If from one perspective Cooper’s readers were living in a new age of monuments and memory, in another sense they lived among the ripe ambiguities of silence. Writing to Thomas Jefferson in 1815, John Adams asked, “Who shall write the history of the American revolution? Who can write it? Who will ever be able to write it?” Jefferson’s answer echoed the same fears: “Nobody ever will be able to write it, except merely it’s [sic] external facts.”

With those facts past and memory unreliable and indistinct, many orators across the country sought to remedy these signs of “the forgetfulness of man” each Fourth of July by avoiding the presumed ambiguity of legend and invoking instead the principles of independence. These ritual events, however, could do little to recapture the experience of the war. In 1823 James Davis Knowles told his Washington audience, “It is unnecessary, on this occasion, to dwell on the history of our revolution....[W]hen we are reproached that the story of our revolution has not yet been fitly told, we may reply, that the record is in our hearts.” Not only might the imagination distort the meaning of the war through legends, but maybe, he suggested, not even the “historian’s pen” was the appropriate tool for conveying the collective memory of national origins. Adams repeatedly claimed that the Revolution had taken place most essentially in “the minds and hearts of the people,” so there, perhaps, its history would stay as well.

This is not to deny the abundance of voices in the early republic eager to speak about the recent war, but the project of telling an American experience had been framed with an array of complications that neither public

THE CREATION OF AMERICAN MARTYRS

Mark this: You must be annalist & Biographer, as well as Aid de Camp, of George Washington, & the Historiographer of the American War! . . . God only knows, how it may terminate. But however that may be, it Will be a most interesting story.

—Hugh Knox to Alexander Hamilton, April 31, 1777
documents nor broad narrative silence could address. “[M]onuments and statues decay,” Joseph Sprague told his Salem listeners a month after Adams and Jefferson had died in 1826, “and in the revolutions of time, history itself becomes obscure and lost.” Throughout Cooper’s America, there was a felt burden of preserving and expressing cultural memory apart from the ravages of time. To a certain extent it was a product of revolutionary optimism, which had infused American expression with a concentrated anxiety. There had been high expectations for bringing about the birth of a new nation, but behind these hopes were the pressures of establishing foundations and the deep fear of failure. In 1776 Thomas Paine exhorted the colonists, “we have it in our power to begin the world over again.”

Through the decades that followed, America was figured as even more than Paine’s newly begun world: In a chorus of what John P. McWilliams has termed “oratorical self-justification,” Independence Day speakers characterized the new nation as “the sun . . . burst[ing] the cloud of time,” “a star of the first magnitude,” “a satellite of the first order,” and even a “new constellation.” It all seemed to have happened so suddenly, almost as if (as one orator put it) “a magician’s wand . . . by its mystic influence struck into existence a mighty nation.” Near the end of his life, Thomas Jefferson specifically linked that belief in a new beginning to a spirit of optimism in cultural narration. He recalled the Revolution’s extraordinary opportunity for the renewal of the promises of language and the boundless possibilities for cultural storytelling. “[O]ur Revolution,” he wrote, “commenced on . . . favorable ground. It presented us an album on which we were free to write what we pleased.” For better or for worse, each story that was recorded in this context would have more than ordinary power, and each event that occurred would be imagined to indelibly mark the seemingly empty page of a new national story.

Built into the very design of independent America, then, was a peculiar sensitivity to the powers and dangers of language, particularly language used in the service of narrating a story of communal identity. In the events of the recent war, the new nation had a political history, and in the founding documents, a set of beliefs clearly had been framed; the task facing America, then, was “to find a middle term,” a cultural imagination to link history and belief. Within this atmosphere of tension and excitement, the language of American self-definition expressed a remarkable creative urgency. Now, in the newly self-conscious program of national storytelling, there were formative shifts in imaginative expression, shifts designed to elucidate an American identity precisely by addressing some of the most peculiarly confusing components of cultural experience. Since the
symbolic rhetoric of independence provided the design for American beliefs, the war for independence, by necessity, would provide the figures to function within it. Here in the experience of the war was the newly empowered vocabulary that would be used in the American story. Here the cultural imagination would recognize certain familiar plots of romance and tragedy, but here also entirely new plots would unfold on American ground. Through the evolution of popular legends of the Revolution, America would gain a *figural* vocabulary for its own stories.

Histories, poems, plays, songs, and fiction remembered the Revolution not only by invoking its principles for continued American freedom but also by focusing on specific incidents that, for various reasons, appealed to the forming cultural imagination. In fact, from the start, popular images of the American revolution assumed no easy uniformity of sentiment; rather, from the first years of the war and well into the nineteenth century, many of the most pervasive legends of the Revolution remarkably focused on disorderly, irreconcilable experiences of the war. This interest and the process by which such strangely captivating images enter into and function within the story of culture dominate Cooper’s novel; *The Spy* maps a panorama of people and places shaping American experience, but more telling still, it resonates with the idiosyncratic powers of native legends that had been stirring in the culture long before public efforts toward installing official interpretations of the war could begin.

Many of the most popular war legends evolved into strong national symbols and yet had their only foundations in the cultural notions of absence and loss growing out of separation from England. In part, the paradox of these legends is an imaginative response to the shifting goals of American identity. Historians have established that the colonies had no plan to enact a “national revolution,” and the vast majority of those involved “never meant to repudiate English culture but rather to embrace and fulfill it.” Yet as the early republic sought a myth of origins, it did so from within the perspective that they—like their model societies from the ancient world—had experienced a revolution in which “the great succession of centuries [was] born afresh.” Despite the original intent, then, the early republic was left to record a story not only of community but also of a nation’s founding era.

By necessity this story would be shaped by certain new conditions of imagining; as a modern form, the nation had none of the traditional apparatus of ancient mythology. Benedict Anderson’s model of the nation as an “imagined community” helps illustrate the new cultural conditions with which modern mythology would contend. Anderson has argued that “the very possibility of imagining a nation” came about only as “three funda-
mental cultural conceptions, all of great antiquity, lost their axiomatic grip on the human mind: (1) “the idea that a particular script-language offered privileged access to ontological truth, precisely because it was an inseparable part of that truth”; (2) “the belief that society was naturally organized around high centers . . . and ruled by some form of cosmological dispensation”; and (3) the “conception of temporality in which cosmology and history were indistinguishable, the origins of the world and of men essentially identical.”

