Introduction: British and American genres

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Anglophone literary scholarship with a transatlantic inflection or focus has become increasingly prominent during the past fifteen or twenty years. The emerging field has been surveyed, subdivided, argued over, theorized, and institutionalized in new journals and degree programs, as well as in learned societies and landmark texts. Like parallel developments in Atlantic history and oceanic geography, transatlantic literary studies have been hailed as innovatory, radical, and "postnational" – and almost as quickly declared parochial, linguistically imperialist, or otherwise politically suspect. With the advent of Hemispheric and Global literary studies, some have been tempted into even broader and less easily generalizable spaces. But there are compelling historical, methodological, and literary reasons for keeping a spotlight on Anglophone transatlantic literary exchanges during the period covered by this book – not least of which is that transatlantic relations were so central to Britons' and Americans' everyday lives, literary imaginations, and histories, and that so much primary recovery work of sources and contacts remains to be done. In this volume of essays we have therefore enlisted scholars from both sides of the Atlantic both to take stock and to address anew what are at present the principal issues and topics in seventeenth- to early nineteenth-century Anglophone transatlantic literary studies. The area is large in every sense, and stringent principles of selection have been necessary to produce a book that, we hope, will be readable, informative, and generate further work. In this introduction we lay out the grounds for transatlantic connections and explain the rationale for the essays' inclusion and approach.

Even before seventeenth-century English settlement on the eastern seaboard, the history and cultural imagination of English speakers was entwined with the idea of a "new world" of material, social, and erotic promise. "Oh my America, My new found land!" John Donne eulogized his mistress. As Wil Verhoeven argues below, between More's *Utopia* and Charles Brockden Brown, on both sides of the ocean, utopian

America-centered "mythmaking" continued to color the era's empiricism and to shape political arguments among British and American Whigs and Tories. Britain and America were linked, as much as anything else, by what Joel Pace calls "Imag-I-Nations." They were also linked more prosaically by people on the move. Alongside successive waves of emigration which Britons feared would depopulate the kingdom, these included visitors and sojourners of all kinds. There were Americans visiting Britain for purposes of education or trade, as agents of provincial assemblies, refugees from wars and revolutions, or emissaries from the new Republic. American Indians made the crossing to see the British king, to raise money for Indian schools, or to make their voices heard. African slaves were carried to Britain by their American or West Indian masters, some remaining as free citizens. British servants, commercial factors, Christian missionaries, and government officials and their families stayed some years in America and returned. Mariners, travelers, soldiers, and fortune-seekers passed through, while British actors and theatrical troupes went out for longer or shorter tours in American theatres. On land and at sea in this multinational Atlantic world, Britons and Americans repeatedly encountered others who resisted incorporation, even as they were themselves unwillingly incorporated through captivity in the societies of others. British and American treatment of others and by others was a key part of transatlantic experiences, and, increasingly, of violent differences and debate.

People brought back stories. Many more than we might expect also wrote. Materially and institutionally, ordinary Britons and Americans were linked by the ocean and its ships, by the letter post, and by a lively transatlantic print culture. As Richard Sher demonstrates, during the course of the eighteenth century, "America was transformed into a provincial centre of Anglophone print culture," which preserved two-way links with Britain even after the Revolution, not only thanks to the importation into America of printed British books, but also by virtue of the longstanding, and far more flexible, transatlantic reprint trade. As Carla Mulford and Jim Egan point out, Americans conceived of the works they wrote in America as participating in English literature, even as they declared the particularity of their experiences and the difference in the conditions of their writing. Cotton Mather published his *Magnalia Christi Americana* in London and read British reviews of the book; about 150 years later, American writers such as Royall Tyler, Charles Brockden Brown, James Fenimore Cooper, and Washington Irving continued to be reprinted in Britain, just as British writers such as Robert Burns, Maria Edgeworth, and Walter Scott continued to be reprinted in America. Considered through the lens

