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Worlding America: A Transnational Anthology of Short Narratives Before 1800
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The movement of stories gives shape to *Worlding America: A Transnational Anthology of Short Narratives Before 1800*. The editors have assembled a unique collection of “short narratives,” a term encompassing excerpts from diaries and letters, as well as texts appearing in periodicals and collections, not simply as a venue for stories that have heretofore “remained largely obscure and marginalized” but to suggest a mode of engaging these early narratives that brings to the fore their complex histories of publication and dissemination, over time and across oceans (1). The anthology aims to be “a dialogue between scholarship and the rich archive of storytelling in the Americas before 1800” as it “combines recent critical trends that reassess American literature in a global context with a new approach that focuses on textual circulation” (8). This approach is framed by “worlding,” a concept imported from Martin Heidegger and now used in literary studies as a “model...based on iteration rather than origination,” which “examines the pluridirectional flow of texts across different languages, cultures, and nations” (10). Oliver Scheiding and Martin Seidl employ this model to create an anthology that transcends the simple collection of texts worthy of reading and analyzing by providing the means to explore the myriad contexts in which these anthologized narratives existed and a networked approach to any “short narratives” circulating during America’s early days.

The anthology is divided into five parts, each of which has two or three sections that include two to three texts. For example, Part II: Female Agency groups texts under “Captivities” and “Authorship.” “Captivities” contains Marie Le Roy and Barbara Leininger’s “The Narrative of Marie le Roy and Barbara Leininger, for Three Years Captives among the Indians” (1759), Cotton Mather’s “A Narrative of a Notable Deliverance from Captivity” (1697), and “The Duston Family” (1836), which may be attributable to Nathaniel Hawthorne – representative of the diversity of texts found throughout. These parts and sections are thematic, and, in addition to the critical notes that appear at the beginning of each part, every narrative is coupled with its “publication history” in footnotes.

The headnotes and publication histories do not solely contextualize the short narratives; they are compelling narratives in their own right, of the texts’ journeys and transformations. Likewise, the editors’ decision to end each part with “Suggestions for Further Reading” enlarges our sense of themes and concerns surrounding the representative narratives included in the anthology. As noted before, the short narratives in the collection are certainly worthy of a wider readership – the editors and the texts themselves definitely make this argument. However, it is the anthology’s suggestion of a multivalent approach to the short narratives born of a nuanced understanding their development and distribution that makes this such an exceptional and valuable addition to the study of early American short form prose.