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## New Frontiers in Early American Studies

Mary C. Carruth, ed. *Feminist Interventions in Early American Studies*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006. 328p.

Matthew P. Brown. *The Pilgrim and the Bee: Reading Rituals and Book Culture in Early New England*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007. 261p.

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The last two decades have seen a change in the curricular landscape of early American literature. Before the modern critical revolutions, survey courses in American literature would spend time grudgingly on the colonial period, a place peopled primarily by grim-faced Puritans whose presence in the curriculum would be explained away by the fact that Hawthorne would later refer to them extensively. Although the political and non-belletristic nature of their writing made them suspect, a few Revolutionary period writers might be mentioned—Paine, Jefferson, and Franklin (who was good for a laugh)—but then it was away for a whirlwind visit to the heroic world of Fenimore Cooper before the course settled down to the real heart of American literature—the transcendentalists, Hawthorne, and Melville. 1492 was a nice safe place to start and, if the truth be told, 1620 with the arrival of the British was when America really seemed to begin; today, we would not be so sure. One of the forces responsible for the opening of the canon, *The Heath Anthology* begins the Colonial period with a section on Native American oral literatures and includes writings from the Spanish and the French explorers. Further, even the nature of canonical writing has also changed: for example, with the publication of David Shield's *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters*, a study of manuscript culture, scholars have begun to accept that print should not be reified as the only subject for study. This review looks at two pieces of recent scholarship that exemplify the changes in the field to demonstrate that early American studies continues to evolve.

The first, *Feminist Interventions in Early American Studies*, edited by Mary C. Carruth, is a collection of seventeen essays spanning the period from about 1660 to 1830. Although Carruth would object to seeing “feminist practice along with women’s history and literary production” subsumed under any broader field, the work of feminist scholars has been a major force in changing all periods, including early American studies. In 1986, when Cathy Davidson’s pioneering *The Revolution and the Word* was published, it was significant for bringing women and women’s history into early American studies; however, Davidson’s focus was on women novelists.

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*Feminist Interventions* is a graphic illustration of the expansion in the field: it de-emphasizes the novelists and writers who were the first focus of reclamation efforts. For example, in *Feminist Interventions*, Puritan poet Anne Bradstreet, a mainstay of American literature courses, appears primarily as the occasion for a comparison with Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz. (Sor Juana, a seventeenth-century Mexican-born nun and author, wrote *Reply to Sor Philothea*, an early defense of women's rights. Those who might want to know more about her should read Octavio Paz' *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, o, Las trampas de la fe*). In her essay, "My Goods are True': Tenth Muses in the New World Market," Tamara Harvey Anne pairs Bradstreet's work with Sor Juana's to argue that women writers were not exempted by gender from being enmeshed in the language and rhetoric of imperialism.

The work of feminist scholarship has evolved and as Sharon Harris argues in "Feminist Theories and Early American Studies," the opening essay of the collection, while "race, class and gender remain viable and ever-changing categories of interrogation" there are many related issues of importance to feminists, including:

theorizing social and political complexities; sexualities, body politics and construction of difference; processes of historicizing; cultural and literary translations; colonization and imperialist practices; authority and authorization; domestic relations (personal and national); print, orality, and censorship; changing divisions of labor; kinship and family structures.... (3)

Of the seventeen essays in the collection, many treat Harris' concerns as well as discussing non-traditional genres: Sharon Harris suggests that the examination of narratives concerning infanticide would be fruitful; Karen Weyler looks at the careers of two female cross-dressers, Deborah Sampson and Ann Bailey, as acts of performance; and Angela Pulley Hudson imagines the construction of difference and Southern identity through the manifold representations of Mary Musgrove, the "Pocahontas of Georgia." Of the three essays on religion, two treat new aspects of Puritan theology and subversive corporeality through the medium of the captivity narrative, and one is one Quaker women's records. Catherine Sedgewick, Judith Sargent Murray, Phyllis Wheatly, and Susanna Rowson join Anne Bradstreet as the principal well-recognized authors in the collection. Two essays interrogate the meaning of masculinity, one on Crèvecoeur and the other about the shaping of manhood by the ideology of republican motherhood. *Feminist Interventions* is a rich and varied collection, particularly useful for upper-level undergraduate courses. As a small cavil, I would have wished for more material on race (the only essay on African-Americans was a reprint of an essay on Phyllis Wheatly by Betsy Erkilla that was first published in 1993) but *Feminist Interventions* is already a substantial volume.

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The second work, a single-authored text, *The Pilgrim and the Bee*, represents not only new work in early American studies but also a fairly new critical approach: book history. Matthew P. Brown's book, a wide-ranging and polemical study of the intersection between the material facts of book culture—in all its various aspects—and the reader, frames its argument through the cultural practices of the theocratic Puritans of early New England. *The Pilgrim and the Bee* refers not to a relationship between a Puritan and a member of the insect kingdom but to the manner in which Brown proposes that Puritans read: the pilgrim being the reader's straightforward trudge through what is perceived as a continuous narrative of the text and the bee representing the reader's asynchronous and ruminative treatment of a text (in the manner of a cookbook or other manual) in which the reader would move from section to section, gathering and also depositing material. Brown emphasizes that the activity of reading in the Puritan community was concentrated on books that are largely ignored when modern scholars treat the canon of reading. These "steady sellers" were devotional texts such as Lewis Bayly's *The Practise of Pietie* (1612) and Arthur Dent's *The Plaine Man's Pathway to Heaven* (1601). Brown makes the telling argument that these were enormously popular, going through very large press runs and as many as thirty editions, a number far in excess of any editions of poetry and drama in the period. In particular, these devotional texts were returned to often and read deeply by their readers in part because of the price of texts and in part because of the structure of Puritan meditative and reflective religious practice.

Because the scaffolding of Brown's argument is both dense and diffuse, influenced perhaps by his reading of the devotional steady sellers themselves, and perhaps because the *The Pilgrim and the Bee* itself follows an alvearial course, Brown's strategy juxtaposes tessellated information. In his opening, Brown argues that devotional literature is literary in part because it fulfills all the criteria that Jerome McGann argues for in McGann's discussion of the difference between historical writing and art writing and in part because of the "profoundly religious" nature of the pre-1700 West (32). Brown describes the gift and market economies of the devotionals and the nature and structure of "devotional subjectivity" that informs the relationship between the Puritan and the book. He then describes the protocols/performance of Puritan reading practice while examining the physical nature of the books he describes. Their construction and imagery implicates the text and the reader into an "eye" and a "hand" piety that complements heart piety, a practice ascribed by scholars to be the most typical of Puritan religious practice. Turning to two common religious Puritan rituals—fast-day sermons and elegies—examined again through the glass of Puritan devotional practice, Brown roots this "literary experience in the lived customs of the devout" to "rethink author and place in favor of a reader-

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based literary history.” The impact of these chapters draws from impressive material artifacts such as Puritan Mary Rock’s note-taking on a set of sermons she heard in 1687. The concluding chapter on race teases out the dynamics of the spread of the gospel to the Amerindians and its implications for the book including the fact that missionary Puritan John Eliot’s crusade to supply books to the tribes resulted in a revitalization of the colony’s existing print house. Brown’s argument breaks new ground, introduces upon extensive archival material and demonstrates familiarity with not only book history but with knotty issues of theology and religious practice. Intended graduate students, *The Pilgrim and the Bee* is a absorbing work and a real contribution to the study of the material culture of the Puritans and how the religious practices of the community deeply informed their reading. With *Feminist Interventions*, *The Pilgrim and the Bee* exemplifies the range of new work being done in early American studies. ✱