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**Mobility in Literature  
and Culture, 1500-1900**

Edited by  
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and Herbert Grabes

2012

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## Migrant Fictions: The Early Story in North American Magazines

### 1. Global Designs and Periodical Literature

Literary globalization is not a phenomenon of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Processes of textual travel and transformation characterize the pre-nation state period of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century transatlantic world, which has created dynamic interplays and negotiations between local cultures and multilingual, metropolitan literatures, or what has been called the "literary commons" of the Atlantic World.<sup>1</sup> Recent studies on world literature, however, are often reductive in the way in which they want to move beyond national paradigms in literary history. Numerous critics focus on investigations of the novel as a key genre and narrow down the *longue durée* of textual mobility to one specific form. In doing so, they frequently overlook the broader systematic relations between literary cultures in the past.<sup>2</sup> One of the most prominent approaches in analyzing the diffusion of the novel results from Franco Moretti's studies in which he traces the wave patterns and formal variations of the novel over long distances of time and space. Given the vast field of global textual traffic, Moretti challenges 'conventional' literary histories which rely on periodization, genre, and canonicity.<sup>3</sup> From the point of view of world systems theory and its assumption of a reciprocal literary exchange between center and periphery, he argues that the novel emerges as a "compromise between a western formal influence (usually French or English) and local materials" (58). Moretti's macro-structural analysis tends to downsize, however, the "local materials" or what is meant by the "structural compromise" that the "encounter between western forms and local reality dictates" (62). His own "cognitive metaphors," or what he calls "trees" and "waves" (66) to visualize the multipath routes of the novel,

<sup>1</sup> Eve Tavor Bannet, *Transatlantic Stories and the History of Reading, 1720-1810: Migrant Fictions* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011), 9.

<sup>2</sup> In his "Toward a History of World Literature," *New Literary History* 39 (2008), David Damrosch criticizes the "presentism" (490) of existing studies that fail in explaining "the cocreation of literary systems that have almost always been mixed in character, at once localized and translocal" (490).

<sup>3</sup> Franco Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature," *New Left Review* 1 (2000): 54-68; cf. Lawrence Buell, *New England Literary Culture: From Revolution Through Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986), 11-22.

make him rely on older developmental schemes predicting that “after 1750 the novel arises just about everywhere” (64).<sup>4</sup> In contrast, recent transatlantic scholarship as well as studies on authorship and print culture have demonstrated that the alleged metropolitan textual hegemonies and national trajectories are frequently out of sync with the actual local literatures in the past.<sup>5</sup> Current studies on the early national period assert, for instance, that the American novel rises out of the decline of a prevailing “periodical culture” in the 1820s and is synchronous to changes brought about by newly emerging “authorial economies” and their “multiple livelihood strategies” in Antebellum America.<sup>6</sup> In the context of current definitional debates and the global re-examinations of literary production, the business of letters, and reading audiences, this paper shifts attention from the novel to the early short story in North America prior to 1800 and discusses the vibrant literary landscape of late eighteenth-century magazine fiction.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> For a critical survey of the progressive school in literary history and the “history of common forms” see James Raven, “New Reading Histories, Print Culture and the Identification of Change: The Case of Eighteenth-Century England,” *Social History* 23.3 (1998): 268-287.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Eve Tavor Bannet and Susan Manning, eds., *Transatlantic Literary Studies, 1660-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012), 1-9; Trish Loughran, *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Age of US Nation Building, 1770-1870* (New York: Columbia UP, 2007), 114-116.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Jared Gardner, *The Rise and Fall of the Early American Magazine Culture* (Urbana et al.: U of Illinois P, 2012), 1-29, 38; Leon Jackson, *The Business of Letters: Authorial Economies in Antebellum America* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2008), 1-52, 17.

<sup>7</sup> Moretti’s essay sparked off a debate caused by its normative assessment of literary history. Critics not only disputed Moretti’s narrow focus on the novel, but also questioned what Jonathan Arac (“Anglo-Globalism?” *New Left Review* 16 (2002): 35-45) has called “formalism without close reading” (38), rejecting Moretti’s proposal of “distant readings without a single direct textual reading” (37; original emphasis). From an empirical point of view, this is one of Moretti’s weak spots. Much of his distant reading derives from ‘second-hand’ sources such as national bibliographies, leaving out the considerable amount of prose fiction in eighteenth-century periodicals, which do not appear in bibliographical sources but play a central role for the literary production and consumption as well as its shifting audiences. As recent scholarship on reading audiences has shown, the appetite for periodical tales, historiettes, fragments, essays and chapbooks exceeds the novelistic production, so that the eighteenth-century novel-reading public is not the rule but the exception, and is only one among many other reading ‘publics’; cf. Jan Fergus, *Provincial Readers in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006); others argue that the novel only establishes a kind of niche consumption in the eighteenth century and that eighteenth-century literature has to be seen as a “range of products created by a loose body of actors (authors, publishers, printers, readers, distributors, commentators, etc.) who are themselves at various points active, to various degrees, in sundry public spheres that intersect often temporarily, and that function sometimes in agreement, sometimes in contention, and sometimes simply coincidentally”: Christopher Flint, *The Appearance of Print in Eighteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011), 50; for revisions of his earlier “conjectures” see Moretti’s reply to his critics in “More Conjectures,” *New Left Review* 20 (2003): 73-81.

