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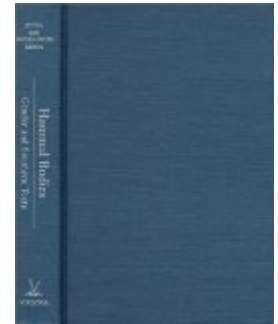
in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Anne Goodwyn Jones, Susan V. Donaldson, eds. *Haunted Bodies: Gender and Southern Texts*. Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1997. x + 533 pp. \$35.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8139-1726-9; \$70.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8139-1725-2.

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Reconstructing Men and Women in the South

It took me forever to read *Haunted Bodies*, but by the time I reached the last essay, I reacted to the book as I did to *Gone with the Wind*: I didn't want it to end. Anne Goodwyn Jones and Susan Donaldson have brought together an impressive array of historians and literary critics to consider the variety of ways in which southern identity is written on the body, the body politic, and the body of texts that constitute southern literature. These twenty essays, six of which have been published previously, present an eclectic range—from Jane Landers's study of African-American women's legal rights in eighteenth-century Spanish Florida to Mary Titus's reflections on nineteenth-century plantation foodways to Ted Ownby's examination of 1970s rock 'n' roll.

Haunted Bodies is divided into seven roughly chronological sections, which also bear thematic continuity. Part One, "Passages: From Africa to the American South," for example, asks us to expand our notion of region and to consider the South as a transnational space defined by its commerce with African and European cultures. *Haunted Bodies* contains twelve essays that explore nineteenth-century culture; a few of these glimpse the twentieth. Michael O'Brien's "The Flight Down the Middle Walk," for example, juxtaposes Mary Chesnut with Virginia Woolf to argue that Chesnut's imposition of self in her "narrative journal" merits *literary*, not customary historical, evaluation (p. 114). The autobiographical, including diaries and slave narratives, is the meat of at least six of the essays; Steven Stowe's "Writing Sickness" ex-

amines one young mother's diary of her children's deaths as an evolving medical narrative which moves from corporeal description to the "wider angle" of diagnosis (p. 259).

A number of the essays present overlays of race with gender and region, providing a scholarly barometer of the prominence of racial identity in discussions about gender in the South. Part Three, "Slavery and Southern Genders," revisits the writings of escaped slaves Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass. Anne Goodwyn Jones's "Engendered in the South" posits that both fugitives broke with early southern socialization by embracing a northern idiom in their rhetoric. In thus pitching themselves to northern audiences, Jacobs and Douglass escaped slavery, Jones argues, but not their regional conditioning as people of color exposed to white models of gentility; to wit, Douglass's aspirations to manor living in later years. Richard Yarborough's essay on Douglass's "The Heroic Slave" is similarly resonant on issues of masculine identity: "Douglass was unable or unwilling to call into question the white bourgeois paradigm of manhood itself. Consequently, his celebration of black heroism was subverted from the outset by the racist, sexist, and elitist assumptions upon which the Anglo-American male ideal was constructed and that so thoroughly permeated the patriarchal structure of slavery" (p. 177). The sins of the fathers, no matter what their biological connection, will be visited upon the children, no matter what their color—a point that several other essayists also raise in their de-

constructions of patriarchal power.

The homosocial and homosexual texts written on the body of southern patriarchy are taken up by Caroline Gebhard in “Reconstructing Southern Manhood,” which deploys a new definition of camp to expose the threat of southern emasculation after the Civil War, and by Noel Polk in “Around, behind, above, below Men,” an essay on Faulkner’s triangulation (and heterosexual strangulation) of male characters in *The Hamlet*. “Reconstructing white, southern masculinity,” Gebhard tells us in her piece about elite white men brought low by defeat and the black male servants who prop them up, “is a project that must be understood as enmeshed in a fin-de-siècle crisis of sexual definition, postwar race relations, and the emergence of a modern American nationalism” (p. 135). Like many of the best essays in the collection, this article insists on reading “the homosocial fantasy of racial harmony” (p. 148) against the destabilizing influences of a political discourse that featured white supremacy and a jingoistic regional unity.

