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

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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.