The forms in which popular legend emerged in the Federalist and early republican years demonstrate that the Revolution irrevocably denied such conceptions of faith and order. Stories of the war emphasized instead the failures of language to convey truth and the radical disorganization and unpredictability of life in the colonies during these years; such stories drew attention to the fact that the America emergent from the Revolution was not the world begun again, but a human community to be sustained by all kinds of acts of the imagination. Just as the modern nation realized its own inception and promise of power, then, it also recognized its ruptured relation to the secure structures of belief that had sustained the colonies from their earliest forms as religious communities. Conversely, at its moment of the deepest loss of potency, cultural language in the nation was reminded of its earlier, almost sacred, function to the community. Accordingly, sacred language would be renewed, now based ironically on negative forms of imagining: a recognition of the limits of language and of the disorder of social structure, a deep cultural need to provide a story of origins—a new context for discerning the meanings of the events of everyday life—for a community ruptured in time and space from ancient patterns of history and cosmology.

In these new modern conditions of culture, the sacredness of language depends not on a presumed allegorical relation to ontological truth but on its capacity to record the indeterminacy of life and belief. In America, nowhere is this clearer than in the remarkable paradoxes of representation at work in popular legends of the Revolution. While much national rhetoric celebrated an image of national unity, as Christopher Looby’s analysis reminds us, such images were appealed to as problems and challenges rather than accomplishments. Certainly some events began in contention and yet as stories could be raised quickly to a level of shared communal sentiment: From the 1764 stamp crisis, for example, American writers gleaned methods of representing “a prospect of oppression, boundless in extent and endless in duration”—a prospect that would generate justified resistance and inspire “the tongues and pens of the well informed citizens” to “kindl[e] the latent sparks of patriotism.” Similarly, despite its
general taint of mob activity, the Boston massacre was remembered as a clear and decisive turning point, a moment when “the people . . . determined no longer to submit to the insolence of military power.”

Stories of events that took place within the years of active fighting often proved more complicated to tell and to interpret; still, in the decades following the Revolution, legends of its heroes would find ways to grow, as most major figures died without falling into public scandal and as partisan causes struggled to find their own principles rooted in the revered War for Independence. An abiding “fear of power,” when invested in any one individual, gave the newly independent United States “an inherent antag-
onism” to endowing its leaders with mythic dimensions, but for heroes who died early, this was less vigorously resisted. Many of the earliest writers inclined to exemplary biographies were happy to extol figures whose contribution, in the end, might be considered comparatively minor. General Joseph Warren, for example, killed at Bunker Hill, was a favorite subject of narrative attention; he was remembered as the very image of “unfading glory,” “the purest patriotism,” and “the most undaunted bravery,” though he died so early in the conflict that he had not yet abandoned his aims for “coalition with the Mother Country.” In the same spirit, in the flurry of imitations following Cooper’s first success with historical romance, some novelists returned to the literary precision and clarity of crises easily known and since resolved, as Lydia Maria Child does in her 1825 domestic romance, *The Rebels*, a story framed by the Stamp Act and insistent on distinguishing between representations of patriotic fervor and the dangers of chaos emergent in acts of mob violence.

The historical imagination in *The Spy*, however, thrives on a quite different America and engages directly with the problems of language in the story of the modern nation. For Cooper’s America, strength is generated in the imprecision of abundance and variety. In the complications of radical uncertainty issuing from that newly American range of characters and settings, in the private history and knowledge of the Spy, in the mysterious and disguised George Washington, in the disappointed love and resulting madness of Sarah Wharton, and in the lawless chaos (personal, domestic, and military) of the neutral ground, Cooper figures the story of American origins as the story of experience, experience as it exposes the limits of cultural language and challenges the known patterns of community. In this way Cooper’s vision of America’s founding era builds upon the strongest imaginative traditions of his culture.

Indeed, among the most telling clues to an index of the storytelling imagination in early America is the fact that—in the two generations between the end of the war and the establishment of a native tradition of
historical romance—no heroic figure or successful battle, no legend that justified resistance through appeals to patriotism or sketches of villainy, could match the pervasive power of and interest in the separate tragic fates of two young British sympathizers, one an accomplished officer and one a civilian woman. Major John André and Miss Jane McCrea may be the two most mysterious ghosts left by the war, if not in their personal histories, at least in their imaginative lives within the American cultural imagination.²⁴

The evolution of their legends and the symbolic roles they play exemplify the interpretive capacities of their social world; their stories are evidence of cultural negotiations with hidden history, expressions of an emergent communal identity through figures of irreconcilable ambiguity and events of irreclaimable loss.²⁵ Both André, Benedict Arnold's British liaison, and McCrea, who chose her Tory lover over all social principles, were killed among ambiguous circumstances on the heavily contested grounds of the Hudson River Valley. Both of their stories were immediate sensations not only throughout the colonies and Britain but into Europe as well; yet both were essentially Loyalist sympathizers whose chance misfortune left them tragic but incidental human casualties of war.

As the British General Henry Clinton's agent chosen to receive Arnold's West Point intelligence, André was captured “within our lines” (as George Washington apparently reported to the trial committee) returning by land to the British encampment at New York. He had taken on “an assumed character,” was dressed “in a disguised habit, with a pass under a feigned name,” and carried Arnold's notes “concealed upon him.”²⁶ He was hung as a spy on October 2, 1780. Even during the ten-day interval between his capture and his death, André began to take hold of the public's sentimental imagination. Pleas for mercy came from all sides, with rapid, impassioned intensity, and in his last days, André's own words and actions fueled the high “romantic interest” that, as Washington Irving later wrote, “was thrown around his memory.”²⁷

There are no last words or records of noble suffering to attend Jane McCrea's memory, nor was anyone there to plead for her life and her honor. Interest in her story too, however, was immediate, pervasive, and sustained well into the nineteenth century. With little evidence or knowledge, countless writers retold the story of the young girl, who, hoping to meet with her fiancé, the British officer David Jones, was instead brutally murdered in the forests near Fort Edward, New York, late in July of 1777.

