

Introduction

When Evert and George Duyckinck published their *Cyclopaedia of American Literature* in 1855, they organized its contents chronologically according to authors' birthdates – or so they said. Though they explained this organizational scheme at the outset, they violated it within their first ten pages. George Sandys, the subject of the first entry, was born in 1578. Thomas Hariot, the subject of the seventh entry, was born in 1560. Sandys's placement at the beginning of the book was neither mistake nor quirk. The Duyckincks had good reason to start their cyclopaedia with Sandys.

Readers have often assumed that early American colonists were so busy carving their communities from the wilderness and safeguarding themselves against native inhabitants that they had neither the time nor the inclination for *belles lettres*. The example of Sandys proves the opposite. Appointed treasurer of the Virginia colony and a member of its governing council, Sandys reached Virginia in 1621. Present for the great Indian uprising that occurred on March 22, 1622, he personally led the first counterattack. He remained in Virginia until 1625. During his stay, he completed *Ovids Metamorphosis Englished* (1626), a translation that would profoundly influence the likes of Milton, Dryden, and Pope. As the Duyckincks tell the story, the premiere author of American literature influenced some of the foremost authors of English literature.¹

Beginning with Sandys, the Duyckincks paralleled the start of British North America with the origins of ancient civilization, depicting America as a world where civilization could start afresh. Introducing an extract from Sandys's Ovid, they indulged their imagination to consider what its translator might have been thinking: "We may fancy him looking round him, as he wrote, upon the rough materials of the Golden Age of Virginia, testing Ovid's poetical dreams by the realities."² Their extract ends with the following lines:

Forthwith the earth, corn unmanured bears;
And every year renews her golden ears:
With milk and nectar were the rivers fill'd;
And yellow honey from green elms distilled.

Chronicling how the academic study of American literature developed, Kermit Vanderbilt identified the *Cyclopaedia of American Literature* as a key text. Part encyclopedia, part anthology, and part literary history, it is, in Vanderbilt's words, "a generous example of humane scholarship of the first order."³ The Duyckincks' use of Sandys reinforces their generosity and their humanity. Putting him first, they gave precedence to Virginia. Throughout this massive compendium of American literature, the Duyckincks made a conscious effort to include the literature of the South, which previous works in the field had ignored in favor of New England. E.H. Smith's *American Poems* (1793), to take for example the first anthology of American verse, neglected southern poets altogether.⁴

Completing their cyclopaedia as tensions between North and South escalated with the approach of the Civil War, these two native New Yorkers did what they could in a literary way to defuse the explosive situation. As their preface explains: "It has been an object in this work to exhibit fairly and amply all portions of the country. The literature of the South is here more fully displayed than ever before."⁵ Despite the Duyckincks' best intentions, literary histories and anthologies published since the Civil War have come closer to Elihu Hubbard. In other words, they typically slight Southern literature, making it seem as if New England were the cradle of American literature.

As courses in American literature entered the college curriculum in the late nineteenth century, many brief literary histories designed for the classroom came on the market, but most gave the South short shrift. With *Southern Literature from 1579–1895*, Louise Manly provided a necessary corrective. A Richmond native, Manly compiled her anthology at the Virginia State Library (now, the Library of Virginia), excerpting many works that other anthologists and literary historians had ignored. In his fine survey of southern literary scholarship, Professor M. Thomas Inge of Randolph-Macon College acknowledges Manly's importance, despite her overt belligerence toward the New England–based anthologies.⁶

In the early twentieth century, the literary history of Virginia received attention as a distinct field of study. For his doctoral dissertation at the University of Virginia, Carol M. Newman, a native of Wytheville, compiled an extensive bibliography and wrote a brief literary history to accompany it, which he published as *Virginia Literature* (1903). Newman divided

his subject into six chronological periods, using major political developments to separate each: “The Early Colonial Period,” which starts with the founding of Jamestown in 1607 and goes to Bacon’s Rebellion in 1676; “The Later Colonial Period,” which goes from Bacon’s Rebellion to 1760, when, in Newman’s words, “the spirit of revolt again became rife in the land”; “The Revolutionary Period, 1760–1800”; “The Period of Union, 1800–1850”; “The Period of Division,” which ranges from the Compromise of 1850 to 1876, the year Rutherford B. Hayes, the president who would end Reconstruction, was elected; and “The Period of Reunion,” from 1876 to the present.⁷

