

Oostium provides an astute account of how some feminist scholars have reductively

treated these modernist male writers as unequivocal allies, for example volently misappropriating Adams as a feminist writer by co-opting his language; James also emerges for some feminists as an ambiguous figure for recreating, but also partly exposing, what John Carlos Rowe calls women's 'imprisonment in patriarchal culture.' Aware of his own position in this debate about a variety of 'male feminisms,' Oostrum writes of these issues with an engagingly self-conscious sense of how he, as a male critic, can be implicated in the 'self-reflexive' cross-gender projects he critiques, that a 'feminized masculinity [cm] annex and possess women.' The best evidence of Oostrum's ability to integrate disparate, but crucially connected, aesthetic and critical discourses comes in his excellent discussion of the ways social constraints could silence women, while men could coterminously operate in a presumably more empowering 'religious aesthetic of silence.'

For Oostrum, the permutations of a variety of imposed and self-imposed silences help contextualize how and why Adams leaves the voice of his wife, who committed suicide, entirely silent. Marian Hooper both speaks and silences herself through her photography, committing suicide by ingesting photo chemicals. While Adams silences a woman's voice and denies her influence except as religious abstraction in *The Education*, even here he suggests a 'structural' rather than imposed or categorical silence; Oostrum ingeniously reads *The Education* against Esther and Tahiti, showing how their construction represents Adams' deeper conviction that in fact 'women are at the center of a man's history.' Focusing on such 'signifying silences,' Oostrum provides a series of vital readings of how gender intersects with national identity and colonialism, for example demonstrating how Adams's experiences in and representation of Samoa should be read against his notions of American womanhood. Including historical overviews of the most important as well as most recent criticism, Oostrum offers a useful mapping of the surprising centrality of the sentimental genre and the doctrine of separate spheres for modernist literature. In Oostrum's view, James, like Mulattuli, uses the sentimental genre to represent female voices, but also undercuts the genre's 'female power.' Oostrum proposes that James, unlike Stowe, uses the sentimental doctrine of separate spheres to ease male power. Tracing through the motifs of sentimental genres, Oostrum concludes that Adams 'exchange[s] modern American womanhood for 'archaic gold girls' in Tahiti, abandon[ing] a gender structure of separate spheres. For an alternative structure.' Anyone interested in modernism and gender studies, and in Adams and James themselves, will find this book eminently useful; its connections to relatively unfamiliar Dutch authors are especially welcome in expanding our sense of the relation between modernism, colonialism, and gender identity, a topic of much recent debate. Oostrum also convincingly shows how many of these Dutch and American writers appropriate the sentimental genre, and we will hopefully hear more from him on whether the sentimental conventions Jane Tompkins champions are applicable to Dutch male writers, or even to American 'expatriate' literature.

In situating Adams as one point of origin for contemporary notions of cross-cultural identity, Oostrum challenges the familiar categories of several literary genres and periods. Ideally, I would also like to read more about the relation between Modernism and postmodernism, especially along the trajectories of nation and gender. Oostrum invokes, as he writes, part of the postmodern project is to investigate, reflexively, supposedly natural

categories such as gender and nationality. Oostium's book ably analyzes and interrogates these categories and enables us to move beyond reductive configurations of gender, nation, and literary influence.

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