of literature, then, the political independence of the American colonies was not so much a severing of ties as the renegotiation of a relationship. Britons and Americans had written to each other, and about each other, in their literary works before 1776; and they continued to do so afterwards. However strident their national feelings, Anglophone writers continued to be concerned with transatlantic issues, just as they continued to inhabit a changing, but ever-powerful matrix of continuity and dissonance. This primary and multi-faceted relationship evolved and persisted until after the American Civil War and arguably until the end of World War I in 1918, despite being increasingly dissipated by the impact of other cultural and political forces. Before about 1830, however, Anglophone lines of transatlantic circulation and exchange dominated in both Britain and America; during this period, connections and differences can be described with some precision across a variety of literary domains.

The organizing principle of the essays in this collection is genre because – like people and with them – genres travel. In Derrida's punning formulation, genres are a passe-partout. Like the mat surrounding a painting (passe-partout), generic conventions set off, frame, and serve as a base or backing for individual works, differentiating recognizable units of discourse from the wealth of surrounding language. At the same time, genres pass everywhere like a passport, carrying a changing variety of hybrid contents with them like a *portemanteau*. Genres traverse seas and oceans, pass through ports and across ethnic frontiers, national boundaries, and local distinctions of gender and class, to weave their circuitous way over diverse linguistic and cultural territories.[1] As the contributors to this volume demonstrate, genres traveled in exemplary ways across such dividing lines in the British-American Atlantic world from the seventeenth to the early nineteenth century, moving back and forth across the ocean innumerable times and carrying diverse contents with them as they went. Both before and after the American Declaration of Independence in 1776, Britons and Americans, women and men, enslaved African, American, and British captives, liminal white, red, and black voyagers, "highbrow" and "lowbrow" writers, and religious groups of different denominations deployed the same literary genres on both sides of the Atlantic. They did so to pass on their distinctive ideas and experiences, and to enable these to pass muster elsewhere – in a different linguistic, ethnic, national, economic, or cultural community, in different historical and social circumstances, in different parts of the New or Old World.

Long-lived as they generally were, genres in this period might therefore be described as a sort of transatlantic lingua franca: a common language

joining people/s across distance and difference and contributing (in Benedict Anderson's terms) to the process by which contemporaries on different sides of the ocean were able to imagine themselves as one transatlantic Anglophone community.[2] But this would be only half the story. For, as Robert Miles argues below in his chapter on transatlantic Gothic, the lingua franca of genre is most accurately viewed, not in classical structuralist terms as a set of "inert" and largely invariable formulae "into which individual works will naturally slot," but as a highly dynamic "kind of narrative language with common semantic and syntactic elements," which did not have identical meaning in all "individual acts of parole," and which themselves always remained "contingent and therefore subject to history." In other words, once generic recurrences are considered empirically in transatlantic terms, cultural difference, historical change, uncertain meaning, and singularity come to the fore. Thus, while arguing that providence tales, spiritual autobiographies, and tales of wonder followed similar narrative structures and obeyed the same interpretative rules on both sides of the Atlantic from the early seventeenth to the late eighteenth centuries, Jim Egan shows how these narrative structures and interpretative rules were applied by different factions of the same seventeenth-century New England Puritan community to parse its shared history in mutually contradictory ways, and portray the same persons and events in diametrically opposite fashion. He thus demonstrates the equivocation even of fixed narrative elements considered in themselves, and their unexpected flexibility in the hands of different writers, even within the same geographical and ideological community. Miles makes a similar point transatlantically by showing how Charles Brockden Brown reused and recast narrative elements of Godwinian Gothic in *Wieland*, and how Godwin in turn subsequently reused and recast narrative elements of *Wieland* in his novel, *Mandeville*. Here generic repetition and difference not only gave each writer his singular voice, but became a vehicle for transatlantic dialogue.