Newman looked forward to further research into the history of Virginia literature but did not pursue the subject himself, preferring instead a career as an educator and administrator at Virginia Polytechnic Institute, where he became one of the most beloved men on campus. (The main library at Virginia Tech is named in his honor.) Newman did contribute to the most ambitious project ever undertaken in the field of Southern letters: the *Library of Southern Literature*, a seventeen-volume anthology. Under the general editorship of Edwin Anderson Alderman, the president of the University of Virginia (which named its main library in his honor), and co-editors Joel Chandler Harris and Charles W. Kent, the *Library of Southern Literature* celebrates the literature of the South with judicious selections from Virginia and all the other Southern states. Appreciative headnotes introduce each author anthologized. The fifteenth volume forms a biographical dictionary containing nearly four thousand entries. Its entry for Louise Manly, for example, calls her *Southern Literature* “a work which has been of very great value both in arousing public interest and in supplying important information.”⁸

The year 1907 marked the tricentenary of the founding of Jamestown. That same year F. V. N. Painter, a professor of modern languages and literature at Roanoke College, published *Poets of Virginia*, a history of Virginia verse, which Inge characterizes as “a relentless description of seemingly every poet who ever published a volume of verse in Virginia.”⁹ Whereas Inge criticizes him for being too relentless, one could argue that Painter was not relentless enough. His emphasis on printed volumes minimizes both the manuscript tradition and fugitive verse, that is, poems published in newspapers and periodicals but never collected. Regardless, Painter’s quest for comprehensiveness is admirable, and he offers thoughtful appreciations of many poets who deserve another look. In terms of historical periodization, Painter presents only one colonial section instead of two, but otherwise he closely follows Newman.

In 1916, Earl Gregg Swem, then assistant librarian at the Virginia State Library, published *A Bibliography of Virginia*, an attempt to catalogue all the books in the library by Virginians, about Virginia, or printed in Virginia. In his introduction, he expresses his gratitude to Newman's work, but Swem goes well beyond Newman in terms of inclusiveness.¹⁰ More than 750 pages long, this bibliography testifies to Swem's thoroughness and hard work. Not only did he list Virginia books, he also listed parts of books about Virginia. Each selection pertaining to Virginia from *Library of Southern Literature*, for example, receives a separate entry in *A Bibliography of Virginia*. Four years later, Swem would leave the Virginia State Library to become librarian at William and Mary, where he completed an even more ambitious project, the *Virginia Historical Index* (1934–36). Also known as "Swem's Index," the work provides a wealth of information that has greatly benefitted researchers in many fields of study. It contains vast riches that literary scholars have yet to exploit fully. While at William and Mary, Swem turned its library into a major collection for students and researchers. The main library on campus is named in his honor. Naming their libraries after literary historians and bibliographers, Virginia universities testify to the importance the book plays in the history of the state.

Two decades after Newman's Virginia dissertation, Jay B. Hubbell completed his doctoral dissertation, *Virginia Life in Fiction* (1922), at Columbia University. Born in Smyth County, Virginia, Hubbell took his B.A. at Richmond College, but he went to Harvard for graduate work. Dissatisfied that during his two years there Harvard had not offered any graduate courses in American literature, he transferred to Columbia.¹¹ After earning his doctorate, Hubbell pursued his interest in the literary history of the South, which culminated in *The South in American Literature, 1607–1900* (1954), a magisterial work that forms a landmark in the field. Reviewing the book upon its release, Floyd Stovall, Edgar Allan Poe Professor at the University of Virginia, concluded, "The old-fashioned virtues of scholarship – patience, accuracy, thoroughness, and impartiality – are here demonstrated so effectively that this book may well become a model for younger scholars in the practice of their craft."¹²

Another Virginia native continued the study of Southern literature, concentrating on the colonial and early national periods. Born in Accomack, Virginia, Richard Beale Davis took his bachelor's degree from Randolph-Macon College, later earning his doctorate from the University of Virginia under James Southall Wilson, the founder of the *Virginia Quarterly Review*. Davis discussed early Virginia literary and intellectual history in *Intellectual Life in Jefferson's Virginia, 1790–1830* (1964) and *The*

Intellectual Life of the Colonial South (1978), which won the National Book Award. The works of Hubbell and Davis have been instrumental to the study of Southern literature. The present volume is dedicated in honor of their memory.

