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BENEDICT ARNOLD, JOHN ANDRÉ, AND HIS THREE YEOMAN CAPTORS

A Sentimental Journey or American Virtue Defined

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Somehow or other, I cannot get Arnold out of my head.

Major Samuel Shaw to Rev. Eliot, 1 October 1780 (Dawson 118)

In the early morning hours of 22 September 1780, Benedict Arnold closeted himself with British officer John André to plot the fall of West Point, which was under Arnold's command and provided the crucial link between the northern and southern colonies. André was later caught with incriminating documents in the heel of his boot and hanged as a spy on October 2. Arnold learned of André's capture before the plot was completely understood, though. Spurring his horse down the banks of West Point, he escaped to a nearby British ship. Leaving an enraged citizenry behind, Arnold quickly became the most hated turncoat in American history.

All across the country, Americans vented their anger. In Philadelphia, the citizens burned Arnold in effigy a few days after Arnold's plot was discovered. Arrayed in regimental dress, the mock Arnold was drawn through the city in a cart. Arnold's head was given two faces, and he also had a mask, symbols of his duplicitous treachery. Behind the General stood the devil, who shook a purse of money in Arnold's left ear while holding a pitchfork with which to prod Arnold to hell. According to a local newspaper, "The procession was attended with a numerous concourse of people, who after expressing their abhorrence of the Treason and the Traitor, committed him to the flames, and left both the effigy and the original to sink into ashes and oblivion" (*Pennsylvania Packet*, 3 October 1780).

But the effigy itself contained signs that Arnold would not be so easily banished from memory. Arnold's treachery was symbolized both by a mask and by two faces. The very meaning evoked by the two together was contradictory. If a mask best symbolized Arnold's treachery, his true self was evil but was hidden from view by his false front. If Arnold had two faces,

though, there was no true self to discover; rather, he was split, a mixture of good and evil.¹ As one writer noted, Arnold's actions could take on a radically different complexion depending on one's perspective, making him "the ornament or the disgrace, the pride, or the pestilence of mankind" (*Pennsylvania Packet*, 21 October 1780). The ambiguities contained within Arnold's representation point to larger tensions within American society. The *Pennsylvania Packet* ended its account as if Arnold and all that he represented had been destroyed, but the exploration of what Arnold stood for was only beginning. He was troubling to his fellow countrymen precisely because he was representative of tensions within the Revolution and flaws within themselves.² Some of Arnold's traits ran deep in revolutionary society, and his symbolic meaning became contested terrain precisely because defining his meaning was bound up with larger questions of American identity (Royster, "The Nature of Treason" 184).³ Ultimately, the confusion about who Arnold really was and what his treason meant stemmed from a confusion about what it meant to be American. As his story was told and retold during the early years of the new nation, attempts to represent Arnold were a sensitive barometer of the changing beliefs about the "character" of the nation.

Arnold shared a number of flaws with his one-time countrymen. The Continental Army harbored any number of officers and soldiers with suspect commitments to the cause (in one letter from André to Arnold, André suggested a slew of Americans who could possibly be convinced to aid the British cause) (Van Doren 447).⁴ For example, one of the most important causes of Arnold's growing disaffection with the American cause was that he was passed over for promotion, an issue that engendered bitter feelings among countless officers. George Washington worried constantly about the problem. As he wrote of one group, "They murmur, brood over their discontent, and have lately shown a disposition to enter into seditious combinations." And this discontent was not limited to the officers. In the same letter, he wrote, "There never has been a stage of the war, in which the dissatisfaction has ever been so general or alarming. It has lately, in particular instances, worn features of a very dangerous complexion" (Washington to the President of Congress, 3 April 1780; Washington 18: 209-10). Arnold's desire for gold and European finery was also commonplace in American society as Americans sought the very British products that they condemned. In fact, the Revolution was fought, in part, for those luxuries. During the war, American colonists continued to carry on a vigorous and illegal trade with Britain. One disgusted patriot, calling himself a "plain dealing Whig," lashed out at the "many-headed monster" that he called "Tory Toleration": "Arnold's conspiracy drew its breath and received its nourishment from this doctrine . . . it opened avenues of British gold, through which it not only reached his sordid soul, but, I fear, the hearts of

many others in the confidence of their country, on whom it is now operating with full force" (*Pennsylvania Packet*, 10 October 1780).⁵ Between the extremes of no trade and unrestricted trade, there were large areas of disagreement about what constituted disloyalty (Main 47). Even his corruption seemed to be a feature of the young republic. Quartermasters and commissaries enriched themselves as they supplied the army. Others also took advantage of wartime conditions. The army received spoiled meat, poorly made shoes, blankets that were too small, and other shoddy goods. Officers took bribes and cheated the men of their pay. Soldiers took bribes to allow illicit trading and sold army property for their own gain (Royster, *Revolutionary People* 274–75). Many Americans appeared to be unready to sacrifice themselves for their principles. Arnold became an outlet for these tensions. As Charles Royster writes, "When widespread self-seeking began to look irreversible . . . the Revolutionaries turned to the corruption of one man whose ruin would signify the defeat of corruption within the Revolution" (Royster, "The Nature of Treason" 184).

All of these similarities converged to make Americans anxious about themselves. Shaw warned, "Without vigorous exertions [American liberties] may be lost. This is not impossible, though one would judge it was, from the behavior of the people at large" (Shaw to his father, 1 October 1780; Dawson 119). While Shaw fretted that Americans could fritter away their liberties through a lack of effort, others feared that Arnold was a sign of a deeper malignancy in the body politic. When Washington first learned of the treason, he said to Henry Lenox, "Arnold has betrayed me. Whom can we trust now?" (qtd. in Wallace 251). Others expected Arnold to be the first of many. Major Henry Lee, Jr. wrote to General Wayne, "Have any other defection, have more conspirators come out?" (27 September 1780; Dawson 71). Colonel Alexander Scammell wrote, "We were all astonishment, each peeping at his next neighbor to see if any treason was hanging about him: nay, we even descended to a critical examination of ourselves" (to Colonel Peabody, 3 October 1780; Dawson 66). Outside observers noted the reaction as well. Count Vergennes, the French foreign minister, wrote, "It is less the example that I dread than the motives on which the treason was based, for, they can flourish in a country where jealousy is somehow the essence of government" (qtd. in Wallace 268). A New York Loyalist agreed, "The jealousy amongst them is at present rather more than even the event might naturally produce." He claimed that the reaction to Arnold revealed "their distrust of themselves" (Andrew Elliot to William Eden, 4–5 October 1780; qtd. in Royster, "The Nature of Treason" 187).

To lay Arnold and, more importantly, their distrust of themselves to rest, Americans needed to place him in a framework where boundaries could be drawn establishing the difference between Arnold and "true" Ameri-

cans. He needed, in short, a story. The stories that Americans would tell themselves about Arnold were most of all stories about themselves. They were tales both of what Americans hoped that they would be and feared that they were, illustrating the ongoing importance of the issue of loyalty and the project of defining the grounds of American citizenship, a task bound up with a larger search for an "American" character. In that process, Arnold's story served as a focal point at various periods when issues of loyalty and character came to the fore. In the end, Arnold's story became deeply linked with America's own, the dark-side of the more Whiggish tale of providential destiny that Americans liked to tell themselves.

