

Amanda Adams, *Performing Authorship in the Nineteenth-Century Lecture Tour* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), 168 pp.

Reviewed by **Laura L. Mielke**, University of Kansas

At a talk in October 2016 at the University of Kansas, Kevin Young, poet and incoming Director of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Studies, offered through verse and memoir his reflections on "Race, Reading, and the Archive." The archive, he averred, can preserve histories otherwise lost to cultural memory. Young proposed that each of us has an individual, internal archive, one that corresponds to self-creation through reading and writing and that aids and corrects collective memory. Speaking before projected pictures from his childhood, he performed the manner in which the author emerges from private experience and public expression, from the intersection of the textual and the physical.

Sitting in the audience, I was primed to receive Young's talk as a performance of authorship having just finished reading Amanda Adams's *Performing Authorship in the Nineteenth-Century Lecture Tour*, a study of eight nineteenth-century British and US authors who lectured to audiences on the *other* side of the Atlantic. The study's central claims might best be summarized through three keywords: the literary, the book, and the author. These keywords are less common in performance studies than in book history, but in that transference lies Adams's main intervention in nineteenth-century studies.

Adams asserts that "a central goal of this project [is] to expand critical concepts of the literary by focusing on embodied performance" (9). In so doing, her study joins a growing body of scholarship that brings performance studies and rhetorical studies to bear on what gets called literature. Adams draws on essential treatments of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century oratorical cultures by Thomas Augst, James Perrin Warren, Sandra Gustafson, along with Gregory Clark and S. Michael Halloran as well as foundational works in performance studies by Richard Schechner and Diana Taylor. Furthermore, *Performing Authorship* delves into scholarship focused on the eight authors (Frederick Douglass, Harriet Martineau, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, Matthew Arnold, Oscar Wilde, and Henry James), in an effort to restore the complexity of their public appearances to accounts of their careers.

Throughout her chapters, Adams insists on the ways that the lecture tour and the book existed in a symbiotic relationship in terms of reception and cultural work. The book, she determines, "is never free from a worldly, embodied, performative culture and reality" (22). To flesh out these claims, Adams pairs Martineau with Stowe, Dickens

with Twain, and Arnold with Wilde and bookends these studies with close examinations of Douglass (in the introduction) and James (in the final chapter). The pairings clarify how the author lecture makes visible the essential role of the body in the creation and reception of literature.

To wit: Douglass's management of his physicality during lectures helped both to authenticate his particular textual biography and to establish its representativeness as an account of slavery. On the unusual instances when Martineau and Stowe spoke in public, their embodied denunciations of slavery threatened to undermine respectively the posture of objectivity and veil of privacy on which their antislavery arguments depended. The transatlantic literary tour enabled Dickens and Twain to claim their literary property in the era before international copyright: Dickens performed his writings as an extension of himself; Twain made himself into an object to be consumed. In their own ways, Arnold and Wilde developed their authorial ethos and social capital through the development of celebrity personae that recirculated in realms far beyond their control. And such lack of control did not drive Henry James from the marketplace but actually spurred a deeply personal engagement with publicity.

Adams thus provides us a new chapter in the history of what Peter P. Reed terms "print-performance culture," one that turns our attention to a largely neglected cultural form (the lecture tour) by placing it at the heart of a much-studied one (authorship). Indeed, she goes so far as to declare that "the lecture tour as a genre serves as a microcosm for nineteenth-century authorship in all its contradictions and complexity" (2). *Performing Authorship* convinces that reader that the authorial persona emerges through the intermeshing of the book and the body in performance (broadly conceived), thus serving as an index of the individual creator and as a reproducible commodity for the market.

The dichotomies just mentioned (book and body, text and performance, creation and commodification) are not the only ones in Adams's study. The authorial persona that arises from her treatments of the eight authors, as well as a conclusion that gestures toward the modernists, skates on particular tensions: between objectivity and subjectivity, privacy and publicity, labor and intellect, word and image, and elite and popular. The interpretive power of this study lies in its simultaneously accepting and resisting the binaries that animated nineteenth-century understandings of how writers create.

So how might future studies triangulate the understanding of the authorial persona and bring other cultural forms to bear on its performance? Deeply interested as I am in nineteenth-century theater history, I cannot help noting its near absence from

Performing Authorship. Although the book does occasionally refer to the dramatic qualities of authors' lectures and briefly touches on Wilde's and James's theatrical pursuits, other questions might be fruitfully raised. How, I wonder, did the author's lecture tour intersect with theatrical practices of the day, whether in terms of dramatic genres (melodrama, tragedy, farce, extravaganza), theatrical modes (the tableau, soliloquy, sensation scene, musical solo), or the burgeoning star system? How did dramatic readings—whether Fanny Kemble and Edwin Forrest's readings of Shakespeare, William Wells Brown and Mary Webb's recitations of abolitionist dramas, or the reading of dramas in private parlors—inform authors' lectures? Did the authors speak in theatrical venues, and if so, how did the stage appear? Were lectures promoted in a manner similar to theatrical performances—through playbills and puff pieces?

"Race" is another keyword to be pursued more fully. Just as a study of authorship and the body in the nineteenth century necessitates one's consideration of women's vexed relationship with the public sphere, so too does it lead one to grapple with what it meant to speak and write as a person of color. African Americans addressed largely white audiences in the context of enslavement, disenfranchisement, segregation, lynching, and other forms of legal and extralegal violence placing the black body under the control of the white. Adams's treatment of Douglass's transatlantic lecture tour moves in this direction. When she points out that his refusal to display the marks on his back made them "symbolic and textual" as well as "real reminders of the body of the slave" (30), she helps us understand how Douglass's use of performative as well as textual elision enabled him to retain individual agency within a communal pursuit of justice.

What I find harder to accept are the diminishment of key distinctions between what it meant for a formerly enslaved African American activist as opposed to an eminent English poet-critic to write and speak publicly. When, for example, the chapter on Wilde and Arnold compares their complaints of "feeling powerless over their fates in America" with how Douglass faced "the pressures of his white organizers" (90), it gives this reader pause. Adams acknowledges "Douglass's experience was unique compared to many of the other authors in this study," yet she also asserts that he "encapsulates the paradox of the performing author" that "remained true for any author who chose to not just write, but speak, for his or her public" (31-32). Didn't the authorial paradox for African Americans entail additional tensions (between enslavement and freedom) and profoundly complicate others (e.g., labor and intellect)?

Adams's rightful insistence on placing abolitionist lectures within the genealogy of the lecture tour expands our understanding of how authorial performance worked in the century. A next step—and here the relevant scholarship includes studies by Daphne

Brooks, Marvin McAllister, John Ernest, and Tavia Nyong'o, among others—will be to develop further the account of that genealogy. In the spirit of her pairings, one might, for example, explore the radically different rhetorical and performative contexts for the late-nineteenth century transatlantic lecturing of Henry James and Ida B. Wells.

Ultimately Adams's deeply researched and consistently argued study convinces the reader of the importance of the lecture tour to nineteenth-century literary culture and the role of the author within it. Anyone working on the eight authors Adams takes up will need to engage her research, and literary historians concerned with reception and performance will find arguments that they should engage. *Performing Authorship* draws on a neglected archive to resurrect an ephemeral, physical form and reminds us of the significant work left to be done on the place of the body in nineteenth-century print culture.