A History of Virginia Literature represents the first major collaborative literary history of Virginia ever attempted. Virginia deserves a literary history of its own for numerous reasons. As Carol Newman said a century ago, “In more ways than one the literature of the Old Dominion is worthy of minutest study.”¹³ England’s first permanent American colony, it established a foothold for English colonial ambitions throughout America. The name “Virginia” originally pertained to the entirety of North America. Captain John Smith considered New England – a place name he coined – to be the northern part of Virginia. As other English colonies emerged in North America, Virginia remained the largest. According to its charter, it originally extended westward to the Pacific coast. During the American Revolution, Virginia nurtured Revolutionary and national ideology, producing some of the nation’s earliest and foremost statesmen, including George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, and James Madison, all of whom happened to be fine writers, too. These Virginia leaders remain among the greatest icons of the United States. As literature started being defined more in terms of *belles lettres* in the nineteenth century, Virginia produced another author who has influenced world literature more fully than perhaps any other American writer: Edgar Allan Poe.¹⁴

In recent decades, the phrase “expanding the canon” has become an integral part of the critical discourse of American literature. A divisive term, the “canon” basically refers to those works the scholarly community deems worthy of study and research. Since the 1980s, the canon of American literature has been expanded in terms of diversity – race, class, gender – but not necessarily in terms of geography: the South continues to be slighted. Colonial literature – the one period of American literature that has expanded in terms of geography – is often conceived nowadays in hemispherical terms. Students of early American literature study colonial French, colonial Portuguese, and colonial Spanish literature from Central and South America. The study of early American literature currently stretches from Hudson Bay to Patagonia, but somehow Virginia has been slighted again. Virginia will be ignored no longer. Its rich and varied literature forms a vital part of American literary culture, as *A History of Virginia Literature* amply demonstrates. Supplementing the scholarship of the past with a considerable amount of new information, *A History of*

Virginia Literature constitutes a comprehensive history. The first of its kind in four hundred years, it is designed to be the standard work in the field for decades to come.

A History of Virginia Literature is organized in a rough chronological manner. It contains twenty-six chapters, separated into four major chronological periods: “Colonial Virginia,” “Jeffersonian Virginia,” “The Civil War Era,” and “Modern Virginia.”

Part I, “Colonial Virginia,” begins with the settling of Jamestown and continues through the Revolutionary era. In the first chapter, Karen Schramm reconstructs the literary culture of Jamestown, not only examining the writings of Captain John Smith and his circle, but also taking a backward glance at the works written in anticipation of Jamestown by such writers as Thomas Hariot, Arthur Barlowe, and other promotional authors. In their relationship with Native Americans, many seventeenth-century Virginia authors recognized the significance of oratory to the indigenous culture, another topic Schramm undertakes. In the second chapter, Jon Kukla analyzes the work of several colonial historians, tracing the story of Virginia from Bacon’s Rebellion through the middle third of the eighteenth century. In Chapter 3, Stephen C. Ausband surveys the life and writings of William Byrd of Westover, examining his two most renowned works, *The Secret History of the Line* and *The History of the Dividing Line*, and seeing how these parallel works tell the same story for different audiences and purposes.

Continuing Part I, Nanette Tamer takes an in-depth look at early Virginia verse from Captain John Smith to Robert Bolling, whom J. A. Leo Lemay has called “the most accomplished litterateur of colonial Virginia.”¹⁵ In the following chapter, A. Franklin Parks studies the impact that printing had on colonial Virginia, surveying the output of William Parks’ press, evaluating his most significant imprints, and tracing the complicated story of all the different Williamsburg newspapers named *Virginia Gazette*. In Chapter 6, Brian Steele surveys the political writings Revolutionary Virginia produced. The personal letter, which George Washington called “the greatest mark of friendship and esteem you can show to an absent Friend,” forms the subject of Chapter 7.¹⁶ In this, the last chapter of Part I, Elizabeth Hewitt studies the biographical, cultural, and historiographical place of letter writing in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Virginia, giving the most attention to George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, both of whom were excellent letter writers.

Part II, “Jeffersonian Virginia,” examines the period from the end of the Revolutionary War through the first third of the nineteenth century. Since the two previous chapters study Jefferson’s letters and Revolutionary writings, Jason Robles takes a different angle in Chapter 8 telling the story of Jefferson’s life as a writer from his appointment as minister to France through his final days and offering an overall perspective on his literary style and outlook. Chapter 9, the only chapter devoted to a single book, studies Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia*. Some years ago, Richard Beale Davis indicated that book’s literary importance by comparing its subject with those of other major authors in American literature: “Virginia was to Jefferson what Walden was to Thoreau, the whale ship to Melville, the human individual to Whitman.”¹⁷ Chapter 9 surveys the composition, structure, and themes of *Notes on the State of Virginia*, arguably the most important book in the literary history of Virginia.

