

OLIVER SCHEIDING and MARTIN SEIDL, eds., *Worlding America: A Transnational Anthology of Short Narratives before 1800* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2015), 245 pp.

Anthologies are by nature provocative: the chosen selections will always impress some and dismay others, and, by prioritizing certain writers and values, editors make literary and political statements. There is nothing hidden, however, about the agenda behind *Worlding America*. Rather than aiming to create or revise a pedagogical canon (in the mode of the Norton, Heath or Bedford anthologies), this slim collection is designed to make and illustrate a critical statement about the untapped abundance of short narratives that fall within the broad category of early American writing. It is therefore an invaluable resource for two overlapping areas of scholarly interest: the evolution of the American short story and new perspectives on early American writing. Because of the sheer diversity and the plot-driven designs of the narratives, the anthology is also a great read.

The thirty selected narratives, which range from two to fifteen pages in length, are grouped into five categories: Life Writing, Female Agency, The Circum-Atlantic World, Cultures of Print, and Ghost Stories. These overlapping and eclectic subheadings reflect the anthology's aim of being suggestive rather than exhaustive. Like boxes containing boxes, each category is divided into smaller subgroups, so that, for instance, what is meant by 'Cultures of Print' becomes clarified by the section's further division into Orientalism, Migrant Fictions and Sensationalism, each of which is represented by two texts. Under Sensationalism, for example, we find a fictionalized account of a man who murdered his family because he believed God commanded it, and a revenant love story set in Italy, pirated from a French collection, and published anonymously in an American periodical. For those familiar with Brockden Brown's *Wieland* and the stories of Edgar Allan Poe, the connections are appealing, and despite the editors' assertion that this anthology is not simply an Ur-context for the emergence of the American short story, the material certainly could be used to that end. The critical headnotes mostly skirt such teleological goals and focus instead on the peculiarities of early American literary culture, including the importance of eighteenth-century periodicals in shaping

these brief, plot-driven narratives, and the prevalence of literary piracy and other forms of recycling that complicate the notion of authorship.

Within the subdivided structure of the anthology we find some predictable themes and genres: captivity narrative and slavery are there, for instance. But accounts from different locales, times, and cultures are thoughtfully juxtaposed so that adjacent to the dramatic account of New England's Hannah Duston, who scalped her captors, is the narrative of Marie Le Roy and Barbara Leininger, who were German-speaking inhabitants of eighteenth-century Pennsylvania, and whose story became as legendary as Duston's within their community. Yoked with these captivity narratives under the joint heading Female Agency are two examples of such agency exerted through "Authorship," a sketch entitled "Inhuman Treatment to a Negro Slave" and the "Story of Henry and Anne: Founded on Fact," both published in 1791. We are invited to ponder what might be comparable between pursuing empowerment through surviving and writing about a captivity experience and authoring a sentimental love story or anti-slavery sketch. In the case of the story and the sketch, a generational comparison is possible since they were written at different times by a mother and daughter (Ann Eliza Bleecker and Margaretta V. Faugerer), though both published in 1791.

By highlighting texts that have been overlooked in literary historical accounts and anthologies, for reasons that we are now in a position to reverse, this collection demonstrates the valuable role that an anthology can play in post-canonical scholarship. Most of the texts gathered in Scheiding's and Seidl's anthology became marginalized partly because of their brevity. Because they predated the emergence of the "short story" as an aesthetic masterpiece, their shortness has perhaps been mistaken for slightness—the sketch, the circulated letter, the personal account, the plagiarized story, such even seem to present themselves sometimes as diversionary material, designed to be quickly read and then stored, passed on or laid aside. Some of the narratives were published in ephemeral journals or pamphlets, others were circulated, or in the case of Taylor's journal, simply kept as a personal record. *Worlding America* does not consist of newly unearthed discoveries: specialists in the various subfields of early American studies

will be familiar with certain texts that relate to their own areas of interest. What is new is the notion that the literary qualities of being a narrative and being short offer a sufficient basis for kinship and comparative analysis.