In the following, I will focus on processes of textual travel and transformation that characterize the early American story. In doing so, the paper seeks to demonstrate how some of the so-called first ‘American’ short stories (such as “The Child of Snow,” 1792) emerge from complex cultural translations and traffic. One of my essay’s goals is to reframe the national paradigm of American literary history by taking into consideration the multilingual sources of the early American story, which are now for the first time widely accessible through numerous electronic databases.<sup>8</sup> This paper also intends to go beyond the search for structural and generic elements, which characterize the ‘emergence’ of the American short story, to ask questions about how early stories that migrated from Europe to America have been re-classified by editors for changing audiences, times, and circumstances. I will argue that the early American story is less a creation of a single author than an editorial product. Its success, or its ‘becoming American,’ depends less on its being ‘original,’ that is, penned by an American writer (most stories were published anonymously, anyway) than by its brevity and variety, those features most essential to the medium that the story was published in: the magazine, meant to be a type of eighteenth-century periodical exclusive of newspapers not primarily concerned with conveying intelligence, whose miscellaneous sections on art, poetry, literature, and science are frequently compared by editors to a “Bee Hive, enriched by the aromatics of every field.”<sup>9</sup>

Besides, early American stories often have multiple ‘lives’ as they cross generic and linguistic boundaries, for instance, from collections of foreign language tales that are translated into English to separately printed extracts in newspapers or magazines. Some have an ‘after-life’ as reprints or serve as templates for nineteenth-century short stories. Along the way, they were renamed, stripped of their origin, and sometimes re-written. Whereas, in Romanticism, European legends are consciously modified, as in Washington Irving’s *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* (1820), the early story in America emerges from acts of literary piracy and verbatim copying as well as from the editors’ relentless hunt for short tales that satisfy the desultory reading habits of their audience. More recent studies demonstrate that “[r]eaders and publishers [...] routinely forced fiction to migrate into other forms of writing – a kind of transtextual operation that turned fiction into other genres such as aphorism, moral essay, magazine article, character sketch, political

<sup>8</sup> The growing interest in periodical literature is documented in Mark Kamrath and Sharon M. Harrison, eds., *Periodical Literature in Eighteenth-Century America* (Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 2005), ix-xxvii. Periodical literature is widely made accessible by databases such as ProQuest’s *American Periodical Series Online* and the *American Antiquarian Society’s Historical Periodicals Collection*.

<sup>9</sup> “General Preface,” *The Massachusetts Magazine, or, Monthly Museum of Knowledge and Rational Entertainment* (January 1, 1790): ii.

disquisition, and so on."<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the magazine's material constraints resulting from a loose production cycle (weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, annual), length of availability, a changing readerly consumption, and even the paucity of paper and lack of money determine editorial decisions.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the magazine's publication design is sometimes less motivated by deliberate acts or even literary intentions on the side of the editor or the magazine's proprietor than by the fact that a brief piece of prose is at hand to fill the limited space available in the miscellaneous section. One could come to the conclusion that quite often the materiality of the page (i.e. paper size, double or multiple column print, page breaks, etc.), or what one editor has called the magazine's "crowded page,"<sup>12</sup> determines the emergence and continuity of the short story more effectively than what literary histories account for as its 'original' sources, for instance, oral story-telling that survived in the British colonies.

Since the burgeoning field of periodical literature opens up exciting opportunities for fresh examinations and comparative analysis of the early story in America, we are confronted with fundamental questions: How can we analyze the art of story-telling prior to 1800 while avoiding normative reassessments that disqualify early stories as the less aesthetic predecessor of the nineteenth-century American short story? How can we restore the massive body of early stories and their narrative dynamics to American literature? In addition, the recent interest in 'itinerant poetics' stresses the materialist dimension of literary traffic that goes beyond the mere generic features of a given text. Margaret Cohen puts it this way:

The materialist approach to genre is a good starting point for distinguishing the multiple levels at which a genre must be working for it to travel. Genres that travel across space, like genres that endure across time, must be able to address social and/or literary questions that are transportable, that can speak to divergent publics or a public defined in its diversity, dispersion, and heterogeneity.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Flint 46.

<sup>11</sup> Still one of most informative studies on early American magazines is Lyon Richardson, *A History of Early American Magazines, 1741-1789* (New York: Octagon Books, 1966); for more recent updates on single early periodical ventures see Ronald Lora and William Henry Longton, eds., *The Conservative Press in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century America* (Westport, CN: Greenwood, 1999), Keith Pacholl, "Newspapers and Journals," *Colonial America: An Encyclopedia of Social, Political, Cultural, and Economic History*, vol. 3, ed. James Ciment (Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 2006), 619-622, and Gardner.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Dennie, *An Established Literary and Political Paper. The Editor of the Farmer's Weekly Museum, Printed at Walpole, New Hampshire, Offers his Paper to the Publick, as a Vehicle Free From Localities and Multiplied Advertisements, and Calculated for General Circulation* (Walpole, NH: Printed by David Carlisle, 1797), n.p.

<sup>13</sup> Margaret Cohen, "Traveling Genres," *New Literary History* 34 (2003): 482.

Extending the materialist lineage in literary studies, Trish Loughran speaks of an "unnarrated gap" that exists, as it does in our case, between the "world of things" (magazines) and the "world of words" (early short narratives).<sup>14</sup> In other words, we do not know what kind of literature we are talking about (in most cases short prose fiction in serial publications) when we talk about eighteenth-century periodical literature.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, in his early study on the English novel in magazines, Robert Mayo disputes literary history's tunnel vision and its single focus on the novel by reconstructing the "considerable repository of prose fiction" in British magazines, "which seldom figured in the publishers' lists and which is rarely mentioned in the reviews, but which nevertheless enjoyed a wide currency in eighteenth-century England, and was both 'pre-romantic' and 'popular.'"<sup>16</sup>

So far, there is no in-depth study available that discusses the earliest period of short fiction in America, which James Nagel calls "the most intriguing for literary history in that it is here, in the years from 1747 to 1819, that the essential elements of a 'story' are established."<sup>17</sup> Some attempts have been made to include the early story into a genealogical framework of the American short story, which has its 'origins' in the particular colonial forms of story-telling such as providence tales, captivity narratives, sketches, anecdotes, or other brief prose narratives "structured around a central character with a conflict."<sup>18</sup> As insightful as these approaches are, they focus on internal processes of generic creation, but lack a sufficient awareness of the international dimension in those processes of formation and transformation, particularly in the eighteenth-century Atlantic world and its migrant fictions.