Chapter 10, the third in Part II, examines the circle of Williamsburg poets and intellectuals to which Jefferson belonged, a group that included Theodorick Bland, Samuel Henley, John Page, Margaret Lowther Page, and St. George Tucker. Chapter 11 overviews several works of Virginia literature in the fields of biography, history, and travel, nearly all of which Jefferson helped influence, inspire, or facilitate. In Chapter 12, Russell Brickey resumes the study of Virginia verse, surveying the work of several early nineteenth-century poets, including Philip Pendleton Cooke, Dabney Carr Terrell, and, of course, Edgar Allan Poe.

Paul C. Jones continues the story of Poe’s place in Virginia literature, providing a critical appreciation of his short fiction in Chapter 13. Though the story of Poe’s stories extends beyond the Jeffersonian period, biography links Edgar Allan Poe and Thomas Jefferson, who was still alive when Poe matriculated at the University of Virginia. Jefferson often came to campus and also invited students to Monticello for Sunday dinner. The evidence suggests that Poe was one of Jefferson’s dinner guests and that he took some advice Jefferson gave him about books to read. After Jefferson’s death on July 4, 1826, Poe honored him by attending his funeral.¹⁸

“We have not yet forgotten, nor is it likely we shall very soon forget, the rich simplicity of diction – the manliness of tone – the admirable traits of Virginian manners, and the striking pictures of still life, to be found in *Swallow Barn*”: so Edgar Allan Poe wrote about the work that is typically identified as the very first Virginia novel, John Pendleton Kennedy’s *Swallow Barn*. Unique within the United States, Virginia has a type of novel named after it. The Virginia novel forms the subject of Chapter 14, the first chapter in Part III, “The Civil War Era,” which tells the story of

Virginia literature during the last two-thirds of the nineteenth century. In this, the first of two chapters devoted to the subject, John C. Hare surveys the major Virginia novels, starting with *Swallow Barn* and continuing through the works of William Alexander Caruthers and Nathaniel Beverley Tucker, the author of *George Balcombe*, which Poe called “one of the best novels ever published in America.” Poe’s remark may be extravagant, but it testifies to his efforts to champion the literature of Virginia.¹⁹

Poe’s comment about Kennedy appears in a review he published when he was with the *Southern Literary Messenger*, the foremost magazine in antebellum Virginia and, arguably, the nineteenth-century South. In Chapter 15, Christine Modey presents a literary history of the *Messenger*, emphasizing its importance to Virginia, the South, and the nation. Chapter 16, which examines Virginia folklore, appears in Part III for convenience, but its subject stretches from pre-colonial days to the twenty-first century. In this chapter, Ted Olson surveys Virginia’s rich folk tradition, which spans several different ethnic groups – African, European, Native American – discussing ballads, dances, folk songs, folktales, folkways, legends, spirituals, and superstitions. In Chapter 17, Robyn McGee studies the literature of slavery, including *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (1831), the story of the only successful slave revolt in Virginia history. McGee unravels the questionable authorship of the work but there can be no doubt about its narrative power, which reflects what Cecil M. Brown has called Nat Turner’s “schizophrenic eloquence.”²⁰

In Chapter 18, David Anderson looks at the non-fiction writings that emerged from the Civil War experience, especially diaries and memoirs. The next two chapters study the belletristic writings published after the war. In the first, Lauren Rule Maxwell offers a critical appreciation of the major Virginia poets of the late nineteenth century. Gwendolyn Jones Harold resumes the story of the Virginia novel in the second, showing how it changed as the end of the century approached.

Part IV, “Modern Virginia,” begins with Susan Goodman’s biographical and critical overview of Ellen Glasgow, “the foremost woman novelist of America,” in the words of James Branch Cabell.²¹ Glasgow set the tone for a new period in the state’s literary history, bringing the Virginia novel to the modern era, and identifying some of its inherent contradictions. In Chapter 22, Tom Barden looks at the works produced by the Virginia Writers’ Project, which formed part of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), a subject that Professor Charles L. Perdue, Jr., introduced to him at the University of Virginia. This literary history briefly shades into personal

Introduction

9

memoir as Barden relates his experience with the extraordinary collection of Virginia materials gathered by the WPA and, in so doing, telling a story of intellectual discovery at the University of Virginia similar to what earlier students from Edgar Allan Poe to Richard Beale Davis experienced there.

