

Alessa Johns, *Bluestocking Feminism and British-German Cultural Transfer, 1750–1837*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2014. Pp. 227. £26.95 (pb). ISBN 9780472035946.

Alessa Johns's book on the reciprocal exchange of progressive 'knowledge, methods, people, and goods' (1) between Britain and Germany in the decades of the Personal Union builds on her expertise in British women writers and the connections between Europe and its colonies in the long eighteenth century. Since Sylvia Harcstark Myers's ground-breaking study (1990) revived historical and literary interest in Bluestocking feminism, several publications and a National Portrait Gallery exhibition (2008) have attended to the achievements of female intellectuals and their participation in cultural and political debates in eighteenth-century Britain. More recently, the label 'bluestocking' has been extended to include discursive connections of both women and men debating issues of liberty and sociocultural reform in wider, transnational contexts. Johns's monograph is a notable contribution to this more comprehensive approach, standing as a well-researched, informed, and engagingly written scholarly exploration of the processes and agents of cultural transfer in the second half of the long eighteenth century.

The study departs from the narrower definition of 'Bluestocking' referring exclusively to the eponymous circle and salon, and uses 'the term [bluestocking feminism] in its broadest possible sense, applying both its original reference to both sexes and to interest in intellectual and philanthropic pursuits, as well as including later members of feminist intellectual circles in Britain and on the Continent' (12). Johns adopts Bruno Latour's actor-network theory to examine selected cultural transfer activities in four chapters that address the book as a cosmopolitan object and Anglo-German book trade before the French Revolution; the dissemination of progressive, feminist ideas through translations and translators; travel writing in the Napoleonic area and 'the gendered discussions of [the volcano metaphor] Vesuvius' (91); and the influence of transatlantic journeys on the perception and discussion of gender roles in Britain and Germany.

The first substantial chapter illustrates how books 'aided in national self-definition and at the same time furthered international connection' (19), introducing two women who were 'central in fostering the intellectual and cultural growth of northern Germany in the period' (26): British-born Göttingen publisher Anna Vandenhoeck, and book collector and 'bluestocking aristocrat' (26) Philippine Charlotte of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel. According to Johns, these women's nationalist self-affirmation did not conflict with their international orientation, which 'was of a more pragmatic, embedded nature' than the cosmopolitanism of male German thinkers who 'gave way to growing nationalism after the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars' (37). While Vandenhoeck's pragmatism was probably helped by the fact that she died before 1789, these two female cultural agents certainly lived and promoted what Johns (after Kwame Anthony Appiah) characterizes as an eighteenth-century 'patriotic cosmopolitanism' (38).

Chapter Two details some fascinating examples of translations that were conducive to 'transnational social understanding' (40), but also reflected nationalist peculiarities. While Meta Forkel's German version of Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man* disseminated radical English ideas (57-61), Mary Wollstonecraft failed to transfer the 'pragmatic aim of social transformation' (66) of Christian Gotthilf Salzmann's acclaimed educational text *Moralisches Elementarbuch* (1783). Originally hired to 'further liberal ideology by teaching English readers progressive German approaches' (76), Wollstonecraft enhances the text with a metaphysical transcendence that ultimately weakens its protofeminist agenda – a remarkable case of progressive ideologies actually thwarting what they aim to achieve.

Chapters Three and Four deal with cultural transfer through travel encounters. Focusing on representations of Vesuvius in northern European travel accounts, Johns uses the volcano's literary rendition to illustrate gendered responses to war and catastrophes in the Napoleonic era (109-120). Her discussion of traveller, Shakespeare scholar and versatile writer Anna Jameson, whose journeys to Italy and North America run through the chapters, gives due attention to a fascinating figure of early transnationalism. Jameson's meticulous observations of Canadian First Nations' social structures complicate 'simplistic theories of historical progress' (128) by showing awareness of the intersection of class and gender in both the colonies and in Europe. Placing her in 'a long line of feminists beginning [with] Christine de Pizan,' (152), Johns portrays Jameson as an enlightened utopian thinker who rejected separate spheres for women and men in favour of a 'communion of labour' (150).

This stimulating book deserved more attentive editing. Dates of birth and death are assigned only occasionally to the historical figures portrayed, while some central contentions lose clarity in the attempt to widen the conceptual grasp of the study's approach. Historiographical methods like the *terrains vastes*, established in French scholarship but less well-known in Anglophone contexts, would have benefited from a clear exposition. Notwithstanding such minor weaknesses, the study draws attention to hitherto overlooked cultural agents and the historical means of transfer of progressive thinking in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Johns successfully corrects imperialist and nationalist myths to uncover a cosmopolitan legacy in micronarratives which, as the case of Anna Jameson in particular shows, provide keys to a new understanding of both 'the grand narrative of women's long-standing oppression' (170) and to both sexes' creative and engaged confrontation of it.

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