Re-reading the handful of Puritan texts that I recognized, placed alongside narratives from eighteenth-century coffee-table periodicals, Indian legends, criminal confessions, a Jesuit relation, and a Pennsylvanian German ghost story, was very illuminating. Such comparative reading effortlessly repels the cozy exceptionalism that is generated not only by a blinkered and proleptic focus on the USA, but also by the academic tendency to fragment literary materials into cultural, geographic and linguistic subfields in order to make our critical task more manageable. *Worlding America* shows that dissolving such boundaries needn't lead to a white-out in which all landmarks are lost and all scholars buried under an avalanche of sources. It demonstrates that with the help of careful selection, the "worlding" process will enable new connections to emerge, and the editors' framing of their chosen texts through critical categories is an object lesson in how it can be done.

Like recent work that puts early America in an Atlantic or hemispheric context, *Worlding America* carries its readers across linguistic barriers by including narratives translated from German, Spanish and French, and some from Native American sources. Pennsylvania German culture, represented by the aforementioned captivity narrative, plus two texts by Christopher Sauer, is a particularly welcome addition. Perhaps least satisfactory is the engagement with Spanish sources, the sole representative being the first chapter of Góngora's *The Misfortunes of Alonso Ramírez*. Although the courtly manners of this text pose a wonderful counterpoint to that of the Anglophone confessions and journals in the anthology, it appears as a token representative of Spanish colonial writing and is extracted from a longer narrative. On the other hand, "hemispheric" comparisons are now easily found elsewhere, and this collection aims instead to identify multiple crisscrossing threads in early American narrative prose that is drawn from diverse cultures and contexts. My other minor quibble is that the category "Ghost Stories" feels like a rather uncomfortable and culturally biased backwards projection when used to group together stories from Washington Irving and Christopher Sauer with origin myths

involving the underworld from Maya and Penobscot traditions.

Besides using "worlding" to evoke the "transnational," the editors also wish to accentuate the relation of early American texts to their material environments. The absence of a proto-national framework of "American literature" will, the editors propose, encourage closer attention to local material circumstances, including the circulation of texts like Duston's story, or the shipwreck narrative by Anthony Thacher, which became embedded in books by two generations of Mathers. As Scheiding and Seidl point out, narratives published in eighteenth-century periodicals often belonged to more than one nation: some were lifted verbatim from a European publication, while others were rewritten or repackaged, and others, including Sauer's ghost story, were spirited to a New World location to reflect the surroundings of their colonial readers. The footnotes explaining the sources of some of these narratives read like picaresque narratives in themselves and provide a fascinating demonstration of the complexity of identifying the literary origins of any story, not to mention the story of a national literature.

Speaking of literary origins, *Worlding America* offers intriguing (and corrective) reading for those interested in the evolution of the American short story by anticipating many of the features that might be assumed to arise from nineteenth-century circumstances. Points of continuity include adaptation of European folklore, concern for unity of plot, the spatial requirements of periodical publication and, in the confessions of criminals and adventurers, the forging of a connection between a reader and a rogue that is facilitated by the brevity of the text. Indeed, I would have enjoyed more discussion of the manifold uses of shortness as represented by the chosen texts. Though not a genre, brevity is the shared feature that unites these varied texts, and so the anthology implicitly invites further critical exploration of the literary dynamics of short narrative while in the introductions focusing on explaining the external pressures that shaped it. Close reading would of course be more difficult for the texts that appear in translation, but this is only to highlight the benefits of pursuing multilingualism in American Studies. The editors' preference of foregrounding material conditions rather than aesthetic outcomes in the shaping of

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these narratives allows them to offer an excellent overview of recent trends in early American literary scholarship, including the influence of global economics, printing and distribution networks, and scribal circulation, in their headnotes and introduction. The appended bibliography is impressively wide ranging and up-to-date, and I look forward to

scouring it in my own research and teaching. At the end of each section, the editors have also provided concise lists of related primary sources for further reading, thereby making the anthology easily expandable into a textbook for a semester-length course.

Cambridge

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