
The Genius of America: Jeannette Hart's Experimental Writing for a New Republic

Elizabeth T. Kenney*¹

¹Salem State University – United States

Abstract

Although little regarded when they were anonymously published and neglected since, the three short fictional works of Jeannette Hart, one published in 1827 and two in 1828, collectively show a complex and self-conscious appropriation of "old world" literary genres in the interest of not only creating a new literature but also a new role for a woman of talent. When the three texts are read together, they form a triptych which reveals the transnationalism of Hart's "new world" literature and shows a self-reflectivity unusual in literature of the period. From her earliest work, *Nahant, or the Fleure of Souvenance*, which answers European literary models with a domestic local legend, to *Letters from the Bahama Islands*, which occupies a transatlantic physical as well as literary space, to her final work, *Cora, or the Genius of America*, which wrestles with both the creation of a new "American" literature and, simultaneously, a new role for women writers in the new republic, her texts are well worth recovering today.

*Speaker