Throughout the early attempts to tell Arnold's story, writers revealed an ambiguity about the nation's character. Some stories focused on John André, the dashing young British officer. Others emphasized his yeoman captors as exemplars of native American virtue.⁶ This tension spoke to the larger question of the true meaning of the American Revolution and the true grounds of American-ness. George Washington emphasized the crucial nature of the early days of the young republic, writing, "We are a young Nation and have a character to establish. It behooves us therefore to set out right for first impressions will be lasting, indeed are all in all" (to John Augustine Washington, 15 June 1783; Washington 27: 13). The changing shape of Arnold's story revealed political and social developments in the young republic, as an emergent democratic politics and active political participation undermined elite claims to deferential rule (Wood; Taylor; Waldstreicher). During this time, the early appeal of John André, a British officer who seemed to embody the ideal of gentility, eroded, replaced by accounts of his heroic captors, simple American farmers. Astutely recognizing the new democratic ethos when he wrote his biography of Washington in the early nineteenth century, Parson Weems articulated this new story as well as anyone, even going so far to recast the great Washington himself as a common man.

The shifting nature of Arnold's story raises issues central to the ongoing debate among literary scholars over the role of sensibility in setting the boundaries for inclusion in the new national realm.⁷ Julia Stern in her recent work suggests that novels of the 1790s offered the possibility of a revived genuine sympathy that could lead to a broadly inclusive vision of democracy, a possibility increasingly closed off as the century drew to a close and national self-definition increasingly took place through exclusion.⁸ Bruce Burgett argues for a more complicated understanding, seeing both democratic potential and normalizing effects that are contested in literary and political public spaces, a contest bound up in a larger shift from a republican body politic to a democratic one. Both, however, find common ground in the notion that sentiment is, as Burgett writes, "the dividing line between citizenship and subjection in the early republic" (Burgett 21).

While Stern notes that political developments of the 1790s kept “African Americans enslaved, Native Americans subject to military ‘removal,’ and women of all colors disenfranchised and denied public forms of political expression,” Arnold’s story shows a different group struggling to join the body politic—white men (Stern 5). As attempts to tell Arnold’s story reveal, the place of average, versus elite, white men in the political realm remained uncertain. Sensibility was one of the crucial means of distinguishing the proper republican citizen, a standard with a distinctly class-based thrust. Thomas Monroe in *Olla Podrida* jokingly wrote, “No man should be permitted to moisten a white handkerchief at the *ohs* and *ahs* of a modern tragedy, unless he possessed an estate of seven hundred a year” (qtd. in Todd 13). Republican beliefs in a virtuous elite would eventually give way to a liberal regime based on private virtue, and sensibility would itself be reworked into sentimentality, aptly reflecting the rising democratic ethos of the new nation. But that story itself was a story of struggle.

The meaning of Arnold first began to take shape under the pen of Alexander Hamilton. Shortly after Arnold’s treason, Hamilton wrote a letter to his friend and fellow officer John Laurens that quickly gained wide prominence and helped shape future accounts. It was reprinted in countless newspapers. Hamilton introduced the characters who were going to become the key players in the Arnold drama. He ended his account by explicitly contrasting Arnold’s behavior with that of André’s captors, John Paulding, Isaac Van Wart, and David Williams:

To his [Arnold] conduct that of the captors of André form a striking contrast. He tempted them with the offer of his watch, his horse, and any sum of money that they should name. They rejected his offers with indignation: and the gold that could seduce a man high in the esteem and confidence of his country, who had the remembrance of past exploits, the motives of present reputation and future glory, to prop his integrity, had no charms for these simple peasants, leaning only on their virtue and an honest sense of their duty. . . . While Arnold is handed down, with execration, to future times, posterity will repeat with reverence, the names of Van Wart, Paulding, and Williams (to John Laurens, 11 October 1780; Hamilton 2: 470).

In later depositions, Van Wart claimed that he did not hesitate for a moment in declining André’s bribe (Dawson 121). This unthinking reaction starkly contrasted with Arnold’s obvious calculation. Van Wart showed that true virtue was not a matter of the head. Simple farmers, armed only with native American virtue, were able to resist the mercenary impulses that impelled Arnold to his treason. And since the mass of Americans were indeed small farmers, the fears of illicit trade and suspect loyalty were alleviated. American virtue could still be seen as impervious to tainted British

gold. As Thomas Paine wrote, "The unshaken honesty of those who detected him heightens the national character, to which his apostasy serves as a foil" (Paine). The sturdy character of André's captors seemed to refute American citizens' anxieties about themselves.

But the main character in Hamilton's account was not these farmers. It was not even Arnold himself. The true focus of Hamilton's extended exposition was the British officer John André. At first glance, André would seem to be an unlikely candidate for admiration. He was caught as a spy, a character universally despised among men of honor. A number of accounts ridiculed Britain for having to resort to such arts. Hamilton removed this stain from his reputation, though, explaining how André was forced to assume the character of a spy against his will by the treacherous Arnold—something that André himself argued.

Hamilton expounded at length on André's many virtues, perhaps best captured under the rubric of "a becoming sensibility" (2: 466).⁹ This idea of sensibility implied a range of aesthetic, emotional, and psychological responses and was a crucial part of the eighteenth century *mentalité* for educated men and women. In Hamilton's account, André at one point burst "into tears in spite of his efforts to suppress them" (2: 466–67). The tears bespoke precisely the excess of feeling inherent in the possessor of sensibility, and the inability to suppress them only offered further proof of their genuine nature. André's accomplishments gave further proof of his becoming sensibility: he had "attained some proficiency in poetry, music, and painting" (2: 467). And his whole manner embodied the empathetic nature so crucial to the man of sensibility: "His sentiments were elevated, and inspired esteem: they had a softness that conciliated affection. His elocution was handsome: his address easy, polite, and insinuating" (2: 467). Hamilton identified so strongly with André that he could scarcely perform his duty of suggesting a trade of André for Arnold. He admitted with embarrassment to his fiancé, "It was proposed to me to suggest to him the idea of an exchange for Arnold; but I knew I should have forfeited his honor by doing it, and therefore declined it. As a man of honor he could not but reject it; and I would not for the world have proposed to him a thing which must have placed me in the unamiable light of supposing him capable of meanness, or of not feeling myself the impropriety of the measure. I confess to you, I had the weakness to value the esteem of a dying man, because I revered his merit" (to Elizabeth Schuyler, 2 October 1780; Hamilton 2: 448–49).¹⁰

André's apotheosis revealed a troubling counter-story to that of yeoman virtue, an ideal linked to being a gentleman and an ideal that was firmly British in origin and character. The qualities André represented proved a distressing standard for Americans who found themselves at war with Great Britain and all that it represented. As we have already seen, this did

not stop them from desiring British goods. It also did not stop them from striving to be gentlemen. In many ways, the idea of republican virtue became a cover for Americans to pursue British gentlemanly ideals under a patriotic banner. Senior officers and some members of Congress attempted to nurture the idea of officers as gentlemen, hoping that it would be useful as a tool in leading the men, but the officers themselves had other ideas: "While they were eager to serve their country as gentleman officers, they worked harder to make their military rank prove that they were gentlemen than to use their social status as an instrument of command," Royster notes (*Revolutionary People* 87). Because of the newness of American society, gentlemanly pretensions rested on shaky grounds, only exacerbating feelings of insecurity.¹¹ Loyalists derided American social pretensions. Whereas Americans could at least claim to partake of the same virtues as André's captors, most could not confidently stake a claim to André's type of distinguished status. This inability only increased their esteem for him. But the attraction of André's becoming sensibility represented much more than the insecure longings of a colonial elite striving to reach British standards of gentlemanly behavior. Sensibility represented one means in the new republic for deciding larger questions of citizenship. As Julie Ellison has written, "Sensibility is the price paid by the republican family for its own appetite for impersonality. Legitimate power cannot be passed on from father to son. What is passed on is virtuous feeling" (Ellison 582).