In a recent article, "'The Adventures of Emmera,' the Transatlantic Novel, and the Fiction of America" (2007), Jeffrey Richards challenges the nationalist model prevalent in studies on the early American novel, and warns against a "critical 'navel gazing' that ignores the more vibrant, complex, transnational dimension to the circulation of fiction in English."<sup>19</sup> By examining early novels that were published prior to the allegedly first American novel – William Hill Brown's *A Power of Sympathy* (1789) – Richards concludes:

<sup>14</sup> Loughran 17.

<sup>15</sup> The only detailed study available on one particular periodical genre, the serial essay, remains Martin Christadler's *Der amerikanische Essay* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1968). Since this study has not been translated into English, most of Christadler's astute and trenchant observations have gone unnoticed; cf. Gardner.

<sup>16</sup> Robert D. Mayo, *The English Novel in the Magazines, 1740-1815: With a Catalogue of 1375 Magazine Novels and Novelettes* (London: Oxford UP, 1962), 1.

<sup>17</sup> James Nagel, *Anthology of the American Short Story* (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2008), 5.

<sup>18</sup> Nagel 4.

<sup>19</sup> Jeffrey Richards, "'The Adventures of Emmera,' the Transatlantic Novel, and the Fiction of America," *Early American Literature* 42 (2007): 496.

Because there is virtually no such thing as an American novel (considered nationally) written before 1800 – that is, one written by an American-born author, about an *exclusively* American subject, with *exclusively* American characters, for a presumed-to-be exclusive American audience – and because the phrase “English” or “British” novel obscures the presence of this fancied America, then perhaps a term like the fiction of America, with its necessarily transatlantic character, might be substituted for an authorially centered designation.<sup>20</sup>

If knowledge of the author does not determine a text's national identity, as Richards maintains, and if the “denationalized scheme” can be applied to reassess the early American novel in terms of what he calls “fictions of America,” a similar claim can be made for a re-appraisal of the short story in early American magazines. This also raises the question of what determines a text's national identity, particularly in light of the fact that short stories were anonymously published and not exclusively written by American authors. However, short narratives are so far not examined in conjunction with the literary production, consumption, and exchange that characterize the transatlantic world of the eighteenth century. While the novel has been heavily ‘transnationalized,’<sup>21</sup> the short story seems to have remained the gate-keeper of nationality since it is the genre “often referred to as our nation's unique contribution to modern literary forms,” as Eugene Current-García aptly puts it.<sup>22</sup>

So far, only Edward Pitcher's carefully researched anthologies and bibliographical studies provide reliable source information about the early story's emergence in America. Pitcher, who edits the reference series “Studies in British and American Magazines” (2000-2007), has established a canon of stories written by American authors by closely examining and indexing eighteenth-century British and European magazines in order to assure the Americanness of the stories he has collected. However, his approach is strictly generic and aims at classifying forms. It is less interested in the circulation of fiction in English, in how stories migrated and, in doing so, how they became ‘American.’<sup>23</sup>

In addition, the few comprehensive anthologies available, like the one edited by Keith J. Fennimore, work on the assumption of literary continuity and the existence of a tradition in American literature. Despite the “vicissitudes of

<sup>20</sup> Richards 501, emphasis in the original.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Paul Giles, *The Global Remapping of American Literature* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2011); Wai Chee Dimock, ed., *Shades of the Planet: American Literature as World Literature* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2007).

<sup>22</sup> Eugene Current-García, *The American Short Story Prior to 1850* (Boston: Twayne, 1985), 1.

<sup>23</sup> See Pitcher's comprehensive bibliography *Fiction in American Magazines Before 1800* (Schenectady, NY: Union College P, 1993) and his two anthologies *Sensationalist Literature and Popular Culture in the Early American Republic* (Lewiston: Mellen, 2000); *An Anthology of the Short Story in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century America*, 2 vols. (Lewiston: Mellen, 2000).

the popular press, the pressures of politics, business and the arid literary climate,” quite a number of tales, according to Fennimore, “constitute a real presence” as they made it into the households of late eighteenth-century New England by employing American scenes and themes, and thus provide a “vital link to our American past.”<sup>24</sup> Contrary to assimilating the short story to national literary narratives, my reading suggests that the early migrant stories participate in forging an imaginative America in which origin and continuity are contingent and inessential. One may contend that what makes the early short story ‘American’ is its “mode of imagining an already imagined place,” or its proliferation and articulation as a reprinted text.<sup>25</sup>

## 2. Migrant Stories and Early American Magazines

A good case in point is the anonymously published short story “The Child of Snow” and its circulation in American newspapers and magazines from July 4, 1787, in the *Charleston Morning Post and Daily Advertiser* to its final appearance in *The Boston Weekly Magazine and Ladies' Miscellany* of 1818. The story tells of a traveling merchant's wife who becomes pregnant by another man during one of her husband's long absences and, on his return, attributes her son's birth to a miraculous conception induced by a falling snowflake, inadvertently swallowed while she was leaning outside her window. The story, however, has a macabre ending. Initially the husband appears to believe the wife's story, but secretly he plots revenge for her infidelity. When the boy is fifteen, the merchant takes him on a journey to Genoa, where he sells him to a Saracen slave trader bound for Alexandria. Upon his return, he tells his wife that the boy melted away on an especially hot day in the torrid climate. “The wife knew perfectly well the merchant's meaning,” the narrator concludes, only to add: “She durst not, however, break out, but was obliged to swallow the liquor she had brewed.”<sup>26</sup>

Critics identify this rather flat and short piece of prose as an American story.<sup>27</sup> They recognize in it a successful combination of folkloristic material with a domestic background, namely, the American merchant traveling for

<sup>24</sup> Keith J. Fennimore, *Short Stories from Another Day: Eighteenth-Century Periodical Fiction* (East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 1989), 8.

<sup>25</sup> Richards 522.

<sup>26</sup> “The Child of Snow,” *The Massachusetts Magazine, or, Monthly Museum of Knowledge and Rational Entertainment*, Dec. 1 (1792): 719; hereafter CS.

