

Publication

Antifiction Fictions

JournalArticle (Originalarbeit in einer wissenschaftlichen Zeitschrift)

ID 4631572

Author(s) Schweighauser, Philipp

Author(s) at UniBasel [Schweighauser, Philipp](#) ;

Year 2021

Title Antifiction Fictions

Journal Spec. issue Fictionality of Early American Literature, eds. Matthew Pethers and Thomas Koenigs

Volume 56

Number 3

Pages / Article-Number 731-54

This essay focuses on the curious phenomenon of antifiction fictions, novels that rail against fiction in the form of fiction, through various examples from the early Republic such as William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy* (1789) and Tabitha Gilman Tenney's *Female Quixotism* (1801). A critical engagement with Catherine Gallagher's claim that, in the early Republic, fictionality was "but faintly understood" leads me to argue that these novels' antifiction stances are anything but anxious defense strategies in the face of a powerful antifiction movement. Instead, they constitute fictionality signals that function as a major site for the early American novel's reflection on its own fictionality—and thus its modernity. Drawing on Niklas Luhmann's contention that modernization is first and foremost a process of functional differentiation that was still underway in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, this essay reads antifiction fictions as expressions of a transitional phase in the development of the novel into an autonomous genre within what systems theorists call "the system of art." The antifiction novelists being discussed were caught up in this process just as fellow writers of their generation were, but by self-reflexively flaunting the internal contradictions resulting from the production of fiction that rejects fiction, it is they who carve out a space for the novel to be explicit about what it does best: deceive its readers, if only for the duration of the reading process, into mistaking made-up worlds for the real thing.ää

Full Text on edoc ;