Hamilton was not the only one to be captivated by André or to find himself drawn to the exchange of virtuous, republican sentiment. André was brought before a Board of General Officers to be tried as a spy. From his description, Hamilton seemed to find the most interesting part of the trial the feelings exchanged between board and prisoner. André, Hamilton boasted, "was required to answer no interrogatory which could even embarrass his feelings" (2: 466). Since the purpose of the board was to inquire into the nature of the affair, it is unclear why they should be so concerned with not offending André's feelings. But in the world of sensibility, feelings were precisely what counted. And to offend someone's sensibilities was to show a distressing lack of sensibility in one's self. By this logic, the officers examining André were on trial as well. And, Hamilton showed, all passed the important test: "The members of it [the board] were not more impressed with the candor and firmness, mixed with a becoming sensibility, which he displayed, than he was penetrated with their liberality and politeness" (2: 466). All had played their parts in the republican drama, a drama that begins to make sense when republicanism is considered less as a discrete set of beliefs than as a set of relations defined by the presence or absence of masculine sentiment, according to Ellison. As such, Hamilton and others' reaction to André's performance also defined their place in the republican political realm.

At André's execution, Hamilton wrote, he "excited the admiration, and melted the hearts of the beholders. . . . he died universally esteemed and universally regretted" (2: 468). Hamilton cast André's tale as one of meteoric rise and fall, a trajectory synonymous with tragedy: "By his merit, he had acquired the unlimited confidence of his General, and was making a rapid progress in military rank and reputation. But at the height of his career, flushed with new hopes from the execution of a project, the most beneficial to his party that could be devised, he was at once precipitated from the summit of prosperity, and saw all the expectations of his ambition blasted, and himself ruined" (2: 467). He faced the end with stoic self-possession, a behavior that called forth tears from those who witnessed his death. A number of other accounts wrote fulsomely of the occasion. One witness wrote that André's conduct "did honor to human nature" (Lieutenant-Colonel R. K. Meade to Colonel Theodorick Bland, Jr., 3 October 1780; Dawson 108). Another claimed that André's grave "was consecrated by the tears of thousands" (Narrative of Dr. James Thatcher, 2 October 1780; Dawson 133). André embodied the perfect republican hero, earning his position by justifying the tears of other men, a complicated interplay in which stoicism and sensibility provoke one another and in which weeping becomes a ritual of male bonding that combines shared feeling with civic virtue (Ellison 594–95, 576). The republican drama of André's trial represented a larger cultural performance, what Kenneth Silverman has characterized as "whig sentimentalism."

Hamilton's account juxtaposed Arnold with the men who would be used to define him for the next twenty years, John André and his yeoman captors. Arnold was found wanting from both perspectives. This juxtaposition revealed a lack of resolution, though, because the values represented by these men were at odds. The yeoman represented simple American virtue nurtured by the soil. André represented gentlemanly refinement and becoming sensibility nurtured by civilization. Which ideal was Arnold guilty of betraying? Which did Americans want to embrace? These standards revealed the tensions emerging during the patriotic project of nation-building, a period when Americans struggled to reach some consensus on the meaning of the Revolution. Was it conservative or radical? Who was it fought for? In Carl Becker's famous formulation, the war was not simply over home rule but over who should rule at home.

One could say that Hamilton was only reporting the story as it happened, but this criticism would miss the constructed nature of any story. Although Hamilton's tale largely reported the facts, that hardly guaranteed its significance. Other stories, which were soon forgotten, proposed different scenarios. In one, André was described as coming over in disguise, making him a spy of his own volition. He was then recognized by a British deserter and captured by Hamilton, elevating a different ideal

than that represented by the yeoman (*Pennsylvania Packet*, 30 September 1780). In another, Washington and his family were seen as the primary object of Arnold's treachery. This angle focused on the "domestic" nature of the war by making the general's family the object of attack. In the same story, André was disguised as a servant, once again revealing him as a willing spy and undermining André's gentlemanly pretensions. The account also polished up the Army's role in the affair because Arnold learned of André's capture through luck, rather than being told by his naive subordinate (*Pennsylvania Packet*, 3 October 1780).

Was Hamilton's story more accurate and thus "naturally" superior? In fact, crucial inaccuracies also found their way into his account. Most importantly, the characters of both André and the yeoman were changed dramatically. Although account after account glorified the soldiers' rejection of André's bribes, the real story was far less comforting, and it was a story readily apparent to knowledgeable citizens. As one officer wrote, André "was taken up by some militia, or rather a species of freebooters, who live by the plunder they pick up between the lines" (Shaw to Eliot, 27 September 1780; Dawson 114).¹² André himself declared that they attempted to rob him and would have accepted his bribe but for the fear that André would double-cross them and reward them with prison rather than gold (Randall 554). Absent without leave, the soldiers were roving in neutral territory hoping to waylay and rob unwary travelers and were hardly representative of yeoman virtue.

André was also a more ambiguous figure. Nothing seemed to improve others' opinion of André's life so much as his losing it. Although he had risen to become Clinton's chief of staff, many officers felt that he had been unfairly promoted over more senior officers. And until his capture and death, he had been seen as a foppish dandy. In the end, Hamilton's story received such widespread publication not because it was true but because it tapped into ideas that Americans wanted to believe about themselves.

But what exactly did Americans want to believe about themselves? Hamilton's account still left that as something of an open question. To answer it, more sustained attempts would have to be made to explain Arnold. It would be the work of poets and playwrights. A highly theatrical story would receive its resolution on the stage. St. George Tucker's reaction to Arnold's treason was typical of many literate Americans. He wrote to a friend, "My soul was so fill'd with Horror and Detestation of the once admired Heroe of America that I wrote a little piece in imitation of Churchill's manner which I sent to the printers very soon after the Affair was known" (to John Page, 13 October 1780; Alderman Library Special Collections, University of Virginia). In these literary attempts to understand Arnold, he was seen as a sign of deeper problems in the society. What was so upsetting about Arnold was not that he was different from other Ameri-

cans but that he was so much the same. As various dramatists attempted to distill moral lessons from Arnold's betrayal, they wrestled with the initial ambiguity of Hamilton's account. Although the gradual shift from a deferential to a participatory politics would eventually revive the reputations of the yeoman farmers, initial attempts to represent the story positioned André as the tragic hero, a story that valued refined sensibility over homespun virtue.