<sup>27</sup> Abby H.P. Werlock, ed., *The Facts on File Companion to the American Short Story* (New York: Facts on File, 2010), x; Current-García 13; for the story's problematic origin see Robert D. Arner, “‘The Child of Snow’: A Misidentified ‘Early American’ Short Story,” *Early American Literature* 31 (1996): 98-100; Edward W. Pitcher, “A Note on the Source of the ‘The Child of Snow’ and ‘The Son of Snow,’” *Early American Literature* 13 (1978): 217-218.

his business. It also matches the literary tradition of instructive and moral tales about sexual misconduct and marital infidelity, and thus fulfills an eighteenth-century narrative purpose: the fusion of realism and didacticism.

In *The American Short Story before 1850*, Eugene Current-García highlights, in addition to the story's themes, the particular narrative elements which make this tale a forerunner of the nineteenth-century short story. Its combined use of "irony, novel detail, both realistic and fantastic, and its matter-of-fact tone" make it an authentic American tale.<sup>28</sup> Jack B. Moore, in an earlier article on "Black Humor in an Early American Short Story" (1966), reads the story as a mixed type of oral Native American themes and European narrative traditions. He concludes:

"The Child of Snow" offers hidden humor too. Its author has slipped into a mildly racy story of what was originally a quite blunt Indian creation myth. Several of these legends describe the birth of our world in tales similar to that of the erring wife's. Usually some Indian maiden becomes impregnated by a drop of snow or rain falling on her belly or between her legs while she lies sleeping on her back. Whether the anonymous author of "Child of Snow" was using the creation myth here to covertly satirize all such legends, seems dubious but not impossible. What is not dubious about the work is its significance as an early short story and as an early example of that terribly modern achievement, black humor.<sup>29</sup>

On its first appearance, in the *Charleston Morning Post and Daily Advertiser* in 1787, the story's title was "The Child melted by the Sun." A month later, it appeared in Boston and then circulated in numerous newspapers published in Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island until 1790, only to reappear twice in 1800.<sup>30</sup> Most newspaper reprints followed the *Charleston Morning Post* and acknowledged the source. The story was borrowed "From Mr. Le Grand's Tales of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries." Pierre-Jean Baptiste Legrand d'Aussy's collection of thirteenth-century French tales appeared under the title *Fabliaux ou Contes des douzième et treizième siècles, traduits ou extraits d'après les manuscrits* in Paris in 1779. A first English translation was published in London in 1786, titled *Tales of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries. From the French of Mr. Le Grand*. John Williams, the translator, re-issued the collection as *Norman Tales* in 1789. The French medieval tale "De l'enfant qui fu remis au soleil" mutated into the English story "The Child Melted by the Sun," and the American newspaper reprints ascribe their borrowings to the English translations.

<sup>28</sup> Current-García 13.

<sup>29</sup> Jack B. Moore, "Black Humor in an Early American Short Story," *Early American Literature* 1 (1966): 8.

<sup>30</sup> The story appeared in twelve newspapers in 1787 (South Carolina, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York); there are three entries for 1790 (Rhode Island, New York, South Carolina) and two for 1800 (Massachusetts, Vermont); see *America's Historical Newspapers*, Series 1 and 2, 1690-1900.

The French medieval story has its own migratory history. The subject matter of the story and the first Latin version can be found in an eleventh-century Cambridge collection of songs, the *Carmina Cantabrigensia*.<sup>31</sup> The story of a merchant's unfaithful wife emerged out of South German folk-traditions.<sup>32</sup> It belonged to the *de mercatore* type, frequently a comic story of a cuckolded husband and his lustful wife. It was reused during the Middle Ages by Scandinavian, Italian, and French writers. The numerous rewritings made the original story shift from a *ridiculum* (piece of humor) to a moral story emplotted around the wife's lie and merchant's journey, or what has been called a German *Märe*, which originally meant gossip or news. It became widely known in other European collections as a *fabliau* or a comic tale, entitled "The Miracle of the Snow Child."

In North America, it had a second migratory career. "The Child Melted by the Sun" was already a well-circulated story and had reached some appeal in the columns of the dailies, when Isaiah Thomas, the foremost Boston newspaper and book publisher, reprinted the story in *The Massachusetts Magazine* in 1792. Thomas' reprint omitted the source reference, and he changed the title to "The Child of Snow." A comparative reading of the various stories and their textual changes shows that Thomas did not retrieve it from his newspaper files, but borrowed the story from Williams' *Norman Tales*. As a book publisher, he had probably seen the collection's advertisement made by American booksellers in 1791. Moreover, *The Massachusetts Magazine* that commenced in 1789 was on the verge of becoming the most attractive and popular periodical in Boston, "swallowing up all others," as Jeremy Belknap wrote.<sup>33</sup> Thomas, who had already published *The Massachusetts Spy* (1770-1820) and earlier *The Royal American Magazine* (1774-1775), eked out a particular niche for his periodical by satisfying the popular demand for sentimental stories, making the magazine "a shrine for literary ladies of Massachusetts."<sup>34</sup>

Given the growing anti-French climate in the 1790s, one may speculate that Thomas omitted all references to the original source to avoid the promotion of French culture. In addition, such omissions could produce the illusion of originality and the impression that most of the magazine's anonymous

<sup>31</sup> One of the songs, the so-called Modus Liebinc, tells the snow-child sequence; cf. Peter Dronke, *The Medieval Poet and his World* (Rome: Edizioni di Storie e Letteratura, 1984), 150-158.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Max Manitius, *Geschichte der Lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters*, vol. 3, *Vom Ausbruch des Kirchenstreites bis zum Ende des 12. Jahrhunderts* (München: Beck, [1931] 2005), 1036-37.

<sup>33</sup> In Richardson 355. The magazine lasted eight years (1789-1796) and Thomas co-edited it until 1793.