Transatlantic dialogue and the simultaneously historical and individual contingency of generic elements also come to the fore in Lise Sorensen's chapter on the captivity narrative. Sorensen returns the captivity narrative from its twentieth-century status as "a unique American genre" to its dynamic transatlantic history, by canvassing the growing body of scholarship which explores how the early English Barbary captivity narrative morphed into the American Indian captivity narrative in the hands of early American settlers, only to be revived in the new Republic to address the depredations of Barbary pirates on American ships at the turn of the nineteenth century; and how the American captivity narrative, in turn,

evolved into sentimental "captivity romances" in America and into a component of the mixed genre of the novel on both sides of the Atlantic. Sorensen focuses on Susanna Rowson's use of this highly flexible transatlantic genre in her late eighteenth-century play *Slaves in Algiers*, and novel, *Reuben and Rachel*, to argue that Rowson was deploying generic elements from captivity narratives within a "transatlantic imaginary" *after* American Independence in order to "enable estranged Americans and Britons to [re]discover their shared national characteristics and racial genealogy," and to "offer reconciliatory narrative possibilities."

As John Frow has remarked in another context, genres do not travel in a vacuum without material support. They are physically or ceremonially "framed," and transmitted, altered, mixed, and transported by a variety of vehicles produced in a variety of institutional settings.[3] The institution which did more than any other to disseminate genres across distance and dividing lines in the Atlantic world during this period was undoubtedly the print shop. Following Rick Sher's account of the transatlantic book trade, several chapters concern themselves with how the culture and practices of printers in the transatlantic trade affected the transmission and adaptation of genres. Arguing that newspapers and magazines were cheaper, easier to transport, and far more widely read than books, and that American colonists not only imported and reprinted material from English newspapers and adapted English genres of literary journalism but themselves wrote directly for British periodicals, Carla Mulford describes how literary journalism traveled the Atlantic world in both directions, carrying difference and political division with it. Taking Benjamin Franklin as her paradigmatic example, she explains that in America in particular, the printer was key to this development because the printer and publisher of a paper was also generally its chief writer. Transatlantic exchange becomes local, and the distant proximate, in Eve Tavor Bannet's examination of how early Republican reprints of three largely forgotten sub-genres of the English novel impacted the writing of early American novels. Arguing that American printers – who generally selected the foreign novels they reprinted for their bearing on local issues and/or created reprint lists which reflected their own interests or beliefs – created the immediate context in which American writers had to publish, she shows how early Republican authors both used and altered generic features of the many locally reprinted novels of female adultery, servant tales, and Atlantic adventure-romances to produce distinctive works of their own. Colleen Boggs emphasizes the role of such nineteenth-century American periodicals as the *North American Review* and the *Dial* in translating, reprinting, and popularizing European

Romantic works, and in facilitating "a broader cultural understanding of literatures produced in other countries."

The print shop was not the only institution in the Atlantic world which transported genres and transmitted texts. Theatre too was an institution which, as Jeffrey Richards puts it, "reflect[ed] a bi-continental reality in the exchange of news, actors, practices, texts, and commodities (including bodies) as well as dramatic properties" in multifarious ways. Plays performed in English theatres addressed colonial themes, elaborated American and West Indian situations, or represented American and West Indian personages; and colonial Americans, traveling to England for schooling or business, were exposed to British theatre. Migrants and British-born actors and managers, in turn, carried British and Irish plays to America, and later to the new Republican theatre. The meaning of some plays, such Addison's *Cato* (1714), was transformed in the crossing, as they were read and performed by colonial collegians, cited in newspapers, or used as pseudonyms by patriot writers; other British plays were altered and adapted *in situ* by their British-born managers or actors to accommodate the political culture and values of their American audiences. Here too, then, as Richards demonstrates, a "bi-continental" institution created the immediate context in which early Republican playwrights, such as Royall Tyler and Judith Sargent Murray, began to write, alter, and innovate; not surprisingly, therefore, many of their plays also implicitly or explicitly contained a thematic "transatlantic vision."

