

This multivolume *History* marks a new beginning in the study of American literature. It embodies the work of a generation of Americanists who have redrawn the boundaries of the field and redefined the terms of its development. The extraordinary growth of the field has called for, and here receives, a more expansive, more flexible scholarly format. All previous histories of American literature have been either totalizing, offering the magisterial sweep of a single vision, or encyclopedic, composed of a multitude of terse accounts that come to seem just as totalizing because the form itself precludes the development of authorial voice. Here, American literary history unfolds through a polyphony of large-scale narratives. Each is ample enough in scope and detail to allow for the elaboration of distinctive views (premises, arguments, and analyses); each is persuasive by demonstration and authoritative in its own right; and each is related to the others through common themes and concerns.

The authors were selected for the excellence of their scholarship and for the significance of the critical communities informing their work. Together, they demonstrate the achievements of Americanist literary criticism over the past three decades. Their contributions to these volumes speak to continuities as well as disruptions between generations and give voice to the wide range of materials now subsumed under the heading of American literature and culture.

This volume, covering the colonial and early national periods, spans three centuries and an extraordinary variety of authors: Renaissance explorers, Puritan theocrats, Enlightenment naturalists, southern women of letters, revolutionary pamphleteers, and poets and novelists of the young Republic. Myra Jehlen draws upon the multilingual literature of exploration and colonization to tell the story of how America was made up – a story of imperial expansion and imaginative appropriation. Emory Elliott traces the explosive, conflict-ridden development of the New England Way from its fractious beginnings through the tumultuous mid-eighteenth-century revivals. David S. Shields's focus is relatively narrow in time but rich in the materials it brings to light: newly uncovered collections of poems, essays, and letters that reveal a cosmopolitan network of neoclassical belles lettres extending from Philadelphia and New York to the salons of the Old South. Robert A. Ferguson examines the interconnections between the many forms of discourse that constituted the American Enlightenment and eventuated as the rhetoric of nationhood. Michael T. Gilmore describes a series of broad social and economic transformations – from republican to free-market ideology, oral to print culture, communal to individualist values – in the course of detailing the emergence of a national literary tradition.

All five narratives place the literature in international perspective; all five speak of its distinctively American characteristics, whether colonial, provincial, or national; and (in different ways) all of them demonstrate the centrality of language to the course of Americanization. Together, they offer a compelling and, for our time, comprehensive re-vision of the literary importance of early American history and the historical value of early American literature.

THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY  
OF AMERICAN LITERATURE

Volume I  
1590–1820

THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF  
AMERICAN LITERATURE

*General editor:* Sacvan Bercovitch, Charles H. Carswell Professor of  
English and American Literature, Harvard University

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*Associate Editor*  
CYRUS R. K. PATELL,  
*New York University*



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*Sacvan Bercovitch*

### THE LITERATURE OF COLONIZATION

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*Myra Jehlen*



## NEW ENGLAND PURITAN LITERATURE

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*Emory Elliott*

## BRITISH-AMERICAN BELLES LETTRES

Although my account of British-American belles lettres owes an obvious debt to the scholarship of the persons named in the final paragraph of the section, there are influences that may not be readily apparent and that require notice. For instance, the emphasis given institutions of literary conversation owes much to Jürgen Habermas's argument concerning the central place of coffeehouses, clubs, and the republic of letters in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Peter Clark's work on sociability, Lawrence Klein's investigations of politeness, and Richard Bushman's explorations of gentility have instructed my readings of belles lettres as texts designed for social pleasure. Likewise, Dena Goodman's ongoing work on French salon culture greatly aided my understanding of the institutions of women's writing and conversation in British America. The path-breaking scholarship of Pattie Cowell and Carla Mulford establishing a canon of colonial women's writings is the precondition for any informed comment on the subject. My sense of British-American literature as a subject owes a good deal to the critical writings of William Spengemann.

As Samuel Foster Haven Fellow at the American Antiquarian Society, I explored the relationship of manuscript communications and print; the findings presented here should be regarded as an exercise in the new deontological history of the book advocated by David D. Hall and Michael Warner.

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Joseph Green's letter to Captain Benjamin Pollard, 7 June 1733, Smith-Carter Papers, appears courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society.

Robert Bolling's "Occlusion," Collection, Br[ock] 163, appears courtesy of the Huntington Library.

Elizabeth Graeme's "The foregoing song answered by a young Lady," *Juvinilia Poemata*, Manuscript 13494Q, is printed courtesy of the Library Company of Philadelphia.