<sup>34</sup> Herbert R. Brown, "Elements of Sensibility in The Massachusetts Magazine," *American Literature* 1 (1929): 286; for Thomas' role as editor see Clifford Shipton, *Isaiah Thomas: Printer, Patriot and Philanthropist, 1749-1831* (New York: Rochester, 1948), 45-67.

pieces were composed by Americans. However, such considerations are not only speculative but also fruitless. As often as these variables are articulated by critics, notions of a single literary community shine through as if it were already 'national' in character; but frequently it is not. Perhaps Thomas simply saw this writing of fewer than one thousand words as a suitable piece of prose whose brevity satisfied the audience's reading habits in skimming and browsing texts.

So how could a French story be re-classified as an early American short story? Two young German scholars, Aynur Erdogan and Philippe Fidler, have recently discussed the Americanness of the French Indian tale "L'Abenaki" (1765) which was translated into English and reprinted in an American magazine in 1774 as "Adventures of a Young English Officer Among the Abenakee Savages."<sup>35</sup> Similar to "The Child of Snow," both authors consider the Indian tale as a 'transnational' story since it appeared in France, Germany, and England before it migrated to America. Both scholars argue that its Americanness is not

based on the genesis of the story but on the social and political circumstances of its American publication. Where earlier readers identified with the English officer in the story, American readers, especially those on the road to open warfare with England in 1775, were more likely to identify with the Native American.<sup>36</sup>

Such a contextualist theory of the American short story's emergence is viable, as Jan Fergus has shown in her *Provincial Readers in Eighteenth-Century England* (2006). Editors could exploit or create a community of readers precisely because they were not restricted in gender, socio-economic class, or politics as their subscriptions to specialized magazine titles might imply. Although the "Adventures of a British Officer" were published in the *Royal American Magazine* in 1775, the seemingly loyalist outlook did not prevent the editor (Isaiah Thomas) from printing radical patriotic pieces. In the politically heated climate of the 1770s, the magazines did not want to discover readers but rather produce them. Michel de Certeau speaks in this respect of a readerly "appropriation" of texts, an activity through which readers construct a text's meaning for themselves, refashioning what they consume:

[R]eaders are travelers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they do not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves. Writing accumulates, stocks up, resists time by the

<sup>35</sup> The story made its first appearance in the *Gazette littéraire de l'Europe*, cf. Aynur Erdogan, Philipp Fidler, "Critical Commentary," *Origins of the American Short Story*, eds. Wolfgang Hochbruck, Aynur Erdogan and Philipp Fidler (Los Gatos: Slack Water P, 2008), 13-27.

<sup>36</sup> Erdogan and Fidler 14.

establishment of a place and multiplies its production through the expansionism of reproduction.<sup>37</sup>

Like editors, readers obviously plunder actively from texts and, in doing so, appropriate a story as 'American' independent from any reference to origin. In this sense, one may argue that "The Child of Snow" documents another pattern of re-classification based on the pluralities of texts, overlapping genres, and criss-crossed motifs assembled in magazines. "The Child of Snow" transports literary elements and sentiments that matched the overall design of Thomas' magazine. *The Massachusetts Magazine* created an audience by its appeal to a popular rather than a cultivated taste.

Compared to the many other short-lived periodicals of the early national period, *The Massachusetts Magazine* was a fairly vibrant and successful venture. Thomas avoided elite erudition and offered short "amusing but instructive" pieces for a readership that, "not having many leisure moments, will be more likely to read a short essay on any subject, than to set down and peruse in course a lengthy dissertation."<sup>38</sup> He succeeded in building the magazine around a network of correspondents and collaborators. It was not only a self-proclaimed "asylum for native Genius,"<sup>39</sup> but it also established a discursive community based on notions of friendship and mutuality. The magazine created the impression that readers and writers alike (the 'friends' as they were called) have an equal share in patching together a general miscellany for an enlightened public. Magazines thus foster interlocking bonds of lettered sociability ranging from the intimacy of private life and the family to the public. They spell out a communitarian space for private and collective readings, build a collaborative authorship via a network of corresponding agents, and organize representational solidarity.<sup>40</sup>

In opposition to the political press, Thomas and his co-editors founded an early form of a popular literary-cultural journal in the 1790s. This particular type of magazine functioned, as Gardner has it, as "a hybrid of modern print culture and older and ongoing cultures of correspondence, conversation, and manuscript exchange, [and as such] the magazine sought to use print not to eradicate the spaces between the voices, but to make them productive, communicative."<sup>41</sup> Such readings of the magazine's cultural role as a democratic commons framing a new citizenship overlap with what is called the "editorial function." In the context of a reprint culture and its lack of originality, the

<sup>37</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley et al.: U of California P, 1988), 174.

<sup>38</sup> "The General Observer No. 1," *The Massachusetts Magazine, or Monthly Museum of Knowledge and Rational Entertainment* (January 1, 1789): 9.

<sup>39</sup> "General Preface": i.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Robb K. Haberman, "Magazines, Presentation Networks, and the Cultivation of Authorship in Post-Revolutionary America," *American Periodicals* 18.2 (2008): 141-162.

<sup>41</sup> Gardner 110.

term refers to the editor as a controller who arranges "the growing chaos of print voices and the expanding network of information." Given his managerial agency, he "distill[s] from it the essence of what was truly useful and entertaining."<sup>42</sup> Reassessing the editor as a new icon of literary production in the early republic is certainly timely and overdue; however, binding it to the editor's mastermind misses the point of the periodical at large, particularly "the conditions of the production, dissemination, and appropriation of texts" that go along with it.<sup>43</sup>

Only in its second year, the *The Massachusetts Magazine's* editors had to confess that "expectations of Originality" were "delusively founded" and promised a way out by supplying the "vacant pages" with a "copious selection, both Foreign and Domestick."<sup>44</sup> Such editorial statements demonstrate that the magazine's value only exists in its relation to the exteriority of the readers. The magazine creates two expectations in combination: first, the expectation that the magazine organizes a readable space, and secondly, that it offers a procedure for the actualization of texts through arranging texts in thematic sequences. In other words, in a magazine the world of the text encounters the world of the reader. In contrast to specific modes of organizing textual material that impose meaning onto the reader (i.e., dogmatic discourses such as religion or politics), the magazine's function lies in the actualization of texts and their meanings appropriated by readers or hearers, since magazines were sometimes also read aloud. The reproduction of texts in early American magazines does not seek to enhance the readable space. Rearranging, decontextualizing or extracting texts from other sources, magazines invest texts with a new meaning and status, and thus increase the range of textual appropriations on the readers' side. In doing so, magazines move beyond specific groups of readers and appeal to various communities of new readers and their changing reading habits, aptitudes, qualifications, and predilections.