These are the types of legends that had been stirring most powerfully in the years leading up to the development of the historical romance in Cooper's America, and in their ambiguity and terror, no less than in their capacity for romance, they are the imaginative nourishment of *The Spy.*
The persistent interest in the deeply ambiguous legends of John André and Jane McCrea throughout the nineteenth century attests to the early and sustained cultural workings of these challenges to American storytelling, to a historical imagination focused on the renegotiation of the boundaries of communal knowledge based especially on the experiences of lived history. From their earliest appearances in literary and historical texts, the legends of André and McCrea spoke not only to the tragic private losses inflicted by the motion of the emergent culture but also to the sheer power of private, unknowable histories in the shaping process itself. André’s image haunted American forests to suggest the frightening permeability of boundaries and the tremendous authority latent in privately held military secrets. His image later came to invoke the losses inherent in cultural independence and questions regarding America’s future relations with Europe. In her death, Jane McCrea warned of the dangers of British seduction and the savagery of the American wilderness; she later became an emblem of the threats to home, family, and community unleashed through the energies of the Revolution and believed to be all too rampant in the young republic. Both legends highlight the ultimate limits of civil control; both represent fragmented life histories, stories of knowledge and experience irrevocably lost yet endlessly productive of cultural imaginings.

Fears of revolutionary violence done to the domestic and civil orders had not been resolved by independence. Despite colonial victory, many writers recalled that the war “relentlessly tore asunder” the “thousand ties of affection” by which family and community life long had been sustained. Even in the political realm, it had taken no time at all for voices to emerge claiming that “the enchanting sound of Liberty” had somehow fallen prey to an “infection”; “the weakness and inefficiency of the existing Government,” Timothy Dwight lamented in 1801, had ironically “been fashioned in the wild moments of enthusiasm, and founded on visionary ideas of patriotism, [and yet] became also a new and most distressing source of universal perplexity.” Inextricably fusing the best and worst of America, these anxieties, broadly considered, generated a need for cultural symbols that would work toward utopia by drawing symbols from the “still valid past” and claiming them as “ambiguously fit for the future.” Such symbols thus defy the limits of time, history, and representation, while anchoring the imagination to these categories. In so doing they transform the “cultural surplus” of past and present anxiety into a mechanism of the new national imagination and its anticipations of future cultural forms.

By mid-century the artist Horatio Greenough would write to William Cullen Bryant, “I wish to erect a monument which shall record on the same spot—the treason of Arnold—the capture and death of André and
the fate of Capt’n N. Hale. I believe this idea may take a form exceedingly
significant of our system, highly expressive of our democratic ethics—
& a caution to egotistical intrigue.”31 That monument—a spiraling cultural
story of disorder, danger, and the optimism of national pride—would never
be constructed, but as a shape toward which the American historical imag-
ination was tending in the nineteenth century, it might be figured first in
the circulating stories of two of the most ambiguous martyrs of the revo-
lution and then (quite differently) in the narrative dynamics of *The Spy.*

**THE MASSACRED BRIDE**

In the summer of 1777 Loyalists were advancing with success under the
command of Howe in the south and Burgoyne in the north. Driving
colonists from Canada and the lake regions, Burgoyne’s northern cam-
paign aimed to control the crucial Hudson River valley; this would open
British communication between posts in New York and Canada and
thereby sever New England from the other colonies. Ticonderoga had
fallen easily to the British, and with Albany only seventy miles away, Bur-
goyn e seemed destined for unprecedented conquest. But by midautumn, a
series of reversals so shocking had occurred that Burgoyne and his troops
had surrendered at Saratoga, while France began the process of forging an
alliance with independent America. “Tho’ our affairs, for some days past,
have worn a dark and gloomy aspect,” Washington had predicted to Major
General Philip Schuyler on July 22, “I yet look forward to a fortunate and
happy change. I trust General Burgoyne’s Army will meet, sooner or later
an effectual check, and . . . the success he has had, will precipitate his ruin.”
These were “critical” times, Washington emphasized, “big with important
events.”32 It is no accident that this crucial turning point in the war pro-
vided the culture with one of its most popular legends, yet it remains a sur-
prise that—of all of the happenings in New York during those few
months—the one event to capture the public imagination most passion-
ately was the random death of a young woman who was purportedly in
love with a British officer.

The story of Jane McCrea’s death “was told throughout the continent
with the rapidity of lightning.”33 “In the history of the Revolutionary War,”
one writer later remembered, “perhaps no single incident is recorded
which, at the time of its occurrence, created more intense sympathy;” “by
every fireside, in public assemblies, in the national councils, it was told and
re-told”; “it spread still farther, through France, Germany, Italy, and over
all the nations of Europe that recognized the rules of civilized warfare.”34
It even issued in the first book-length narrative to focus completely on an American incident, Michel René Hilliard’s *Miss McCrea: A Novel of the American Revolution* (1784). With every retelling, the story seemed to change. The certainties of the case are few, but a consensus suggests that the McCrea family was divided in loyalties. Jane’s father had died, and Jane was living with her brother’s family (colonial sympathizers) outside of Fort Edward as Burgoyne’s troops approached from the north. At the time of Jane’s death, most citizens of the area (including her family) had removed to safer ground in Albany—why she stayed behind, how, by whom, and under what circumstances she was killed—all of these questions were subjects of conjecture and fertile grounds for romance.

Only a month after the mysterious murder, the American general Horatio Gates announced that Jane had died at the hands of a band of Iroquois employed by Burgoyne, and in his letter of remonstrance to the British commander, he cast Jane to play an exalted symbolic role: “[T]he miserable fate of Miss McCrea was particularly aggravated by her being dressed to meet her promised husband; but [instead] she met her murderers employed by you.” It proved to be a brilliant strategy. Everyone who heard the tale—from the editor of London’s *Annual Register* to readers of Patriot newspapers—abhorred such a savage violation of innocence. The British press “loudly condemned and reprobated” such policies of war that seemed to forget that this was essentially “a civil contest.” If their “own government . . . could call [on] such auxiliaries” as the accused Indians, perhaps the public had been deceived—perhaps British policy had not been, “as they said, . . . to subdue but to exterminate, a people whom they affected to consider, and pretended to reclaim as subjects.” The metaphor was strengthened for the British by a common belief that Jane’s father had been loyal to the crown.

Patriot presses circulated the story at once: It “passed through all the papers of the continent, and, . . . being retouched by the hand of more than one master, excited a peculiar degree of sensibility.” By 1847 George Lippard looked back to “the simple History of David Jones and [Jane] M’Crea” as the answer to all complaints “of the destitution of Legend, Poetry, [and] Romance” in America: “[T]ell me, did you ever read a tradition of England, or France, or Italy, or Spain, or any land under the Heavens, that might, in point of awful tragedy, compare [to this event]?” Lippard’s version has a long pretext in the American storytelling imagination, from Gates’s letter through the transformative lenses of countless narrative and poetic renderings.