Reweaving the cultural fabric around a literary text can sometimes be a tall order, as in Minrose Gwin’s plan “to locate the story of father-daughter incest within the material and textual spaces of [three southern] novels and mark its place on the cultural maps of both southern history and contemporary survivor discourse but also to trace dimensions of the nexus at which all of these spaces converge and overlay” (p. 418). Such attempts at cultural cross-referencing should be applauded despite their convolution, for they have introduced a new chapter in our understanding of the interstitial relationship of gender, race, class, region, and sexuality.

My favorite essays in *Haunted Bodies* propose new ways of looking at cultural texts and then project the applicability of such a vision on other texts. David Leverenz’s essay on Edgar Allan Poe is revolutionary. In it he suggests that Poe “undermines gentry fictions of mastery, not least by exposing the gentleman as a fiction that male characters struggle and fail to impersonate,” but also by “mak[ing] textuality itself the source for true aristocratic honor, a status to which only [Poe’s] genius can pretend” (p. 81). Turning our traditional conception of genteel conventions on its ear, Leverenz’s ideas command the attention of those whose work takes into account southern manners, the iconography of the gentleman, and class concerns more generally. I also love Patsy Yaeger’s essay on the politics of southern women writers’ use of the grotesque. In an analysis that focuses on Eudora Welty’s fiction, Yaeger contends that “the female

body offers a site for political labor, a place for uncoding and recoding the epic disasters of the southern body politic” (p. 291). Physically and symbolically, Yaeger’s reading of the female body as a text upon which cultural contradiction is writ large forms the heart of this anthology.

In a model of clarity and economy, Lucinda MacKethan’s “Domesticity in Dixie” suggests that plantation novels of the 1850s failed in their appropriations of the northern domestic ideal (as embodied in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*) because the woman-centered home was fundamentally at odds with the man-centered governance of plantation and slave life. In their attempt to refute Stowe’s one-dimensional image of docile slaves with an equally limited portrait of slave brutality, authors like Caroline Lee Hentz lopped off domestic harmony at its roots. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese also critiques the dogmatic tendencies in master-slave representation. “Slavery, Race, and the Figure of the Tragic Mulatta” regards the trope of the mulatta as “represent[ing] the inherent contradictions of southern society” (p. 473) evident in the coexistence of black women’s rape at the hands of white men and their construction as rivals to white women for the love of white men. Accepting the subjectivity of slavery is difficult, Fox-Genovese urges, because “the experience of oppression does not inevitably transform fallible men and women into saints any more than the exercise of domination inevitably transforms decent men and women into monsters” (p. 467).

Avoiding binary characterizations is one of the hallmarks of *Haunted Bodies*, as is its insistence on intertextuality. In her piece on autobiography, Peggy Prenshaw uses Lucinda MacKethan’s ideas about gender and the social order. Several of the essayists refer to Bertram Wyatt Brown’s “The Mask of Obedience,” which contrasts the honor/shame model of male slave psychology with the conscience/guilt dynamics that animated the northern imagination. Other contributors mention the Leverenz and Stowe essays. Here are scholars engaged in conversations with one another that unify the whole—not an idle achievement in an anthology with a score of essays.

By the time I got to Susan Donaldson’s “Gender, Race, and Allen Tate’s Profession of Letters in the South,” an essay about the Southern Agrarians’ recasting of literary history through the exclusion of female and African-American voices, I wondered if the failure to silence those voices might have provided a shrewder point of origin for *Haunted Bodies*. The essay’s placement in the book’s fi-

nal section, "The Past in the Present," makes sense, but since so many of the essays configure a new literary history—one that is more inclusive and resists the act of forgetting—Donaldson's piece would have served nicely as a preamble to all that follows. As it stands, *Haunted Bodies* does deliver "a portrait of the region disconcertingly different from the monolithic images of the conser-

vative, hide-bound, isolated South that we have inherited" (p. 16). Students of southern cultural history will want to put this book on their summer reading lists.

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