The choice of the theater to portray Arnold's story was appropriate for larger cultural reasons as well. As Jeffery Richards has noted, the metaphor of the theater had increased importance for the revolutionary period, and many of the political protests of Americans took on the character of a stage play.¹³ It also served to express group needs, according to Richards, conveying covenantal goals or political ends. André himself seems to have recognized that the revolutionary context did not simply allow but call for self-dramatization. As Silverman has noted, André was more cynical and less feeling than he seemed, and he engaged in determined self-fashioning, recasting the details of his story, particularly his mistakes, as heroic tragedy (Silverman 380–82). As early as 1777, André penned a prologue that established how completely the British had given themselves over to a theatricalized version of the war effort, in which fame on the battlefield and the stage were intimately connected (Richards 253). This theatricality was also a part of elite Americans' self-conception, and sensibility itself often seemed to turn life into a sustained performance (Bushman 181–203).

Philip Freneau began writing almost immediately, penning parts of a play called "The Spy" within weeks of Arnold's treason "under the psychological urgency of finding some way of explaining both Arnold's former heroism and his recent treason" (Arner 56).¹⁴ Freneau completed only three of the five acts, ending with Arnold's flight, and the play was never published during his lifetime. By ending where he did, Freneau never explicitly addressed the issues uncovered by Arnold's treason—what it meant to be American or, more precisely, what boundaries separated the loyal from the Loyalists. His inability to finish the play can be seen as one more sign of the troubling nature of Arnold's treason and the difficulty in separating Arnold and what he represented from Americans in general.

Freneau's play opened with two of Arnold's servants complaining of the rocky soil. One said, "We may work till we are gray-headed ere we can produce a turnip or cabbage for him on these barren, unthrifty rocks" (Freneau 2: 39). This opening complaint offered the first glimpse of a somewhat ambiguous new world. The barrenness of the landscape symbolized the sacrifices that Americans had to make while fighting the British, and it also recalled the original Puritan enterprise of wringing a life out of a rocky and barren soil. In American eyes, Britain's great corruption resulted from luxury, from ease of life. The rocky soil of America announced both

the grounds of American virtue and the lure of Great Britain. Virtue was, quite simply, hard work. As Freneau also made explicit in this first scene, it was not the path chosen by all. His servants commented on the company Arnold had been keeping: "And when the general gives a dance . . . , we see none of the true-heart Americans invited. His guests are a lukewarm, half-disaffected sort of people, who say more than for their own sakes I would choose to mention to everybody" (41).

Expanding on the idea of lukewarm Americans, Freneau later connected illicit trade and American treachery. American officers, after searching for illicit traders who sold provisions to the British in return for gold, lamented this internal treachery. One commented,

Gods! Can they be so base,—but there are they
Who sell their country for a mess of pottage,—
A servile, scheming race whose god is gain,
Who for a little gold would stab their fathers
And plunder life from her who gave them life.
These are not true Americans. They are
A spurious race—scum, dregs, and bastards all.
They are not true Americans, I say. (65)

Another officer worried that there are "so many lurking foes within" America that the Revolution would fail (65). The standards of loyalty that these officers outlined pushed a large swath of "patriots" outside the boundary of true loyalty. The story of Arnold's treachery was inextricably linked to a scandalously larger story of treachery being practiced by the many Americans who continued to buy British goods. Arnold's evil was not unique. Illicit trading and Arnold's treachery, according to Freneau, were part of a continuous spectrum.

The true hero of the play was André (Arnold's captors made only a brief appearance). Even as he explained his treasonous intercourse with Arnold, he lamented, "O Britain, Britain, / That one descended from thy true-born sons / Should plot against the soil that gave him birth" (43). Hyper-patriotic, André was upset that anyone descended from the British could commit treason. In his mind, treason was not only unthinkable—it was unnatural. "Nature has formed us with a principle of love to our native land," he commented. André's tragic flaw was precisely his overweening zeal for his country. He claimed, "Had I a thousand lives, I would lay them all down for Britain and my king" (53). His lover warned of "idoltrous extravagance" for king and country, and her dream forewarned André of his death. This fault of André could also be found in Americans, who entered war with excessive zeal, a "*rage militaire*" as Royster has called it. The boundary between patriotism and idolatry was imprecise at best.

Arnold himself became a more ambiguous figure in Freneau's drama.

Torn by self-doubt, "a tumult in [his] soul" (60), Arnold yet declares, "What I do is from principle, from the consciousness of a rectitude of heart and love to my country" (64). Although Arnold admitted that he desired the money as well as the caress of kings, he ultimately claimed to act for reasons of principle. He hoped for

a generalship that may reduce
 These states revolted back to Britain's sway. . . .
 For now I do imagine
 They have no rights, no claims to independence.
 Born were we all, subjected to a king,
 And that subjection must return again.
 The people are not dull republicans,
 By nature they incline to monarchy.
 How glorious should I be to have a share
 In bringing back my country to allegiance.
 Can France uphold them in their proud demand,
 That race of puny, base, perfidious dogs? (50-51)

Freneau never explicitly addressed the challenge of Arnold's soliloquy, choosing instead to enfold his complex reasons within the simple explanation of avarice. André told Clinton, "I found the leading feature of his soul / Was avarice. He could feign and counterfeit, / Persuade you black was white or white was black, / And swear, as interest prompted, false or true" (46). The same evaluation was given by an American at the end of the fragment. Discovering the treason, an aide to Arnold asked, "Was it Resentment, Avarice, Ambition?" (71). Another officer remarked: "'Tis avarice, sir, that base, unmanly motive." Such an abrupt explanation closed off Arnold's former complexity, and by deeming Arnold "unmanly," it also questioned his claims to sensibility and, thus, to proper republican citizenship. It also undermined its own validity, coming on the heels of fuller explanations. Freneau seemed to understand what a number of historians have pointed out: greed alone seemed an insufficient spur to make Arnold do what he did. Perhaps Freneau failed to complete the play because he did not know how to follow this insight to a satisfactory conclusion. If Arnold was not simply acting out of mercenary motives, his treason took on an even more threatening cast.

Like Freneau, Benjamin Young Prime began writing "The Fall of Lucifer," an epic poem about Arnold's treason, almost immediately after the episode occurred.¹⁵ In contrast to most discussions of Arnold, the author admitted in the preface that he once had the highest esteem for the traitor. Rather than completely condemning Arnold, the author made a distinction between Arnold as a citizen (the Arnold who proved to be "an execrable villain") and Arnold as a soldier (the Arnold who proved to be "heroical").

The author then used this distinction to wax elegiac about the “GREATNESS of his FALL,” writing that “it was necessary to contrast what he now is with what he once, whether really or apparently, was” (Prime).

But this phrasing left open the central question for many of his contemporaries: was the heroic Arnold of the early Revolution really heroic? Did his inspired battlefield leadership point to the personal virtue of his “real” self, or was his conduct only a sham, a cover for his true nature? In the poem, the author wrestled with the problem of how Arnold “In feats of valour eminently great, Should not have prov’d as eminently good!” The poet answered resoundingly, “False Arnold, thou indeed hast play’d a part, / But now thy real character we scan / . . . Thy public life was but a specious show, / A cloke to secret wickedness and shame.” The tension between the poet’s honest and incomplete assessment in his preface and his unequivocal answer in the poem echoed Scammell and Freneau’s in its dynamic interplay of doubt and denunciation.