To Gates’s inflammatory imagery of the massacred bride, Burgoyne responded with great indignation; he was “struck with horror” by the
action, and he “positively denied” the American account. Gates’s letter, Burgoyne insisted, was the product of the “rhapsodies of fiction and calumny”—and so it almost certainly was, but seemingly nothing could halt the generative power of the tale’s fragmented facts. Little was certain about Jane’s death, but in that very uncertainty were the most legible of civil terrors; the sharp polarities that were invoked made possible seemingly endless variations and embellishments. Whether the home where Jane was staying had been invaded or not; whether Officer Jones sent for Jane, intending to meet and marry her or not; whether Jane was mistakenly killed in a struggle between two Indian chiefs or not—she remained a violated ideal: the home life as set against wilderness and wartime savagery; love as set against death; innocence as set against violence.

These are the symbolic terms of most accounts of Jane’s death. The players in the drama are two bands of Indians, Jane, Officer Jones, and British and colonial troops; the roles they play shift dramatically but still within certain bounds. Accounts of the Indians’ collective role range from one of honor and good intention (they may have conveyed a letter from Jones and offered Jane safe passage to the British encampment) to full-scale violence (they may have killed her with a hatchet, taking her scalp to the British camp to taunt her lover). For his part, too, Jones could be played as either tragic hero or treacherous villain; he may have sent Jane a letter insisting that she remain safely in the house and promising to come for her, and after her death he may have deserted the war or died of grief. Or he may have seduced her and later been hoping to escape her affections as she sought him at his camp.

The role of the other British soldiers was also amply detailed by Patriot presses: The Pennsylvania Evening Post propagated the image of Jane “scalped . . . in the sight of those very men who are continually preaching up their tender mercies and the forbearance of their more than Christian King”; “the brutal scene,” the paper reported on August 12, 1777, “was transacted by four Indians, under the cover of 300 British regulars, drawn up at a small distance.” Further, that appalling act had been made into a torturous spectacle for “an advanced party of Americans” held at bay by the British. In one of the most significant variations of the legend, however, Jane is killed not by Indians or even in the presence of the British, but mistakenly by the fire of pursuing American troops. Whether kidnapped or accompanying the Indians voluntarily, in this version she is seen leaving the settlement in their company, and the Americans shoot intending to save her.

Despite the flexibility of the legend of Jane McCrea, particular possible interpretations remain unspoken. There would be no sustained interest
in condemning Major André as a duplicitous Royalist scheming the downfall of Patriot ideals, and so too Jane McCrea’s memory curiously avoids two of the darkest patriotic possibilities. On the one hand, her own morals might have been questioned: What was she doing—an unmarried woman in the forests of America, apart from her family, traveling to her British lover’s military camp? Second, the legend claims that either Indians (in savagery) or Americans (in a tragic accident of war) killed Jane: Why had no legend emerged to place the deadly weapon in the hands of one of those many complicitous British?

Even without acquiescence to the easy allegorical answers these questions imply, it remained clear that the many and varied threats to civil order in America’s forests were somehow instigated by the British and demanded a response from the colonies. While the London press may have seized upon the image with the fear that it represented a British policy of colonial extermination, the American imagination seemed to ignore this most propagandistic interpretation. Instead, the reigning metaphor—which indefinitely extended the imaginative play of the story—was that of a British policy of seduction. Whether the terms of seduction were love and the promise of marriage or simply an insidious exploitation, the prey was innocence and the consequences were dire.44

Like many romances that followed, Jane’s story openly evoked fears that as “the tide of public indignation was rising higher and higher,” “the current of domestic happiness” lost strength in proportion.45 The dramatic function of her legend was to play out exactly this dynamic and to recast these two structures of community into a pattern of resolute interdependence. In its cast of an innocent girl and a British seducer, Jane’s story was familiar to American audiences conditioned by the eighteenth-century European sensibilities of Pierre Marivaux and Samuel Richardson. The seduction plot took American form in the 1790s with popular novels such as Susanna Rowson’s Charlotte Temple (1791; Philadelphia, 1794), Hannah Webster Foster’s The Coquette (1797), and the anonymous Amelia, or the Faithless Briton (1798).

Certainly it was not the novelty of Jane’s story that gave it such a potent cultural function, but rather its very familiarity made possible particular structural changes in the American story. Traditionally stories of this sort set domestic happiness as a separate ideal, against the progress of war. In the story of Amelia, for example, a soldier nursed back to health by a young girl and her father “conceive[s] the infamous project of violating the purity and tranquility of [that same] family,” and the author explains further that “the success of the contending forces was alternately fatal to the peace and order of domestic life”: “[T]he objects of policy or ambition are . . . accom-
plished at the expense of private ease and prosperity; while the triumph of arms, like the funeral festivity of a savage tribe, serves to announce some recent calamity—the waste of property, or the fall of families.” What was new in Jane’s story, then, was the concerted effort to unify the ideals of domestic happiness and colonial victory.

To Jane’s America, the notion of colonial independence was at best new, and like the legend of her ill-fated life in the wilds, it suggested the very same dangers of self-imposed vulnerability. Once Jane had been claimed as an American symbol, it became possible not only to dismantle the Loyalist metaphor of the ungrateful child rebelling against the mother country, but also to recast the very entrance of British troops onto the American continent as an act of rape. In Hilliard’s *Miss McCrea* this metaphor is clear in the manner of Captain Belton, the character in the role of David Jones. Here, this British officer moves beyond seduction, as he writes from London to proclaim his love to Jane with striking aggression: “I am returning under the banners of General Burgoyne to conquer your country and you in order to possess you forever.” Through these terms, the enormous symbolic capacities of this essentially private story of love and death expanded to address the relative attractions and dangers of a new national identity. All confusion aside, the legend taught that Jane’s seduction by a British officer eventuated in her death. Further, the American cultural imagination was seduced in turn by the romantic story of an ill-fated Tory love affair.