Literary magazines make texts available that had formerly only circulated in the polite world of wealth and belles lettres. Unacknowledged borrowings

<sup>42</sup> Gardner 55. Not only a "distiller," the editor may fulfill different functions such as author, reader, publisher, printer that refer to the numerous activities of the agents in the eighteenth-century world of print.

<sup>43</sup> Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1994), 32. In light of current periodical research and its claim that magazines offer models of literary citizenship, Mayo holds that at least late eighteenth-century British editors, "[w]ith a shrewd sense of their audience's vanities and naive aspirations, carefully cultivated its writing members, cajoling them into working for them gratis, praising their efforts effusively, and (what is worse) printing them as models of elegant composition" (356). The question is whether American editors greatly differ from their British "brethren," as Thomas calls them.

<sup>44</sup> In Lora and Longton 97.

from foreign textual sources exemplify how texts can be differently apprehended, manipulated, and comprehended in magazines. Besides their often rampant plagiarism, magazines provide new readability created by the fragmented arrangement of texts (serialization), for instance, that makes notions of a linear-textual effectuation appear obsolete. Magazines invite the reader to roam among the texts and frequently cater to the sensationalist inclinations of the public. The staging of texts in a serialized form, or the chopping up of old texts, and new ways of reading invite many different appropriations. Sometimes the specificity of a magazine text resides in the editorial changes. In order to maintain the magazine as a communitarian space, *The Massachusetts Magazine* relies on the recurrence of coded forms; for instance, the sentimental lead story is frequently accompanied by a frontispiece which encodes visually what follows in the text. Additionally, the magazine inscribes texts into a cultural matrix that is not the one that its original creator had in mind. The reprinting proposes texts that authorize new comprehensions and create new uses of these very texts.

### 3. Early Stories and the Appropriation of Magazine Fiction

The anonymous story "The Child of Snow" was reprinted as a companion piece to one of Judith Sargent Murray's essays which appeared first in the pages of the *The Massachusetts Magazine* and were compiled later into three volumes, titled *The Gleaner* (1798).<sup>45</sup> Murray's essay is a moralizing piece that teaches marital conduct. It illustrates the conflict between desire and duty, between the "romantick ideas" (716) of a young lady and her anxieties to lose a "faultless virgin's fame" (717). Her "guardian friends" and their commentaries frame the essay. They admonish her not to "sacrifice to the illusion of a moment, the happiness of life" (716). "The Child of Snow" enhances the cautionary subject position that the essay offers the reader by dramatizing the consequences of adultery. Whereas the essay plays with female youth, romantic ideas of love, and male seduction controlled by the heroine's "guardian friends," the appended story moves the "happiness of life" into the context of commerce and trade familiar to the magazine's local audience. The remediation of short fiction highlights a literary practice closely related to the magazine's role in the world of print. The mass of redacted and original stories establishes continuity between readers' lives and the medium of print, between extra-textual experience and textual expression. The era's literary outlets, such as periodicals, not only acclimated the reader to the consump-

<sup>45</sup> Margareta Melworth [Judith Sargent Murray], "The Gleaner. No. IX," *The Massachusetts Magazine, or Monthly Museum of Knowledge and Rational Entertainment* (Dec. 1, 1792): 713-718.



tion of short fiction but also shaped what value readers accorded to it. The magazine's textual arrangements made readers aware of how to consume texts.

*The Massachusetts Magazine* establishes a publishing formula that reprints short fiction within a sentimental frame. It thereby repeatedly permits different readings and comprehensions of the copied fictions. In terms of a given text's generic appeal for the reader, John Frow remarks that "[t]he story is not just a thing said but is also an act of enunciation which intervenes in, and in part constructs, a social relationship."<sup>46</sup> In an American context, "The Child of Snow" contains thematic cues such as gender, profession, and region, which allow for a high degree of plausibility and exemplarity, at least for the magazine's local readers. Once relocated in the magazine's overall sentimental design, the medieval story gains a livelihood of its own with a different semiotic charge. So what kind of short story is "The Child of Snow" and what does it tell us about the miscellany character of short fiction as an extensive and diverse field of literary production, despite the fact that it has been considered 'trashy' by most post-romantic literary histories?<sup>47</sup>

Editors kept a constant eye upon newspapers, monthly reviews, essay-serials, and the growing number of collections of foreign stories, particularly French tales or other entertaining pieces. Apart from its bawdy tone and its depiction of the consequences of an adulterous relationship, Thomas selected the story not only for its brevity, but more so for its mixture of realistic and sensationalist elements as well as for its reduction of human relationships to formal patternings, often to be found in eighteenth-century fiction. Although an old text, it contains basic narrative features known to a general readership. The paucity of descriptive qualifiers and the type-like references to "the merchant," "his wife," "the husband," and the "child" invite the reader to re-imagine a marital drama of lies, moral pretensions, and sexual transgression in a contemporary context.

The story itself is a *fabliau*, a genre of medieval comic tales, frequently depicting sexual or obscene topics in an unabashedly humorous way. The *fabliau* was never limited to any one social class, and writers borrowed freely from it as did Geoffrey Chaucer in his *Canterbury Tales*, for instance. Eighteenth-century editors frequently used such 'little fables' to compensate for the lack of original stories at hand, but also reprinted them because of their simple, unsophisticated, and practical style. The *fabliau* favors a materialistic view of everyday life as it depicts people from the lower and middle walks of

<sup>46</sup> John Frow, *Genre* (London, New York: Routledge, 2005), 115.