John D. Miles traces the story of Virginia science fiction and fantasy from the early nineteenth century to the present time in Chapter 23. In the next chapter, James L. W. West III surveys the career of William Styron, looking at both his novels and his nonfiction. In Chapter 25, Adam N. Jabbur studies the phenomenon of authors who were born in Virginia but who have become associated with other places, Willa Cather and Tom Wolfe. Born in the mountains of Virginia, Cather lived in Virginia the first ten years of her life. When her family moved to Nebraska, she felt as if she had “come to the end of everything.”²² Wolfe is typically associated with Manhattan, but he was born in Richmond and attended Washington and Lee University in Lexington, where he helped found the literary magazine *Shenandoah*. In the last chapter, Chris Beyers looks at Virginia’s lively verse culture, tracing the story of Virginia poetry from the 1920s to the present. The conclusion attempts to identify patterns that range throughout the literary history of Virginia.

Notes

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2. Evert A. Duyckinck and George L. Duyckinck, *Cyclopaedia of American Literature: Embracing Personal and Critical Notices of Authors, and Selections from Their Writings from the Earliest Period to the Present Day*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner, 1855), vol. 1, p. 1.
3. Kermit Vanderbilt, *American Literature and the Academy: The Roots, Growth, and Maturity of a Profession* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), p. 79.
4. Kevin J. Hayes, “Poetry in the Time of Revolution,” Alfred Bendixen and Stephen Burt (eds.), *The Cambridge History of American Poetry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 139.
5. Duyckinck and Duyckinck, *Cyclopaedia of American Literature*, vol. 1, p. vii.
6. Louise Manly, *Southern Literature from 1579–1895: A Comprehensive Review, with Copious Extracts and Criticisms for the Use of Schools and the General Reader* (Richmond: B. F. Johnson, 1895), p. 7; M. Thomas Inge, “The Study of Southern Literature,” in Louis D. Rubin, Jr. (ed.), *The History of Southern Literature* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), p. 590.
7. Carol M. Newman, *Virginia Literature* (Pulaski, VA: Press of B. D. Smith and Bros., 1903), pp. 6–7.

8. Edwin Anderson Alderman, Joel Chandler Harris, and Charles W. Kent (eds.), *Library of Southern Literature*, 17 vols. (New Orleans: Martin and Hoyt, 1908–1923), vol. 15, p. 286.
9. Inge, “Study of Southern Literature,” p. 592.
10. Earl G. Swem, *A Bibliography of Virginia, Part I: Containing the Titles of Books in the Virginia State Library Which Relate to Virginia and Virginians, the Titles of Those Books Written by Virginians, and of Those Printed in Virginia* (Richmond: Davis Bottom, 1916), p. 35.
11. Vanderbilt, *American Literature and the Academy*, p. 187.
12. Floyd Stovall, “The South in American Literature, 1607–1900,” *Modern Language Notes* 70 (1955), p. 456.
13. Newman, *Virginia Literature*, p. 5.
14. Kevin J. Hayes, *Edgar Allan Poe* (London: Reaktion, 2009), p. 7.
15. J. A. Leo Lemay (ed.), *Robert Bolling Woos Anne Miller: Love and Courtship in Colonial Virginia, 1760* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1990), p. 25.
16. George Washington to John Washington, ca. 1749–1750, *The Papers of George Washington, Colonial Series*, eds. W. W. Abbott, Dorothy Twohig, and Philander D. Chase, 10 vols. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1983–1995), vol. 1, p. 42.
17. Richard Beale Davis, “Notes on the State of Virginia,” *Journal of Southern History* 21 (1955), p. 398.
18. Kevin J. Hayes, *The Road to Monticello: The Life and Mind of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 639–640; James A. Bear, Jr., “The Last Few Days in the Life of Thomas Jefferson,” *Magazine of Albemarle County History* 32 (1974), pp. 63–80.
19. Edgar Allan Poe, *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. James A. Harrison, 17 vols. (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1902), vol. 8, p. 4; vol. 15, p. 195.
20. Cecil M. Brown, “Books Noted,” *Negro Digest*, February 1968, p. 51.
21. James Branch Cabell, “Two Sides of the Shielded,” in Dorothy M. Scura (ed.), *Ellen Glasgow: The Contemporary Reviews* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 355.
22. Willa Cather, *Willa Cather in Person: Interviews, Speeches, and Letters*, ed. L. Brent Bohlke (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), p. 10.