Jane’s story was so uncertain because it was truly her own, not planned, witnessed, or authorized. Perhaps it was so appealing to the romantic imagination because it was a story of the strength of private feelings to the exclusion of social concerns. But as the American imagination made the story its own, the dangers of this most intense subjectivity were obviated in remarkably pointed interpretive reversals. In the developing American tradition, it became popular to suggest a design behind the killing and to cite “authorities” for the truth of a particular version; in both cases, the attempt was to bring the private life story fully into the public realm. However, among the cited authorities, the only possible witness, Jane’s neighbor Mrs. McNeil, was invoked for contradictory stories. Other presumed experts ranged from Jane’s distant nephew to Samuel Standish, whose authority is based solely on the reputation of his own lineage (he was the “ancestor in a direct line” of Miles Standish, “the famous military leader of the first Pilgrims at Plymouth”). The result was a story shaped by and for communal life but empowered strictly through the inviolable secrecy of its subject.

Early public versions of the legend assumed that the murderer’s hand was that of an Indian, and though the British themselves were not accused
of lawless murder, Burgoyne’s policies were imaginatively reshaped in order to provide a fitting contextual design. Just over a month before the incident, on June 21, 1777, Burgoyne had given a public speech to his employed Iroquois in which he attempted to forbid excessive violence. He outlined “the vast differences between a war waged against an entire nation, and the present, in which the faithful were intermixed with rebels, and traitors with friends.” Though the text of the speech was extensively read and known, analyses of its content and effects ranged widely. James Thacher recalled that “Burgoyne’s manifesto” actually caused “innocent persons [to be] made victims of savage barbarity, by means of the tomahawk and scalping,” and later Patriot historians agreed. The “employment of hordes of wild and inhuman savages” was “the most base feature of Burgoyne’s plan,” and it was no surprise that “those hell-hounds of cruelty” would kill the innocent Jane; in fact, they argued, her death was “the legitimate fruit of such a policy as that of Burgoyne.”

Posited as part of a larger narrative in the American versions, the event had not only a pretext in Burgoyne’s June speech but also an unfolding series of results—most immediately in the reversal of fortunes for the two armies that summer in New York. With both cause and effects traced into the public realm, the developing legend drew the incident away from the terms of privacy and into the widest arena of the growth of national strength. Once the war was over, the ultimate failure of Burgoyne’s northern campaign appeared to have been an essential turning point; his own letters confirmed that import as well. A standard patriotic refrain thus claimed that “the blood of this unfortunate girl . . . was not shed in vain. Armies sprang up from it. Her name passed as a note of alarm, along the banks of the Hudson: it was a rallying word among the Green Mountains of Vermont.”

This young woman with no expressed commitment to America—and more than likely deeply tied to the Loyalist cause—became a martyr to the “renaissance of patriotism, a reawakening of the public spirit, an arousing of the lion-heart in a dominant population, with the ultimate result of the birth of a new nation”; from her grave grew “the flowers and blossoms of progress.” Hers was the most timely “sacrifice to the drooping spirit of Liberty.” This sacrifice issued on one side in reinspired patriotism and on the other, in lost support for Burgoyne—including defections of some of his Indian troops, now monitored with a harshly watchful eye. Perhaps most significantly, the legends recalled, this event changed the military map of largely ambivalent New York, for “the murder of Miss McCrea resounded throughout the land.” In response to the news of the incident, many of the uncommitted “flew to arms [with the Americans] to defend
their families and firesides.” Though they would have to leave behind “their shrieking wives and children,” it became clear through the legend that the colonial soldiers could fulfill their domestic duties only by rushing to the aid of Jane’s memory, “hastening to the glorious field, where LIBERTY, heaven-born goddess, was to be bought for blood.” No longer believing in the safety of neutrality, colonists in the New York area were seized by an “immediate concern.” A “general conviction [spread] that a vigorous determined opposition was the only alternative for the preservation of their property, their children and their wives. . . . An army [to preserve civil and domestic peace] was speedily poured forth from the woods and mountains.”

Jane McCrea’s death, wrote David Ramsay, thus stood as the ultimate and pointed rebuke to Loyalist claims of the violated filial bond inherent in colonial revolution and so was the strongest possible antidote to objections that the Revolutionary cause stood against domestic tranquility and happiness. In military terms it was an “almost irrelevant happening.” However, the American cultural imagination had quickly transformed “chance into destiny.” In turn, the bounded symbolic polarities that this death evoked gave the legend a shaping role in the evolving cultural imagination. In many ways the story came to be a central text in “a cleverly manipulated and highly successful Patriot propaganda campaign.”

However, insofar as the terms of the event provided America with a different vocabulary for its experience and its story, there was something substantially more than a propaganda war at stake. The extraordinary power accorded to this single private tragedy supplied a resonant life of personal experience and romance to a cause that so many civilians in America had feared was only an empty “myth of liberty,” even an impediment to all chivalric ideals of love and honor; it did so moreover without representing the costs of American military strength as the loss of American family life. In these terms the legend of Jane McCrea was a symbolic construction that countered any deep sense of American loss precisely by recognizing these fears and making their resolution dependent upon devotion to the national cause; all of these interpretive reversals were contained within the highly charged figure of one lost (British) life.

A COUNTRY IN RUINS

Early in the war the stance of neutrality had been a means of preserving those treasures said to be desecrated in the death of Jane McCrea—family, home, and property. By 1777, in both the cultural imagination and in lived
experience, the meaning of neutrality had begun to shift, or rather, it began
to take on paradoxical meanings where it had earlier signified the very
absence of meaning. Where neutrality was preserved after this incident,
the threats lurking around and within that position would be all the more
evident. In fact, as the war continued, neutrality came to suggest not peace
or safety but latent danger. Investigating the living conditions of uncom-
mitted residents in this region, the Congress of 1777 concluded that a
“general face of waste and devastation” had “spread over a rich and once
well cultivated and well inhabited country.”

Those decimated homes and families were not only fearful but also
feared, for their capacity to harbor people and intelligence aiding the
British cause. Acts of law regarding the neutrals were debated, passed, and
revised in New York between 1777 and 1778; commissions were appointed
to “detect and defeat . . . all Conspiracies which may be formed in this state
against the liberties of America.” Silent neutrals were brought before pan-
els to swear patriotism; they were generally regarded as persons with
“poverty of spirit and an undue attachment to property,” dangerously
unknowable and perhaps “ungratefully and insidiously . . . by artful mis-
representations and a subtle dissemination of doctrines[,] fears[,] and
apprehensions [not only] false in themselves and injurious to the Ameri-
can cause, [but also] seduc[ing] certain weak minded persons” to Loyalist
ends; in short, the neutrals were widely perceived to be “evil” in “example”
and “practice,” “acting a part so unmanly and ignominious.”