<sup>47</sup> Mayo 351; Buell 31; cf. Oliver Scheiding and Martin Seidl, "Early American Short Narratives: The Art of Story-Telling Prior to Washington Irving," *Handbook to the American Short Story: Genres - Developments - Model Interpretations*, eds. Michael Basseler and Ansgar Nünning (Trier: WVT, 2011), 205-219.

life. Altogether, it is more expansive and less didactic than the fable since it avoids a summary of the moral, and it puts a greater emphasis on the story. Expansion thereby refers to processes of appropriation made possible by textual cues that function, according to Frow, as "metacommunications."<sup>48</sup> They may stand out in very obvious ways, such as the husband's "project of revenge" in "The Child of Snow," or come to the fore in statements of condensed information: "It is needless to give the particulars of the journey, or an account of the countries through which he passed" (CS 718). Usually, the *fabliau* contains a twist at the end of the story, mostly in the form of an outwitted character. Apart from its brevity, these general attributes certainly account for its circulation in the amusement section of American newspapers, before such short pieces found their entrance into the miscellanies.

It was also common to append a *fabliau* to a moral tale in order to counterbalance its sometimes antifeminist sentiment. In such cases, the tale highlighted female ingenuity over a foolish husband. *The Massachusetts Magazine* reverts this pattern and annexes the story to an essay-serial written by "Constantia" (alias Judith Sargent Murray), one of the magazine's most versatile and praised contributors. Published as an anonymous piece, it evokes the impression of an original contribution submitted by one of the magazine's many "poetical friends," or by someone who followed the editor's "premonitions" which repeatedly address the "novellist's" among the magazine's consumers and elicit from them "[s]tories [...] founded on verisimilitude" or "American tales."<sup>49</sup> And yet, such reprints were in accordance with common editorial practices of the era and were sanctioned under the terms of the miscellanies' obligation to "furnish to the publick an agreeable variety."<sup>50</sup> Even without having read the morally instructive remarks of the preceding essay, the reader can easily grasp the story's imaginary occurrence because it accords to what has been called "light reading" or "small tales" that appealed to a growing unspecialized audience fascinated by short fictions. "This class of people," as one correspondent harangues,

constitutes three-fourths of the community; and that they are fond of "trifles light as air"; of the wild, the terrific, and the marvellous, as well as of the soft, the melting and the voluptuous. They do not read for instruction or profit, but to "kill time"; or gratify a liquorice taste; and therefore, they prefer such tales, as abound with stories of dæmons, hob-goblins, spectres, witches, haunted towers, churchyards, charnal houses, tombs, enchantments, murders, robberies, gods, goddesses, angels, divinities, demigods, heroes, heroines, lovers, etc. - or loves, gallantries, in-

<sup>48</sup> Frow 115.

<sup>49</sup> "Premonitions," *The Massachusetts Magazine, or Monthly Museum of Knowledge and Rational Entertainment* (January 1, 1790): n.p.

<sup>50</sup> "Acknowledgements to Correspondents," *London Magazine, or Gentleman's Monthly Intelligencer* 48 (1779): 432.

trigues, bastards, perjuries, murders, assassinations, hair-breadth-escapes, suicides, and an almost infinite chain of ridiculous and wild et ceteras.<sup>51</sup>

Being itself a rare moment of insight into prevailing 'popular' reading habits, the comment reveals the extensive range of the era's literature as well as the editors' response to their consumers' reading preferences. They provided their targeted readership with reliable variations on their favorite stories. It also reveals "the amorphous character of the eighteenth-century reading public,"<sup>52</sup> and indicates that lengthy prose fiction aimed at a popular audience plays a minor role for the period's publishing business. References to light reading that "kills time" show that short fiction induced qualitative changes in how readers and writers approached texts. The editorial blurb indicates the extensive nature of the magazine's 'other' forms preferred by the period's numerous readerships, who expected, among other things, sentiment, sensationalism, and surprise endings. Commentaries as the one above reveal the diversity of short forms provided by literary magazines. Conversely, it also suggests short fiction's symbolic expansiveness that exceeds the boundaries of Enlightenment rationality and the era's ubiquitous moral formulae often endorsed by literary magazines. The moral essay is, therefore, only one out of a wide range of favorite narrative forms supplied by editors to meet their audiences' expectations.

Looking at the story's publishing history, one can see that its 'point' varies depending on the medium in which it is reprinted. The story's appearance in the columns of the newspaper gives it a different framing impulse for an interpretation, conditioned by time and the speed of reading and consuming public notes. Although published in the amusement section, it could be emulated as a local event of a "wife [who] became enamoured of a young neighbour" (CS 718) upon the absence of her husband. Given the conservative frame of *The Massachusetts Magazine* that intends "to protect traditional American middle-class values of religion, morality, family, and social life,"<sup>53</sup> the story can be read as a cautionary narrative against adulterous relationships. It echoes the motif of a fallen woman or errant wife known to readers of sentimental literature. While *The Massachusetts Magazine* domesticates the *fabliau* convention within a sentimental framework, a similar piece of short fiction, published two years earlier in the Boston-based *Gentleman and Lady's Town and Country Magazine* (1789-1790), reinvents the *fabliau* and its lurid content under the cloak of sermonic truth-telling. "The Story of the Captain's Wife" (1789) is an original story involving a seafaring husband and his lonely wife longing for his safe return from a long voyage at sea. She is reassured by

<sup>51</sup> "For the Philadelphia Repository," *Philadelphia Repository, and Weekly Register* 2.33 (June 26, 1802): 261, probably written by David Hogan, the magazine's editor.

<sup>52</sup> Mayo 213.