One of the important things to be learned from the penetration of transatlantic issues into such genres as the letter and the diary is that, for contemporaries, the Atlantic was not somewhere "out there": it shaped the realities which affected people's everyday lives. As Susan Imbarrato shows in her chapter on life writings, settlers and travelers used diaries, letters, and commonplace books, and intermixed genres, to maintain "family connections over Atlantic distance" and to "document [their] individual responses to a contemporary world" that included voyages to Britain and around America, reflections on transatlantically shared books and theatrical pieces, and reactions to transatlantic cultures and events. As she points out, though not all they wrote found its way into print, their life writings had an important and determinative impact on print genres. This is clear also from Tim Fulford's chapter. Beginning from American Indian John Norton's journal and from letters reporting the words and conduct of Indian delegates in Britain, Fulford reconstructs the role of Indians who occupied "the middle ground" between British-American and Indian cultures, and exercised their "precarious" power by manipulating the goods, symbols, and prejudices of

white culture in highly sophisticated ways. Discussing also the published travel and captivity narratives of such white interpreters of Indian culture as James Adair, Peter Williamson, and Jonathan Carver, he shows how more "nuanced" representations of Indians gradually became "pivotal" to a variety of eminent British writers and to a variety of print genres. Alan Rice, who seeks the traces of African-American experience in poems and stories "manipulated for the emotional and ideological needs" and for the "competing" abolitionist and anti-abolitionist agendas of whites, offers a salutary reminder of the "silence and absence" of "large majorities of Africans" who were "non-literate and often uncounted and unaccounted for." But he too finds, in the letters of African chaplain Philip Quaque and in the published *History of Mary Prince*, evidence of "the paradoxes created by cultural contacts" which created the "Atlantic creole" who had learned how to negotiate "white" genres, and in Olaudah Equiano and Robert Wedderburn's *Lives* and writings, evidence of how black people used the cultural knowledge they had gained of whites to deal with the class system and seize opportunities to gain political concessions from the white world.

Janet Sorensen's chapter demonstrates that maritime experience in the Atlantic, which also formed part of many Britons' and Americans' ordinary lives, generated an immense amount of writing throughout our period. As she shows, this ranged from "official multi-volume prose accounts of oceanic travels, scientific discoveries, and military encounters to broadside ballads and songs . . . picaresque and, later, historical fiction [and] georgic poems"; and from "highly aestheticized poetic representations of the sea" and mariners' "how-to" books to stories of prisoner transports, shipwrecks, and castaways. Focusing on the vastness and danger of the ocean, the diversity of its peoples, their cruelties, inequities, and sufferings, their changing political and commercial relationships, and the troubling effects of this complex, intrusive, non-homogeneous world at home, Sorensen considers how these issues penetrated established poetic genres as poets and novelists struggled to encompass, transform, or escape its harsh realities in figure and metaphor. As Joel Pace points out in our second chapter devoted specifically to Romantic transatlanticism, "metaphor, particularly the Atlantic as metaphor, is essential" to the Romantic yoking and transcendence in imagination of opposite values, nations, cultures, places, selves, and times. Comparing Phillis Wheatley's and Coleridge's use of ships and transatlantic oceanic voyages, Pace finds that both poets combined conflicting cultural and linguistic frames to "theorize the self" – the "I" between image and nation – as representative of the nation, and "enact[ed] social change"

(for instance, abolition of slavery) by offering liberating images of heavenly flight and cosmic consciousness. Paul Giles argues in similar vein that "geographical knowledge was central to how the world came to understand itself in the Enlightenment," and that this had important implications for both colonial and early Republican poetry. He goes on to show how poets such as Philip Freneau, Joel Barlow, and the Connecticut Wits deployed imagery of global expansion and cosmic order after the Revolution to "re-balance" America's position relative to Britain, to critique Old World hierarchy and corruption, and to portray the new Republic as expanding and rising within, above, and beyond the Atlantic world. Colleen Boggs's discussion of recent scholarship on transatlantic Romanticism makes an intriguingly analogous point. She shows how it goes far beyond rereadings of canonical English Romantics such as Southey or Blake which demonstrate the impact of such transatlantic issues as slavery, race, and gender on their literary composition, to dissolve the canon, reshape the study of Romanticism, and place the literatures written in different genres and at different geographic points of the transatlantic world in dialogue with each other. And suggesting that trans-nation is to Romanticism what gender was to feminism, Boggs offers us a heady image of infinite meanings, dialogues, and interactions among texts in different genres circulating freely in the Atlantic world, which brilliantly affirms, even while it dissolves, the concept of Romanticism itself.