In contrast to Freneau’s play, Prime ended with a comparison of Arnold with André’s three captors, Paulding, Van Wart, and Williams (André, although called “a hero,” received only brief mention in the poem). Unlike Arnold, they obeyed “reason’s laws” and were “thrice-honour’d instruments” of heaven. For their “virtue unblemish’d” in performing their “disinterested deed,” the poet promised that they would receive eternal fame. With their refusal of British gold, these soldiers showed that American virtue did exist, that Arnold’s villainy was not a sign of American weakness. As average American farmers, they offered proof that Americans were naturally virtuous, a self-conception crucial to Americans’ belief in their ability to create a republican nation.

But the poet betrayed the incomplete acceptance of this ideal, the lurking ambiguity about the proper grounds of republican citizenship. In his preface, the author worried that “some of his readers will think he has celebrated them in a stile of encomium too high for their condition in life.” The poet revealed the continuing influence of notions of society based on deference in which the proper figures for admiration were not from the common ranks and where individuals were expected to stay within their prescribed stations.¹⁶ He only hoped that “his candid readers will indulge him in his enthusiastic veneration for those humble peasants. . . . he confesses, he is peculiarly charmed with public spirit in obscure life” (iv). His very choice of genre revealed his problem. An epic poem was not common fare directed at a popular audience. It was meant for an elite audience of sensibility, an audience not necessarily sympathetic to the idea of the elevation of the common man.

Despite the example of such stalwarts as Paulding, Van Wart, and Williams, an undercurrent of anxiety, unleashed by Arnold’s defection, ran throughout this poem. The poet’s comparison of Arnold to Lucifer encap-

sulated the difficulty. Lucifer with his seductive ways caused the fall of man, and the poet was clearly worried that Arnold and his values would have a similar seductiveness, which could bring about a similar fall for the divinely inspired America. Although he dismissed the effect of British “wiles” and “dissimulation” as a “small danger,” he worried:

. . . but serious ills invade,
 When sneaking forg’ry plays her subtle game,
 And British baubles tempt a lawless trade,
 The foes glad triumph and our country’s shame:
 So once to folly Israel’s sons beguil’d,
 By Midianish harlots and their toys,
 With their malicious foes triumphant smil’d,
 Blush’d and paid dear for their forbidden joys. (15)

He appended a footnote to make explicit his meaning, citing “the pernicious and scandalous traffic clandestinely carried on by some with our enemies at New York and Long Island” (14).

The poet had no answer for this form of treachery through trade, though, and he refused to follow the implications. Instead, as so many others did, he turned immediately to the British seduction of Arnold as “the dire master-piece of all their art” (15). After a shuddering look at this plot, the poet banished any further talk: “No more be mentioned any dark design / Or base transaction of the days of yore; Let sleep in silence Roman Cataline, / Ye Briton’s talk of POWDER PLOTS no more” (16). Duplicitous merchants and lukewarm patriots were blotted out by the greatness of Arnold’s evil. Potential cracks in the republican ranks were covered over in silence. Once again, as in the case of Freneau, the poet struggled to lay Arnold’s disquieting implications to rest.

With the end of the war, the troubling questions raised by Arnold’s treachery receded. Americans had proven virtuous enough to win the war, and although many continued to debate the proper boundaries of political participation, the larger question of loyalty to the nation was at least temporarily of lesser importance. However, in the late 1790s, issues of loyalty and foreign influence again came to the fore. Many feared that the republican experiment in government was quickly headed towards disaster, and extreme rhetoric from both Federalists and Republicans was commonplace.¹⁷ The Quasi-War with France, the Alien and Sedition Acts, and the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions were all signs, many feared, that the union would fail. In this context, unsurprisingly, Arnold again stirred the literary imagination, but the underlying political and social context had changed drastically, leading to a fundamental reshaping of the famous story to suit the new national circumstances. In a series of two plays, William Dunlap embarked on another attempt to give meaning to

the story of Benedict Arnold. In 1798, during the height of party tensions, Dunlap produced "André," a tragedy he claimed to have started nine years earlier but which was clearly shaped by the charged political atmosphere of the late 1790s. To choose an Englishman as the hero of a tragedy at this time was already to reveal his Federalist sympathies, but Dunlap shunned this label. In his prologue, he asked that "no party-spirit blast his views" (Dunlap vii). Instead, Dunlap hoped "to instruct, without reproach" (Prologue).

Dunlap used the story of André to argue against isolationist sentiment. One officer dreamed of an America uncorrupted by Europe:

O! would to heaven
That in mid-way between these fever'd worlds
Rose barriers, all impassable to man,
Cutting off intercourse, till either side
Had lost all memory of the other.
. . . Then might, perhaps, one land on earth be found,
Free from th' extremes of poverty and riches (25).

But another officer (who was virtually identical to the General in his views) chided his fellow officer: "Prophet of ill, / From Europe shall enriching commerce flow, / . . . likewise . . . blest science." Good and evil were everywhere commingled, argued this officer, and Europe had much to offer the new world. Given the quasi-war between France and America, such an argument was really a plea for continued ties with England, and in the final lines, the same officer closed the play with a plea that commerce should flow through the portals of Great Britain: "Ever remembering, that the race who plan'd, / Who acquiesced, or did the deeds abhor'd, / Has pass'd from off the earth; and in its stead, / Stand men who challenge love or detestation / But from their proper, individual deeds. / Never let memory of the sire's offence / Descend upon the son" (62).

The pro-British message was reinforced by André's own actions of mercy toward Americans (in actuality, André took a particularly hard line against Americans). Even after his capture, he worked to have the father of an American officer (Bland) released rather than punished for André's own death. André was elevated in the play to a Christ-like figure. One officer described André's kind treatment of himself and other Americans held on a British prison ship that echoed the Christian story of Christ's descent into hell to redeem all of humanity: André "sought out the pit obscene of foul disease . . . like an angel" (13-14). And through his kind offices, he "restor'd us light, and partial liberty." The officer claimed that André had "every virtue of humanity" (31). Despite the pleas of Bland, Bland's mother (whose husband was threatened with execution by the British if André was hanged), and André's lover, the General (a thinly disguised Washington)

held firm to his intention that André be hanged as a spy (echoing André's real life request that he be allowed the privilege of dying a soldier's death, rather than hanged). In the play, he complained that he would be "a mid-air spectacle to gaping clowns" (72). But Washington refused (in both the play and in the actual execution), fearing that it would show weakness as well as implicitly question André's conviction as a spy. A number of people considered this refusal as one of Washington's greatest mistakes. Dunlap himself commented in the prologue on "the diversity of opinion which agitated the minds of men at that time, on the question of putting André to death" (iv). Linking steadfastness with the fate of the nation, the General said in justification of his decision: "But the destiny of millions, millions / Yet unborn, depends upon the rigours / Of this moment" (32). André's captors received only passing, though praiseworthy, mention in the play. André's star appeared to eclipse the virtuous yeoman farmers.