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*David S. Shields*

#### THE AMERICAN ENLIGHTENMENT, 1750–1820

In writing my section of this history in the present tense, I ask you to enter into a particular awareness of history as subject and as enterprise. "Presentism" is a term that historians often use to denigrate a misleading application of contemporary standards to the past, and the warning is a real one; the dangers of inappropriate application always remain with us. My own use, however, reaches for another reality. Whatever the dangers, the imposition of the present on the past is also an unavoidable construct – so unavoidable that it is well for writer and reader to recall that limitation together.

Contemporary appropriations of the American Revolution occur in every era. That is what it means, at least in part, to have a legacy. But if the Revolution changes with each succeeding generation, acknowledgment of this

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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fact does not release the historian — even the historian as literary critic — into a realm of unbounded speculation. Indeed, the hazards of an inevitable ahistoricism should force writer and reader back upon the joined integrity and volatility of primary materials. In this sense, use of the present tense signifies both the slippage in any necessary ordering of the past and the sometimes contradictory impulse to recover history in the making.

Literary history in particular welcomes the present. It dwells upon extant texts, and I try to use the analytical convention to reach for more of the original excitement that revolutionary texts provoked. Not fixed accomplishment but the messiness of ongoing event and the related immediacies of thought and act drive the often hesitant language of the period. The now arcane genres of sermon, pamphlet, and public document — not to mention the forgotten placards of ritualized protests — are fluid forms evolving under immense cultural pressure, not rigid envelopes in a static discourse.

What do we really know about the Revolution? First and foremost, we have the writings, the related texts, and other artifacts of those figures who participated in and witnessed events. Second, we have the so-called facts gathered about those events, then and later. Third, we have the contested ground of the history of interpretation regarding the period and its thought, and fourth, we have what might more generally be called the history of ideas. Like every scholar, I seek to combine the four elements in effective and graceful ways, and I try to do so with the many previous approaches to this cumulative record in mind. My contributions to the bibliography at the end of this volume provide a partial record of my indebtedness. At the same time, and in a competing goal, I mean to remind you of uneasy simplifications in the combinations themselves. The past is always more complicated than we can know. The most basic primary text glosses underlying incident, and each new layer of writing contributes to the studied appearance of history.

I try to entertain these difficulties within several recognitions. Current awareness of cultural diversity makes this a good moment for reexamining national origins. Then, too, the writings and speeches of the period are in themselves more rhetorically complex and more fully available to critical consciousness than many have realized. I believe that we are still learning how to read the basic texts of the Revolution and that the need for scrutiny now is all the more engaging because of growing intellectual awareness of dialectics in Enlightenment thought. This scrutiny, in turn, benefits from a singular piece of national good fortune: the federal union begins in a moment when Americans take ideas seriously — not always the case in its history. If this study opens any of these ideas to fresh inquiry for others, it will have served its most important purpose.

In the community of scholars, five have been more than communal during

the course of this project. Ann Douglas and Richard Posner read and commented with care on parts of the manuscript. My immediate collaborator Michael T. Gilmore made important suggestions throughout. John Paul Russo and Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson tested every word more than once. Separate but together, they made as fine a committee of correspondence as one could hope for.

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Robert A. Ferguson

THE LITERATURE OF THE REVOLUTIONARY AND EARLY  
 NATIONAL PERIODS

My contribution to the Cambridge History focuses on the flowering and decline of civic humanism in the development of American culture between the Revolution and the 1820s. This perspective derives from the writings of historians and literary critics who see the republican period as originary of our modern world but also as fundamentally different from the liberal and Romantic ethos that crystallized in the nineteenth century. Among the scholars who have strongly influenced my argument, I would like to single out Gordon Wood, J. G. A. Pocock, William Charvat, Cathy Davidson, Michael Warner, and Benedict Anderson. The rich work on the origins of the novel form, both in England and America, has been particularly important to my understanding of early national literature. In addition to Davidson’s work, I wish to acknowledge the scholarship of Lennard Davis, Nancy Armstrong, and Michael McKeon. Other valuable sources – and there have been many – are listed in the bibliography. As the reader will discover, I often disagree with the conclusions of the scholars who preceded me, but I could not have written this section of the History without their pioneering investigations.

It has taken a very long time for this project to see the light, and I have accumulated many debts along the way. The manuscript was read in its entirety by Sacvan Bercovitch and Robert Ferguson; their comments led to

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*Michael T. Gilmore*