While the neutral property holders seemed quietly subversive to the
ideals of the Patriot cause, the neutral ground itself seemed to come alive
with a character of its own that was indiscriminately dangerous. As one
historian recalled it,

the Neutral Ground . . . was infested by two gangs of marauders, the off-
spring of civil commotion, respectively denominated Cow-boys and
Skinners . . . [Inhabitants] were exposed to the depredations of both par-
ties, . . . often actually plundered, and always liable to . . . calamity. They
feared everybody whom they saw, and loved nobody. . . .at was, appar-
tently, the only passion by which they were animated. The power of voli-
tion seemed to have deserted them. . . . Their houses . . . were . . . scenes
of desolation. . . . The world was motionless and silent.

Draining the people of all forms of expression, from speech to volition to
movement, the neutral ground ironically seemed to be the place of the
most intense fervor of revolution, a place where passions had spun madly
beyond cognition or control, seemingly beyond the agency of individuals.
In 1777 even Robert R. Livingston—who had been a member of the committee to prepare the Declaration and later would serve as secretary of foreign affairs—described this sense of life in his home state of New York. Even though he was one of the guiding hands of the cause, he too felt that he was “swimming with a stream it is impossible to stem,” yielding “to the Torrent” and abandoning all reservations about the war in the best possible effort to help “direct its course.”

Fully infused with the spirit of war, the Hudson River Valley no longer provided peace or protection. By late in 1780 the neutral ground was by all accounts a place of misery rather than of cowardly hidden privilege. James Thacher’s *Military Journal* recalls the “abandoned . . . farms” with “rotting fruit in the orchards”; the “rich and fertile” country had been deserted as Tories escaped to New York and Patriots ventured to still more remote interior lands. “[T]he privileges which their neutrality ought to secure them,” wrote Thacher, are negated by “the ravages and insults of infamous banditti”: “[I]t now has the marks of a country in ruins.”

The latent violence of the neutral ground threatened passing soldiers of both armies. Like the residents of the area, these soldiers faced very real dangers of vigilante killings or even simply mob robbery—with death in the name of no cause at all. In March of 1781 Thacher wrote again of widespread fear of the “Cowboys” and “Skinners” on the neutral ground: “This is to be considered a very hazardous situation; it requires the utmost vigilance to guard against a surprise.” This was bipartisan violence, and its horrors prompted participants of any ideological cast to recognize an essential difference between political ideals and the terrorist acts spawned on either side.

On July 4, 1781, the New York publisher James Rivington—perhaps the most notorious and powerful civilian Loyalist on the continent—lambasted American leadership for the abhorrent conditions of life along the banks of the Hudson River. Only a small number of New Yorkers, he said, were patriots; those “consist only of such as despair of escaping the vengeance of their countrymen,” and (he continued) in the madness of that despair, they “abandon themselves to all the cruelty of cowardice.” He argued that the root cause of the “miserable condition[s]” there was not the marauding of both sides, but a deeply conceived fear of the secrets hidden in the region, which was at once the coveted prize of both armies and a resistant, ideologically uncharted, terrain: “Alive to suspicion, the general consideration [of Americans] is about spies and harborers of spies, and in the extremity of their terrors, the slightest preparations pass with the tyrants in office for demonstrable proof.” No longer did the neutrals affront both armies only by their comfort and property but now
also by their invisible powers, the knowledge they may easily have absorbed simply through their presence on a tract of land resounding with the hushed tones of military secrets and the unspoken horrors of private tragedy.

It was on this neutral ground—just over three years after the death of Jane McCrea—that Major John André assumed the living form of devastating secrecy. This time, as legends would tell, not an innocent girl but the sacred trust of a virtuous cause would be violated. When André emerged from the woods, becoming visible to American forces, there could be no doubt of his fate. Like a specter that comes only in a dream, André had to be eradicated at that moment and in that world, or else he and the silent secrets he (for a moment) embodied would surely return in another guise. André’s story did not offer the sentiments of love gone wrong; it was instead the haunting tale of a Loyalist officer who had carried within his boot papers capable of shattering the possibilities of independence. The legend proved seductive even so: The effusion of love and praise for André from the American imagination seemed utterly unguarded.

**THE GENTLEMAN SPY**

“Buoy’d above the terror of death, by the consciousness of a life devoted to honorable pursuits,” Major André wrote from captivity to General Washington, requesting to die the honorable death of a soldier rather than the ignominious death of a spy. At his trial too, André had spoken to redeem his honor. Denying the motive of “apprehension for [his own] safety,” André stated that he hoped “to secure [him]self from an imputation of having assumed a mean character, for treacherous purposes or self-interest.” He rightly believed that his “condition in life” and “the principles that actuated [him]” would evoke the esteem of his American captors, and he knew that he could produce letters to prove that he had been only “involuntarily an imposter.”

Though André’s words would not save his life, they enshrined a virtuous portrait of his character. Both Patriot and Loyalist presses quickly circulated the trial documents, laced with partisan commentary. Even his captors esteemed his rank and cultural sophistication; to popular audiences it seemed an unfortunate irony that a man of such nobility should be captured by mercenaries, the Cowboys who roamed the neutral ground. The American troops who held André came to believe that he had “refused to be carried within the American posts” only to find that “the promise made him by Arnold was not observed.” Accordingly, they
treated him well during the days of his captivity, but in the end insisted that the laws of war dictated his death.

After all (as both the colonial forces and later American historians emphasized), the loss of West Point could have literalized—through military and political consequences—the deeply internal wound that the colonials had suffered in the defection of the prominent American general, Benedict Arnold. “No position in America could afford the British greater advantages,” wrote Thacher in his *Military Journal*. West Point “commands the whole extent of country on the Hudson from New York to Canada, and secures a communication between the eastern and southern states.” The *Pennsylvania Packet* conveyed the gravity of the incident by reporting it in an extract from General Nathanael Greene’s formal military orders: “TREASON of the Blackest Dye was yesterday discovered. General Arnold, . . . lost to every sentiment of honor, of public and private obligation, was about to deliver up [West Point] into the hands of the enemy. Such an event must have given the American cause a deadly wound if not a fatal stab.” And so it seemed that the only way that the utter dissolution of the colonial cause had been prevented was in the chance detection of the event, which doomed André but also proved “that the liberties of America are the object of divine protection.” In this context the colonial leaders hoped that André’s execution—though regrettable, since (as even the newspapers reported) he was “one of the most eminent officers and polite men in the British Army”—would offer resounding proof that the forces for independence “are not to be deterred by great menace” and that they are “determined to extirpate [their] enemies one by one, until peace shall be restored.”