Perhaps already revealing the shifting political landscape that would lead to the Republican victories in 1800, though, Dunlap found himself out of tune with larger nationalist sentiment, praising a British aristocrat at a time when even Federalists were increasingly forced to attempt to make popular appeals to the people to win elections. In the original version of "André," Bland became so angry at the General's refusal to shoot André as an officer (rather than hang him as a spy) that he resigned his commission, an action that was hissed during the production, and Dunlap himself realized the unfortunate choice of André as a hero. He wrote, "I find that general satisfaction was expressed, but our warm and ignorant people, look upon Bland's action as an insult to the Country. On considering that to withdraw the play would show an acknowledgment of its insufficiency I determine on its repetition on Monday. Make an alteration in 5th Act, by making Bland on his repentance receive the cockade again" (Dunlap, *Diary* 1: 237). Dunlap changed the scene so that by the second night of the performance, Bland accepted his commission back, recognizing his youthful folly (Canary 93). The audience's disapproval represented not simply their veneration for Washington but a growing consensus about the proper nature of patriotism and even of the national character itself, a consensus that would find expression through the ballot box with Thomas Jefferson's election in what he called the "Revolution of 1800." In 1803, Dunlap produced a drastically revised "André," retitled "The Glory of Columbia." He correctly gauged the public mood, turning a box-office failure into a profitable patriotic play (Canary 99). Arnold made a brief appearance but only as a cardboard villain. Dunlap did not risk any ambiguity that could cloud his straightforward, patriotic message. Arnold mused on his unrewarded valor and exclaimed, "I must have gold—else will my well earned name and gallant service nought avail me. Perish the public good! my private welfare henceforth be my aim" (Dunlap, "Glory" 3). The General ex-

PLICITLY became Washington. Bland never resigned his commission. Even the ambiguity of André's former situation was flattened. No longer freely choosing the part of the spy, André was brought within enemy lines without his knowledge. When he learned what had happened, he cried, "How! Betrayed. . . . And has my zeal to serve my country led me to the necessity of deceit? . . . o fallen indeed" (10). Perhaps most importantly, Dunlap chose to devote most of the play to the emblematic figures of Paulding, Williams, and Van Wart.

Their encounter with André encapsulated the thrust of Dunlap's play. Throughout, André was undone by the simple virtue and honesty of these men. When André first came upon them, he asked if they were rebels. When they told him they were not, he declared his British loyalties, but he was trapped by their simple understanding of the word "rebels." They explained, "We are neither rebels, or britons, but freemen; independent farmers; armed to defend the prosperity and the rights we have inherited from our fathers" (14). When André complained that they had tricked him, Paulding said, "We are your open undisguised enemies" (14). Knowing that he was disguised, which his captors did not yet know, André was once again confounded, "Known? disguise? am I then? confusion! how am I sunk! how does the plain honesty of these men confound and lower me in my own esteem!" (14). When André realized that he was captured, he attempted to bribe them. All resolutely refused, and Williams offered a homily explaining their stand, "Why I tell you what, mister, very likely there is more in that there purse than father's farm's worth stock and all: but somehow or other there is a sort of something here (pointing to his breast) that we yankees don't choose to truck for money." Although poor, Williams explained, they had fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, sweethearts, and wives. "Now tho' all those things mayhap only be trifles, yet—what sum do you think a man ought to sell 'em for?" (15–16). When André offered them promotion and rank in the English forces, Williams once again explained the roots of American virtue: "Thank you kindly for myself, sir, but I don't want a master or a livery. An American soldier wears an uniform to show that he serves his country, and never will wear a livery or serve a master" (17). This unrelenting display of American virtue led not only to André's capture but to his conversion. In the end, he submitted willingly, "Tis well you have taught me to reverence an American farmer. You have given me a convincing proof, that it is not high attainments, or distinguished rank which ensure virtue, but rather early habits, and moderate desires. You have not only captured me—you have conquered me" (17). Yeoman virtue had vanquished the overly civilized and overly clever André. The refined virtue of republican sensibility had given way to the simple virtue of the American farmer.

Their virtue shone unabated after André's capture. When some spoke

of their getting a reward, Van Wart remarked, "We have received the only reward [a commander's praise] a soldier should look for" (19). The play ended with the capture of Yorktown. While others cried out, "We'll not spare them," these soldiers entered the battle under Williams's cry of "Humanity!," rushing off into the embrace of apotheosis. And what of André? Dunlap chose to forget his earlier enthusiasm for the Englishman. In the 1830s, he wrote that he had never shared in "the fictitious admiration of this young gentleman, which was created principally to cast odium on General Washington and the sacred cause of an insulted people" (Dunlap, *Diary* 2: 188).

With native virtue re-enthroned as the keystone of the Arnold story at the expense of André, the story began to resolve the conflict in values represented by André and the three yeoman, a story refined by a preacher-cum-Bible peddler named Parson Weems, who was trying to create his own vision of America, one that rescued Washington from the filiopietistic Federalist histories to remake him into a republican hero. In Weems's version, native American virtue retained its perch, now exemplified by Washington himself, and Arnold became a fitting foil to the Virginian's unblemished character. Sensibility had given way to sentimentality.

Early in his biography, Weems tied Washington's greatness to America itself: "Where shall we look for Washington, the greatest among men, but in America—that greatest Continent" (Weems 10). In fact, America's natural sublimity was "so far superior to any thing of the kind in the other continents, that we may fairly conclude that great men and great deeds are designed for America" (10). In this incarnation, Washington served as the representative of all Americans, so that all could share in his virtue.

Arnold was a standing rebuke to this vision of American-inspired benevolence. How could the landscape that called forth the great Washington also call forth Arnold? Weems chose to explain Arnold's fall as the simple outcome of extravagance: "That which makes rogues of thousands, I mean Extravagance, was the ruin of this great soldier. Though extremely brave, he was of that vulgar sort, who having no taste for the pleasures of the mind, think of nothing but high living, dress, and show" (111). Although British luxury had always been castigated as the source of British corruption, Weems's remarks revealed the broader disrepute of refinement and the consequent elevation of the common man. Weems's censure rested largely on his construction of private virtue as the foundation for public and national virtue. Arnold's faults revolved around too much "show," too much extravagant self-display. Weems's revealed this preoccupation in his initial description of Arnold as "strutting . . . on the public state, he could play you the great man, on a handsome scale" (6). But, for Weems, this sort of public display was not a true guide: "It is not, then, in the glare of public, but in the shade of private life, that we are to look for the man. Private

life, is always real life" (7). The emphasis on private virtue was a striking shift from the emphasis on public virtue that republicanism demanded—and that sensibility demanded be displayed.

Revealing the increasing power of the democratic ideal of American virtue as the birthright of the common man nurtured on American soil, rather than aristocratic refinement or sensibility, Weems fashioned the Virginian as a common man who achieved greatness through his own efforts. Raised in a "modest" house, Washington called his father "Pa" and ran around barefoot (*"with his little naked toes he scratched in the soft ground"* [8]). He spent his early manhood in the "laborious life of a woodsman." Throughout the biography, Weems emphasized Washington's common beginnings, writing of how "from such low beginnings" and as a "poor young man" who "from a sheep-cot ascended the throne of his country's affections," Washington advanced "to such unparalleled usefulness and glory among men!" (134). Modest beginnings were not simply a sign of what Washington had overcome—they were the very source of his greatness. "HAPPILY for America, George Washington was not born with a 'silver spoon in his mouth,'" Weems wrote, because it forced him to make his way in the world "by his own merit" (19). No longer the product of an elite gentry culture, Weems's Washington was a self-made man. Through this reworking, Washington became the symbol of American virtue, embodying the simple virtues of the yeoman farmers at the expense of the once revered André and recasting refinement in a distinctly American idiom.