<sup>53</sup> Lora and Longton 100.

a mysterious old woman who miraculously conducts her to her husband's remote location one night in a sailboat transformed from a bushel basket. Husband and wife reunite, but he does not recognize her, although he traces in her countenance "every feature of [his] wife."<sup>54</sup> He takes her to his bed and offers money to her for the affair, but she refuses the money and asks instead for a curious knife and fork that he owned. By morning she has returned home, and seven months later the husband returns to find that she is pregnant. He becomes enraged at her infidelity and wants to leave her, until she confronts him with the knife and fork. In a complete change of countenance, he begs for mercy and insists that she would not treat him the way he has treated her for the same crime. She forgives him and they live happily ever after.

Both stories consist of a mixture of realistic and magic elements that are reconciled in different ways. "The Story of a Captain's Wife" emerges out of numerous narrative types such as the sermon, the exemplum, and the folk tale. Such amalgamated stories occur within tightly woven frame narratives. The exterior story resembles a sermon and reflects upon the first chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel and David's repentance in the second Book of Samuel. The interior story is both exemplum and folk tale. While the exemplum narrates the couple's separation and reunion, the folk tale adds to it a supernatural occurrence brought about by a spooky match-maker or ghost-figure, uncommon to the period's stories of sentimental nature. The story proper derives from an oral source, "an aged clergyman of this Commonwealth," whom the unnamed first person narrator happens to meet "in one of the capital towns on the American continent" (CW 483). Although the story is disguised as a clergyman's sermonizing instruction, it caters to the "liquorice taste" of an audience that welcomed short fiction about lurid sexual encounters frequently involving subject matter such as bastards' tales or young wives married to sea-faring men.

Both stories contain fairy-tale elements or magic promptings which permit different readings. In "The Child of Snow," the wife's supernaturally caused pregnancy is exposed as a lie. At the end of the story, the narrator's apodictic comment leaves no question about the wife's misconduct and restores the order of marital obligations.<sup>55</sup> The mixture of narrative forms in

<sup>54</sup> Ruri Colla, "The Story of a Captain's Wife," *Gentleman and Lady's Town and Country Magazine* (October 1, 1789): 483-485; (November 1, 1789): 521; hereafter CW. The story echoes the Judah and Tamar narrative in Gen 38, 13-26 that deals with themes of love, prostitution, and honor.

<sup>55</sup> The 1818 reprint cuts this ending, as the story occurs in a different frame. This time, the story accompanies an essay entitled "The Friend of Women" that begins with the following statement: "Too much good or too much evil has always been ascribed to women" (122). Remnants of the story can be found in Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Snow-Image: A Childish Miracle" whose final comment reads: "The remarkable story of the

"The Story of the Captain's Wife" unfolds an ambivalent story that fuels the reader's fantasy. Similar to "The Child of Snow," the narrator makes no attempt to develop the characters; the lesson to be learned is, however, less clear since the story does not reconcile the realistic and supernatural elements. In contrast to "The Child of Snow," the magic encounter does not reveal a lie but proves the legitimacy and naturalness of the wife's pregnancy, and, at the same time, unravels both characters' willingness to trespass sexual norms: the husband's by showing his willingness to have sexual intercourse with any woman as long as she resembles his wife, and the wife's by following a match-maker able to satisfy her hidden desires. Both stories show that the rise of the American short story is less about the outcome of who could seize both "native elements and borrowed literary sources" in order to "transform them into new, durable literary art,"<sup>56</sup> but rather how texts are organized and circulated so that they achieve mobility across audiences.

#### 4. Conclusion

What follows from this analysis? First, early short stories, such as "The Child of Snow," make us think about a new chapter in American literary history and the emergence of the American short story prior to Washington Irving. While earlier studies stressed either particular national themes or original authorship as central criteria for incorporating stories into a canon of early American short fiction, my reading evolves from the pluralities of migrant stories that circulate in magazines and shows how foreign literature is re-packaged and redeployed, inviting readerly appropriations out of which an American story evolves. Migrant stories such as "The Child of Snow," "The Adventures of an English Officer," or "Azakia: A Canadian Story,"<sup>57</sup> illustrate that readers could imagine different subject positions as they read them. Second, their 'becoming' American short stories uncovers the early story as an outcome of iteration and not origination. Their recognition as a 'fiction of America' remains frequently a local and short-lived phenomenon, unacknowledged by later generations of consumers and their changing readerly appropriations. Therefore, future studies on the American short story should be embedded within "a social history of the uses and under-

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snow-image [...] may seem but a childish affair, is, nevertheless, capable of being moralized in various methods" (1853, 34).

<sup>56</sup> Current-García 17.

<sup>57</sup> Translated from Nicolas Bricaire de la Dixmerie's *Contes philosophiques et moraux* (Paris, 1765), the story was reprinted in a German translation in *Der Neuschottländische Kalender*, 1788, followed by English versions in *The American Museum, or Repository of Ancient and Modern Fugitive Pieces*, 1789, *The New-York Magazine, or Literary Repository*, 1797 and *The Desert to the True American*, 1798.

standings of texts by communities of readers who, successively, take possession of them."<sup>58</sup>

And finally, sometimes used as mere filler text, but sometimes also selected by editors because of their thematic appeal to a reading public, these stories develop a life of their own as they enter the plural readerly and writerly world of the magazine. Their lack of originality should therefore not cause their exclusion from future anthologies that seek to trace the emergence of the American short story in the pages of the magazine. Given the amalgam of fact and fiction in magazines, readers were being acclimated to imaginative prose of a distinctive modern cast well before the rise of the novel. The American short story has a long pre-history that cannot be explained simply in terms of an evolutionary and generic scheme, or as what Pitcher calls "a gradual coming together of forms,"<sup>59</sup> but must take into account the magazine's agency in re-classifying European texts as early American short stories.

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<sup>58</sup> Roger Chartier, *Forms and Meanings: Texts, Performance, and Audiences from Codex to Computer* (Philadelphia: U of Philadelphia P, 1995), 92.

<sup>59</sup> Pitcher 2000, 1.

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