The West Point crisis focused both critical and reverential attention on the ethics of colonial principles and on both the integrity and humanity of its leaders. “In every officer,” Frances Wright recalled, there was—potentially—“another Arnold.” All actions would be suspect now, but none more so than the decision to hang André as a spy. From a British perspective Richard Lamb argued that at André’s trial, Generals Greene and Lafayette “thirsted for the blood of the unfortunate victim whom fate had put in their power.” But most of the controversy involved the role of the Commanding General Washington. When “the news of André’s arrest and Arnold’s treason fell like a thunderbolt upon the public ear,” historians recalled, “all hearts turned for relief to the wisdom of Washington.” Correspondingly, later ages turned to his image as they retold and interpreted the event. As the legend developed, it became emphatically necessary from the American perspective to establish both reluctance and control in Washington’s decision. With “the interests of his country at stake,” wrote
Patriot historians, Washington must have seen that “private feelings”—his own, as well as André’s—“must be sacrificed.”

Indeed, David Ramsay and others would emphasize the cultural loss in paeans that echoed André’s own words: Stating and restating that his life was “stained with no action that gave [him] remorse,” André fashioned himself not only as a cultivated man of the arts but also as a man of deep moral values. Patriot historians believed him, and without self-conscious irony, they praised “his fidelity, . . . his high ideas of candor, and his abhorrence of duplicity.” The mission had been discovered, they claimed, because of that simple honesty which betrayed André to his captors. The earliest Loyalist pamphlets on the subject had made the same claims, and they explicitly contrasted André’s image to that of their villain, George Washington, whose character, they argued, would now be “fixed [with] an indelible stain . . . —a stain which no time can efface.” He would be remembered forever as “the unrelenting MURDERER of Major André.” It was part of the cultural work of the American legend to efface that stain without assault on André’s purity.

Washington had not met directly with André during his captivity, nor did he respond to (much less grant) André’s last request for an honorable soldier’s death; from these events Loyalists would infer the callousness of a man motivated by policy alone. Washington’s silence, however, provided American legends with alternative possibilities: They imagined their commander—so deeply distraught as to understand the need for isolation and meditation, in the throes of a crisis both personal and military—still successfully enduring, steeling himself against the ineffable tragedy of war. “Washington’s hand,” Patriot writers contended, “could scarcely command his pen, when signing the warrant for the execution of Major André.” The fine character of the British officer had “melted [Washington’s] angel soul.” This proved at once his compassion and its ultimate (safe) subordination to his reason and principles.

Had André not been so personally and symbolically appealing, the story of the event would have been simple. In military terms the Americans could say that the net effect of the West Point plot was a clear colonial victory: With the loss of both André and Arnold, the British “exchangen[ed] one of their best officers for the worst man in the American army.” André, however, had quickly ascended to be “a shining model of all that was excellent.” He was a model gentleman and suitor, as Alexander Hamilton noted, when he wrote to his fiancée, Elizabeth Schuyler, “I wished myself possessed of André’s accomplishments for your sake.” He seemed to have all that America lacked, in his “industrious cultivation” of an “elegant taste for literature and the fine arts.” Thus his death was per-
ceived not simply as a loss to Britain, but also as an indication of cultural sacrifice, an encoded fear of the inevitable losses that would attend American independence. The passing of two generations between the execution and the emergence of the historical romance in America did nothing to appease the controversy. Richard Snowden's “scripture style” History expressed a sentiment common not only to American historians but also to novelists, poets, and dramatists in 1823: “Even the scribe, at this late hour, hath caught the soft contagion; and is not ashamed to acknowledge, that the fate of André, entered deep into his soul.”

As the event passed into American legend, it maintained an ambiguity of tone, celebration mixed with caution. The loss of André became an emblem of “the fatal fruit of [Arnold’s] treachery.” Writers of Cooper’s era were caught by a sense that “there is a moral that breathes from the tale.” Only in the immediate sense had both Arnold and America escaped the consequences of the plot; the legend of André taught that each “midnight negotiation . . . carried on in darkness among the trees” had costs and effects for both personal and cultural history. At the time of Arnold’s treason, David Ramsay writes, the American army was in a particularly “distressed state” that promoted deep fears of “the contagious nature of treachery.” And so it was that this one plot could suggest to the American forces a “boundless field of possible contingencies”—including rumors of other high-ranking traitors. Perhaps more importantly, however, the tale of André revealed a broad fear of the hidden corners of subjectivity, its alarming power to resist or even betray the nascent civil order, and the fundamental inadequacy of modes of communication (both personal and military) to neutralize such power.

By 1798 William Dunlap’s André would already display many of the cultural anxieties that the legend had begun to serve. The perspective of Dunlap’s play is conciliatory and patriotic: Here André is clearly a sentimental hero, yet he remorsefully acknowledges his wrongs; the central conflict is thus cast as the insoluble human division between reason and passion, and accordingly the play gives no stage time to evil but only to the problems of ignorance and misunderstanding. As the play opens, George Washington is alone and silent, “wrapt in meditation deep” as he plans “the welfare of our war-worn land,” while his officers find themselves “assail’d” by “many strange tales and monstrous rumors” of an incident of high-level treason. As knowledge of the case comes to light, Washington—after the obligatory sentimental hesitation—insists on the necessity of André’s death. Within the drama this execution is necessary to uphold the order of all human life—to stem the flood of ills, which else . . . would pour uncheck’d upon the sickening world, sweeping away all trace of civil life”
Nevertheless, this order comes at the high cost of immediate social distress. Fears of retaliatory killings prompt one American officer’s wife to “kneel [and pray], till André, pardoned, ensures to [her] a husband [and to her children] a father” (WD, 36). Later, André’s beloved Honora ends in madness as she cries that André’s death will be “murder of the blackest dye” (WD, 60)—the language of her despair echoing Greene’s announcement of the treason and thus equating Washington’s decision with the villainy of Arnold’s betrayal itself.

From Shays’ Rebellion to the XYZ affair, serious threats to domestic and international order had been launched during the Federalist era, and to those threats, too, Presidents Washington and Adams had been firm in their resolve. However, with the father of the country retired to private life and a new century on the horizon, Dunlap’s America again faced uncertain dangers. Dunlap’s play attests to fears of these divisive energies and—through the symbolic terms of the legend—expands the issues to include considerations of the place of America’s new national culture in the larger world.