The success of Weems's configuration of Washington's virtue as the birthright of all Americans revealed a rising confidence in the nation's destiny, brushing aside the fear that Arnold could actually represent flaws in the national character. Arnold retained some usefulness, if only to set off Washington in all his glory. In Weems's account, Arnold appeared as early as the second page as well as in the final pages. The anxieties associated with Arnold (as well as the difficulties in representing his story) had abated. The increasing democratization of the nation's political process had begun to resolve the ambiguities about the nation's character, even if the elevation of the common man would not fully arrive until the Jacksonian period. With the success of Weems's representation of Washington as a common man and with the political triumph of Jefferson in his "Revolution of 1800," it became clear what Arnold was supposed to represent as well as how he differed from "true" Americans. Weems linked Washington and Arnold in a way that seemed to confirm native American incorruptibility. Truly, we were a virtuous people—at least, according to this story.

But some Americans would resist that emerging story, expressing a nostalgia for the increasingly lost world of sensibility, deference, and hierarchy. Although Weems's reformulation seemed to offer a solution to the

dilemma posed by the differing virtues of André and his three captors, the issue of gentility versus yeoman simplicity, for some, would remain alive even decades later. In the popular novel *The Spy: A Tale of the Neutral Ground*, first published in 1821 and at one time regarded as the first significant achievement in American fiction, James Fenimore Cooper addressed the same issues of ambiguous loyalty and nascent national identity that dominated the revolutionary-era stories of Arnold's betrayal, and Cooper himself was well aware of the similarity. André's execution hangs like a ghostly presence over the entire novel. His capture and hanging (and the issues surrounding it) are recalled repeatedly by various characters, and the novel's plot focuses on the capture and possible execution of Henry Wharton, a British officer who disguised himself to cross the American lines and visit his family. In addition, the novel itself is named for another spy, Harvey Birch, an itinerant peddler who uses his mobility to spy for the Americans. Perhaps most importantly, Cooper set his novel in New York's Westchester County (not far from West Point), a region crossed and recrossed by forces of both sides, "a sort of No Man's Land, the 'Neutral Ground' of Cooper's subtitle, where the Cow-boys (British sympathizers) and the Skinners (American sympathizers) made life miserable for the civilian population," as one literary commentator has written (Winterich 8).

In contrast to Weems, though, Cooper viewed the emerging democratic polity with disdain. The novelist had watched his own father lose political power, largely as a result of the emergence of a more democratic politics unsympathetic to genteel claims on political office, and then lose his fortune, a painful fall from the genteel circumstances that Cooper had known as a child. Cooper longed for a return to the kind of deferential and hierarchical social order that had been lost, writing that "confusion in the relations between the different members of society . . . must, more or less, lead to confusion in society itself" (Cooper, *The American Democrat* 81).

Although the stories of both Dunlap and Weems revealed a rapidly democratizing America in which André's three captors served as more suitable heroic models than André, Cooper's novel implicitly criticized that emerging society, even though he himself wrote at a time when the last vestiges of elite rule, such as property requirements for voters, were on the verge of being eliminated. Throughout the novel, Cooper expressed an only thinly disguised contempt for the common man. Although Birch was the titular hero, his social class precluded him from significant participation in the drawing room scenes that occupy much of the novel, and he was forced to the margins of the story. Cooper called the regular soldiers the "vulgar herd," readily revealing his elitism (Cooper 100). Additionally, his characters criticized the American militia. One American cavalry officer complained that they "seldom fail of making a bloody field, either by

their cowardice or their ignorance, and the real soldier is made to suffer for their bad conduct" (380). Most strikingly, in a direct revision of the glorification of André's three captors, Cooper's true villains were the American "Skinners," military freebooters who were supposed to harass the enemy in the neutral ground. In the novel, the Skinners' actual activities were largely directed toward plundering their fellow citizens, regardless of their loyalty. Cooper wrote of them, "Oppression and injustice were the natural consequence of the possession of military power that was uncurbed by the restraints of civil authority. In time, a distinct order of the community was formed, whose sole occupation appears to have been that of relieving their fellow citizens from any little excess of temporal prosperity they might be thought to enjoy, under the pretense of patriotism and the love of liberty" (12). An American officer in the novel said of them, "More than savages; men who, under the guise of patriotism, prowl through the community, with a thirst for plunder that is unsatiable, and a love of cruelty that mocks the ingenuity of the Indian—fellows whose mouths are filled with liberty and equality, and whose hearts are overflowing with cupidity and gall—gentlemen that are called the Skinners" (283). Cooper actually had a higher opinion of their British counterparts, the "Cowboys," who "were enrolled, and their efforts more systematized" (12). The novelist was criticizing the very class of men who had captured André (although he did praise André's three captors in a footnote). In Cooper's tale, the proper grounds of loyalty and the proper character of the American people were decidedly different than they were in Weems's biography or Dunlap's play.

Choosing to highlight the ambiguity of loyalty during the Revolution, Cooper quickly established the complicated political and military landscape in which his novel was set. On the opening page of the novel, Cooper noted that after the British took control of New York City, Westchester County "became common ground, in which both parties continued to act for the remainder of the war of the Revolution. A large portion of its inhabitants, either restrained by attachments, or influenced by their fears, affected a neutrality they did not feel" (1). He emphasized that the "neutral ground" was a place where all was not as it seemed. "Great numbers," he wrote, "wore masks, which even to this day have not been thrown aside" (1), a remark that recalled the fears of American patriots in the wake of Arnold's defection.

Cooper's tale was not a straightforward rendering of loyalty or American virtue. Through the Wharton family, the novelist offered a complex account of the simultaneous pull of British and American sympathies, the Wharton family serving as an apt symbol of how those same conflicting loyalties split the larger national family. The father secretly favored the English, but he attempted to maintain a rigid neutrality and even moved out of New York City to Westchester County to protect that neutrality,

although his illicit trading to get tobacco and other luxuries from behind British lines involved him in precisely the type of activities that patriots excoriated (one character noted in exasperation that Mr. Wharton “does not know whether he belongs to us or to the enemy” [232]). His son, Henry, was an officer in the British army, while his son’s best friend, Major Dunwoodie, was an officer in the American forces. His eldest daughter, Sarah, was ardently pro-British and in love with a British officer, Colonel Wellmere, while the youngest daughter, Frances, embraced the American cause and was in love with Major Dunwoodie. So, the family itself proved to be a complicated neutral ground of sorts. Even considerations of marriage were bound up with larger questions of loyalty. Mr. Wharton consented to Frances’s marriage with Major Dunwoodie, “a rebel,” but his consent was “as much extracted by the increasing necessity which existed for his obtaining republican support, as by any considerations for the happiness of his child” (71).

The ambiguous grounds of loyalty complicated even the simplest exchange. When Mr. Wharton asked Birch, “Are we about to be disturbed again with the enemy?” Birch responded, “Who do you call the enemy?,” and gave Wharton “a look, before which the eyes of Mr. Wharton sank in instant confusion (32) (André’s own capture occurred because of a similarly casual and ambiguous exchange with his captors). Even the alleged hero, Harvey Birch, occupied ambiguous ground, at least in the eyes of others. Although secretly working as a spy for the Americans, his trade with the British painted him as a British spy or, at best, as someone interested in making money at the expense of his country.