Until recently, literary studies everywhere were largely confined within a nationalist framework developed in the mid nineteenth century, which encouraged scholars to focus principally on the uniqueness, originality, and development of a particular nation's literature and to emplot it in exceptionalist and nationalist terms. Many of the contributors to this volume comment on what Paul Giles calls "the radical dehistoricization" this involved, and explain why the particular genres or writers they discuss make better sense in their initial transatlantic and transnational contexts. Susan Manning emphasizes the extent to which both nineteenth-century national history and the nineteenth-century historical novel developed in a transatlantic framework evolved through transnational comparison. Rounding off the volume with a return to the mutual transformations of historical and fictional narrative that inform Verhoeven's chapter at the beginning, she argues that early transatlantic historical fiction both contributes to and deconstructs the idea of a national past, and argues that early historicizing of a transatlantic imaginary as itself foundational for national fiction.

The contributions to this volume collectively lead us back to the strong sense of international literary interdependence and textual and generic interrelationship which prevailed in European and American writing before the mid nineteenth century. The so-called "Republic of Letters" was only one, and in some ways the latest, most superficial, and most short-lived, manifestation of this transnational interdependence which crossed class, gender, and generic lines. At the same time, in reconstructing some of these transatlantic interrelationships, the contributors to this volume help us see how much we have forgotten, and how much has yet to be retrieved. In the process, they reveal just how partial, anachronistic, and unsatisfactory merely self-referential national literary histories have come to seem.

NOTES

1 Jacques Derrida, *Parages* (Paris: Galilee, 1986). See also Margaret Cohen, "Traveling Genres," *New Literary History* 34 (2003), 481–99.
2 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983; London and New York: Verso, 1991).
3 John Frow, *Genre* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

CHAPTER 1

Transatlantic books and literary culture

Richard B. Sher

On a visit to the London booksellers Edward and Charles Dilly in the mid-1770s, the Presbyterian clergyman John Ewing (1732–1802) of Philadelphia was accosted by Samuel Johnson for speaking sympathetically about the plight of the American colonists. When Johnson asked Ewing what he knew of the subject, the clergyman responded that he had lived in America his entire life. "Sir, what do *you* know in America," Johnson is supposed to have replied. "You never read. You have no books there."[1] In this remarkable anecdote, Johnson dismissed Ewing's firsthand experience of America in favor of book-learning, which he believed that Americans lacked not because they were unable or disinclined to pursue it, but because, on the eve of the War of Independence, they had no books to read.

Johnson's assertion must have astonished not only Ewing but also the Dilly brothers, who were heavily involved with the American book trade.[2] When Johnson was born in 1709 – seventy years after the first American printing press had been established at Cambridge, Massachusetts – books were indeed scarce in the British-American colonies. At that time, there were few printers and booksellers in America, and the numbers of papermakers, bookbinders, newspapers, and colleges were each countable on the fingers of one hand. There were no magazines, engravers, or type founders, and no notable libraries besides the three college libraries at Harvard, Yale, and William and Mary – restricted to a privileged clientele – and some private libraries owned by a few clergymen and landowners. During the course of the eighteenth century, however, and especially during its second half, America was transformed into a provincial center of Anglophone print culture. By the time of Johnson's confrontation with Ewing, British America contained dozens of booksellers, printers, and printing presses (including at least one press in each of the thirteen colonies), numerous newspapers and periodicals, and thousands of books, including many held in substantial libraries organized by diverse communities of readers.[3] Although the American War temporarily interrupted these developments, the year of