Two of the play’s characters are at least as interested in their own theories of cultural development as they are in the fate of André. Seward, a low-ranking American soldier, seizes every opportunity to muse on the happy prospects of American isolation: It would be “heaven,” he imagines, if “midway between” the “sever’d worlds” of America and the other continents, “barriers, all impassable to man” could stand, preventing any contact “till either side had lost all memory of the other” (WD, 23). However, M’Donald, an American officer and the embodiment of reason, insistently envisions America as a repository for all that is best in natural and human creation. Waves from the Atlantic Ocean “bathe” “Columbia’s shores,” while they “chafe” and erode the European and African continents (WD, 23). America seems a “new world,” “a resting spot for man, if he can stand firm in his place while Europe howls around him” (WD, 11), and in these winds and waves, he believes, the best of the Old World will find its way to American soil. Only those with “ignorance curst,” M’Donald insists, would disdain the treasures of “enriching commerce” and “blest science” that may be acquired from “Europe’s knowledge” (WD, 24).

M’Donald never names André as one of those Old World treasures, destined for rest in America, but certainly within the context of the play, the legend of the incident is one such gift to American culture. Replacing the chaotic swirl of the “strange tales” and “monstrous rumors” of treason opening the play is M’Donald’s vision of a true American legend of reason and virtue—a vision expounded in the closing monologue: The sadness and dismay of the moment of André’s death, along with the sentimental
cult of personality attending it, will be transformed by “the children of Columbia” into an understanding of the past and fortitude for the future. “In times to come,” M’Donald predicts, America’s children who “lisp the tale” will be dissuaded from the truth by “no foreign force, no European influence”; “the tongue of eloquence” will not be “awe[d] . . . to silence,” and the story will be so fully and universally known that there will be no possibility of “misstat[ing]” the honorable American response to this early crisis of character.

From the frantic, disorderly imagination of the Revolutionary years, the enlightened reason will read the story of America’s virtue: This is the resolution of Dunlap’s play, framed as it is by the fearsome rumors of the opening scene and the confident synthesis of M’Donald’s closing speech. Despite its formulaic quality, the resolution offers a powerful image of transformations in the cultural imagination. The play’s innovation is the record of a brief interval of time during which the living André and the legend André coexisted; thus Dunlap dramatizes the entry of historical romance into the cultural imagination. In M’Donald’s vision America achieves a strength that cannot be endangered by the world at large; this identity evolves out of an imagination focused on the sorting and careful use of the best raw materials to arrive on Columbia’s shores. Sorting, in the case of Major André, necessitates execution, the obliteration of threat, while careful use entails the preservation of the residual imaginative power derived from his life, which in turn would provide the sustenance of the American storytelling imagination.

In Dunlap’s drama, André’s story works metonymically to illustrate the dynamics of the communal imagination within a new culture deeply unsure of the parameters of its identity. In raising the stakes of André to include both the lived history of the event and the beginnings of the cultural history of the legend, Dunlap emphasizes that in America both life history and imagined history are created from—and made powerful by—their enactment of the uncertainty of boundaries. André’s mission and capture had been, literally, all about boundaries—the “dark and secret machinations” that seemingly pervade only the ambiguous Neutral Ground (WD, 6); the unknowable edges of this darkness through which one can pass unaware into enemy territory; the essential power—extending to life itself—of these borders, even if (or perhaps because) they are simply products of communal imaginings. So too was the legend of André about renegotiating boundaries within the emerging stories of American community. In this sense the residual power of the story had its haunting effects, including the measurable anxiety attending virtually all sympathetic portraits of André in early-nineteenth-century America. Facing
death “with unflinching nerve and steady eye,” André’s composure—as it was recorded in words and paintings alike—seemed an almost eerie reproach to his captors, and in his tie to Arnold, he was a reminder, too, of the possibility of threats from within Patriot lines and so of the impossibility of full, ideological control.\footnote{100}

Compiling a set of forgotten tales about the war, the New York editor Oliver Bunce mused on the near loss of Nathan Hale’s memory and the persistence of André’s: “There is something more than natural in this, if philosophy could find it out.”\footnote{101} A few lonely voices lamented the fact that “so much mawkish sentiment has been expended” on André while Patriot spies were too often forgotten.\footnote{102} Hannah Adams and Jedidiah Morse complained that, despite an almost universal love for André, historians of the Revolution had left Nathan Hale “unnoticed, . . . it is scarcely known that such a character existed.”\footnote{103} As Bruce Rosenberg notes, however, “[m]ost of the nation felt that, compared to André, Hale was a spear carrier.”\footnote{104} In fact America’s preference for the legend of André was part of a cultural reflex essential to nourishing a new story for a nation coming to understand itself (in James Thacher’s words) as “a country in ruins.” In this expansive (and troubling) form, the developing cultural story of America became an agent of mediation between the violent and disordered experience of lived history and the highest ideals of the romantic imagination. It was not that the legends would justify the history, nor that history would avenge the legends—though both are implied dimensions of the cultural work to be done. More importantly, the legends and the history would seduce and resist one another to the end, both in the utter incapacity of the culture to absorb or even to bring to light all of its secrets into a finished public identity and in the insistent refusal of the subjective imagination to surrender its knowledge and passions.

The legends worked—empowered a national imagination and found sustenance in community life—because they were stories of the very life of paradox, its appeal and its dangers. Though in some clear sense, Jane McCrea and John André belonged to the British cause, in their deaths they became creative agents of the American cultural imagination. When the spoils of the war were divided, America had no claim to possess these two martyrs, and for precisely this reason they became, potentially (and then actually), among the most vital symbols of culture. Utterly resistant to full appropriation, these two legends would carry with them a preserved dynamic potential; outside of both the security and the restrictions of
known cultural patterns, these stories had tremendous capacities for sym-
monic representation, yet for the same reason they remained in a volatile
relationship to the culture. In the emerging process of storytelling in
America, the deaths of Jane McCrea and John André contributed enor-
mous shaping powers that Cooper incorporates and substantially revises in
The Spy. Very much in the tradition of these two legends, the tale of the
Spy depends essentially on the unsolved tension among his possible iden-
tities—the idealized, the feared, the rumored, and the experiential; in each
case, this tension speaks for the deeply disordered experiences of Ameri-
can origins, transmuted into figures for the (often dangerous and always
alluring) power of cultural secrecy.