Although the title itself seemed to offer the humble peddler and spy as the hero of the story, most of Cooper’s novelistic energy was focused on an exploration of the proper grounds of gentility, which itself became almost a proxy for patriotism. Cooper repeatedly staged scenes in which a character’s gentility was revealed. When Mr. Harper (later shown to be Washington in disguise) was forced to take refuge at the Wharton’s house because of a storm, his appearance quickly established his status as a gentleman: “His whole appearance was so impressive and so decidedly that of a gentleman, that as he finished laying aside the garments, the ladies arose from their seats, and together with the master of the house, they received anew, and returned the complimentary greetings which were again offered” (5). Henry Wharton arrived at the home in disguise shortly after Harper, but his identity was soon uncovered by Harper because of Henry’s inability to hide his genteel bearing. As a British officer, Colonel Wellmere’s claims to gentility should have been more secure than any other characters, but his demeanor was characterized mainly by hauteur, rather than true refinement. On the verge of marrying Sarah and becoming a bigamist, Wellmere’s prior marriage was revealed by Birch, blasting Wellmere’s genteel facade.

In contrast, Birch successfully assumed disguises on a number of occasions, his lower-class origins allowing him a freedom that the other characters could not achieve. True gentility, at least in Cooper's novel, cannot be disguised.

The lessons offered by Cooper's ending affirm his commitment to a different ideal than that of the yeoman farmer. The character suffering the worst fate was the leader of a band of Skinners. After running afoul of the American forces, he deserted the American side and attempted to join the Cowboys, who promptly hanged him. As for the larger question of loyalty, Cooper allowed time to answer that vexing question. Skipping over thirty-three years in the final chapter, he found resolution in the War of 1812, a war which pitted a now largely united populace against a familiar foe. Stumbling on an approaching battle, Birch rushed to join the American side and was killed during the fight. His body was discovered by Captain Wharton Dunwoodie, the son of Frances and the Major. Still carrying a note from Washington commemorating his service, Birch's heroism was at last revealed. But Cooper's description of young Dunwoodie revealed a far more intense admiration for a different ideal than that represented by Birch:

The person of this youth was tall and finely molded, indicating a just proportion between strength and activity; his deep black eyes were of a searching and dazzling brightness. At times, as they gazed upon the flood of waters that rushed tumultuously at his feet, there was a stern and daring look that flashed from them, which denoted the ardor of an enthusiast. But this proud expression was softened by the lines of a mouth around which there played a suppressed archness, that partook of a feminine beauty. His hair shone in the setting sun like ringlets of gold, as the fair from the falls gently moved the rich curls from a forehead whose whiteness showed that exposure and heat alone had given their darker hue to a face glowing with health. (394-95)

The problem of loyalty had dissipated with time, but for Cooper the allegiance to a genteel world remained. Weems's biography of Washington seemed to offer the genteel virtues of André in a suitably American and democratic form, but genteel refinement and a deferential social order retained their allure for a certain class of men.

The legacy of the Revolution, including the questions raised by the juxtaposition of André and his three captors, remained open to reinterpretation, depending on one's opinion of the triumph of the common man in American politics. Although being born in a log cabin would eventually be a mark of pride, a contrasting ideal would retain its currency for Americans such as Cooper, who resisted the emerging democratic ethos of the country and hoped to enshrine a different revolutionary legacy. The troubling

questions raised by Arnold, André, and the three yeoman farmers resisted any final closure—just as the meaning of the Revolution itself remained (and remains) a subject of contention.

NOTES

1. Even today, one can find the conflicting theories that the self is found through stripping away masks to the opposite idea that the self is expressed through role-playing. See Richards xv.

2. As Peter Brown writes, "In studying both the most admired and the most detested figures in any society, we can see, as seldom through other evidence, the nature of the average man's expectations and hopes for himself" (Brown 81).

3. For the problem of fashioning an identity in the new nation, see Fliegleman; Taylor; Bushman; Renker.

4. General Charles Lee was willing to side with either nation as chance offered. See Van Doren 32. Some historians also suspect that General Horatio Gates had divided loyalties. See Wright 29–35.

5. Royster writes, "The spreading luxury and corruption, which revolutionaries blamed on British conspiracy, were instead the tempting fruits of American freedom. . . . The British may have been the main enemies of American freedom; the Americans were the main enemies of American virtue" (Royster 273–74).

6. For two accounts that re-evaluate the story and emphasize the role of the yeoman, see Cray and Reynolds. For a detailed look at André's apotheosis, see Arner.

7. The literature on sentiment in the eighteenth century is fairly voluminous. For some recent treatments see, Barker-Benfield; Mullan; Todd.

8. For a more optimistic appraisal of this cultural project, see Barnes.

9. For the American context, see Wills and Bushman. By contrast, Arnold seemed to lack precisely what André so abundantly had. As Washington wrote, Arnold "wants feeling" (George Washington to Laurens, 13 October 1780; Washington 20: 173).

10. Hamilton, in fact, did write an unsigned letter to Sir Henry Clinton suggesting just such a trade.

11. For an excellent look at the slippery grounds of gentility and the efforts of many Americans to reach the status of a gentleman, see Taylor.

12. For an account of these figures as well as their varied fortunes through the years, see Cray.

13. For the pervasiveness of theater during the Revolution, see Richards and Silverman.

14. Richards also notes a desire to turn political events into staged ones (Richards 265).

15. Prime wrote the poem in October 1780, and it was published in January 1781.

16. For the ongoing but declining importance of deference in eighteenth-century American society, see Wood; Zuckerman; Taylor.

17. Given the beliefs about the fragility of republican governments, the 1790s became a period of violent rhetoric, as every decision seemed to forebode potential disaster. See Howe; Wood, "Conspiracy"; Smelser.

18. See Taylor, chapter 6, for this shift in political practice, as politicians increasingly styled themselves as friends, rather than fathers, of the people.

19. As one of the many signs of the virtue of an American farmer, Williams was

a servant of Arnold but asked to rejoin the service shortly before Arnold's betrayal, recognizing that Arnold was a changed man (4-5).

20. For a full explanation of Weems's rescue operation, see Onuf.

21. Weems was certainly not the first to argue that Washington's greatness was America's own. John Adams called him "an exemplification of the American character" (John Adams to John Jebb, 10 September 1785; Adams 9: 541). Historians agree on this point. Wendy Wick writes, "Washington was to become, in his retirement, a national symbol. His accomplishments were no longer seen as the work of a single human being but as the destiny of a new nation. His likeness came to represent the whole country; his career became its history" (Wick 53).

22. For an examination of the complicated relationship between public and private in the early republic, see Cogan; Freeman; Goodman.

23. Throughout the late eighteenth century, virtue was undergoing a radical shift from a masculine, political meaning to a feminine, private one. See Cohen; Bloch; Lewis.

24. For a full treatment of how gentility was recast to fit a democratic America, see Bushman 207-448.

25. See also Verhoeven.

26. For an excellent account of Cooper's own genteel aspirations and how those aspirations were expressed in his novels, see Taylor 406-27.

27. Other commentators have noted this as well. Dave McTiernan attributes this marginality to the generic demands of domestic romance and historical adventure, which have no place for a common man such as Birch. T. Hugh Crawford claims that a residual sense of honor forces Birch into his minor role.

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