The Ambivalent Anglophobia of American Travelers in Europe, 1783-1820

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Early in 1824 the Anglo-Irish writer Maria Edgeworth sat down to write a letter of thanks to the New York educator John Griscom. In 1818-19 Griscom had spent a year traveling throughout northern Italy, France, Belgium, Scotland, Ireland, and England. He published his letters several years after his return. Edgeworth wrote not to thank Griscom for any personal favor done for or kind words to her, but rather to express gratitude for something missing in Griscom's travelogue. Edgeworth found Griscom's book remarkable for its "freedom from national jealousy." Nationalist prejudice, she hastened to add, marred not only most American accounts of England, but English writings about the republic across the sea. It was essential, Edgeworth wrote, that this "invidious & degrading spirit cease on both sides of the Atlantic!"

She discerned the hopeful beginnings of such a trend in England, where she reported "It is now becoming *fashionable* indeed in London to *speak* well of Americans." She hoped that Griscom's book was evidence that such a thaw was beginning in the States. It was essential that such a movement commence, she believed. No one begrudged Americans the right to trumpet their "talents & triumphs in arts & sciences," and even exaggeration could be written off as the "admirable weakness" of a healthy patriotism. But, Edgeworth warned, "the moment any one nation or one world begins to deprecate the other, indulgence & sympathy ceases."[1] In his *Year in Europe,* Griscom had voiced these sentiments precisely, which is almost certainly why Edgeworth seized the opportunity provided by a visiting Philadelphian, soon to sail home,

[1] Maria Edgeworth to [John Griscom], March 4, 1824, folder 82, Henry Lyman Koopman Collection (Manuscripts Department, Hay Library, Brown University, Providence, R.I.). Edgeworth addressed the letter to the author of *Travels in Europe*, but internal evidence reveals Griscom to be the addressee.

to scribble her hasty letter. While riding in a carriage from London to Derby early in 1819, one of Griscom's passengers commenced a wholesale denigration of American manners and morals. Griscom learned that this otherwise "civil and good natured" gentleman based his conclusions on a two-month sojourn to eastern New York during which "he had been introduced to no society, except that of dealers." Griscom reflected that his companion's sentiments were hardly exceptional. Because Britons visited the United States with "inflated expectations of wealth, independence, and purity of morals," and had "few introductions to persons of respectability," it was not surprising that they not only became disenchanted but returned home to "write and publish observations replete with unfairness, if not with the grossest calumnies."

Though his "feelings were somewhat roused" by his co-passenger, Griscom made the exceptional decision to repress them, and become an anthropologist instead. The Englishman's response to American conditions was not surprising given the vastly different social conditions and political cultures in Britain and the States. "We ought not, perhaps, to expect, that the freedom of thinking and acting, so universally enjoyed in the United States, and which must eventually give a decided tone to our national manners, should not produce, in some instances, an effect unfriendly to the courtesies and refinements of polished life," he concluded. Faced with a shocking instance of national prejudice, John Griscom elected not to take an eye for an eye. Instead, he used the confrontation to make an appeal for Anglo-American *rapproachment.* "It is time for every honest man," Griscom declared, "in both countries, to set his face against every thing that tends to oppose the temper of mutual forebearance, and that unison of feeling, toward which, the common origin, the common language and literature, the common

sense, and the common welfare of the two nations, have so direct and natural a tendency."[2] Edgeworth and Griscom joined in calling for an end to the self-indulgence of anti-Americanism and Anglophobia so that Britons and Americans could get on with the business of promoting that spirit of improvement that respectable people increasingly identified as the peculiar mission of English-speaking people on both sides of the Atlantic.[3]

Edgeworth feared that a new, virulently nationalist spate of travel accounts would hamper the establishment of such a common front. It is impossible to tell exactly to what strain of Anglophobia Edgeworth was referring. She did not name any particular offenders. Since the Revolution, and particularly after the onset of the Terror in France, hatred of England had emerged as a pervasive feature of American culture.[4] Anglophobia was distributed unevenly, however; it was especially deep among Jeffersonians. John Murrin goes so far as to suggest that Pennsylvania Jeffersonians, perhaps the most passionate England-haters in the new nation, "found in the British menace a satisfactory explanation for nearly everything amiss in America." Considering the timing of her letter, however, Edgeworth probably had in mind the literature of

[2] John Griscom, *A Year in Europe, Comprising a Journal of Observations, in England, Scotland, Ireland, France, Switzerland, The North of Italy, and Holland in 1818 and 1819,* 2 vols. (New York: Collins and Hannay, 1824), II:168-70.

[3] Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York, 2007), chap. 7; Frank Thistlethwaite, *The Anglo-American Connection in the Early Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia, 1959); Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998).

[4] Eran Shalev, "Empire Transformed: Britain in the American Classical Imagination, 1758-1783,"*Early American Studies* 4 (Spring 2006), 112-146; Jennifer Clark, "The War of 1812: American Nationalism and Rhetorical Images of Britain," *War and Society* 12 (1994), 1-26.; David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill, 1997); Stanley Elkins and Eric McKitrick, *The Age of Federalism* (New York, 1993); Ronald L. Hatzenbuehler and Robert L. Ivie, *Congress Declares War: Rhetoric, Leadership, and Partisanship in the Early Republic*(Kent, Ohio, 1983); Andrew W. Robertson, "'Look on this Picture . . . and on *This*!": Nationalism, Localism, and Partisan Images of Otherness in the United States, 1787-1820," *American Historical Review* 106 (Oct., 2001), 1263-80.

the so-called "Paper War," the exchange of nationalist insults traded by the literati of England and the United States, kicked off by a hostile review of Robert Ingersoll's *Inchiquin's Letters* in the January, 1814 issue of the *Quarterly Review.* Lingering ill-feelings, transportation and publishing lags, and domestic political utility conspired to keep this cultural cold war alive well into the 1820s. Referring as she did specifically to a travel account, Edgeworth may well have been referring to the most Anglophobic of American writings on English society and culture, James Kirke Paulding's *A Sketch of Old England,* published in 1822.[5]

A Sketch of Old England is nothing less than a blanket indictment of all things English as well as a denial of the relevance of England for the development of American culture. Paulding accused American travel writers of being taken in by the hype of British superiority, of "acquiescing in the superiority of every thing here, animate and inanimate, moral, political, and intellectual." The American "delusion" of English pre-eminence was doubly damaging, Paulding charged: it "equally tends to nourish a degrading feeling of inferiority on our part, and an offensive arrogance on the part of" the English. Accusing Britons of establishing their reputation for excellence "by the simple expedient of placing every other nation as low as possible in the scale of humanity," Paulding sought to free his countymen from the "trammels of a servile imitation, that will not only fetter the genius of America, but lead to the commission

[5] John M. Murrin, "Escaping Perfidious Albion: Federalism, Fear of Aristocracy, and the Democratization of Corruption in Postrevolutionary America," in Richard K. Matthews, ed., *Virtue, Corruption, and Self-Interest: Political Values in the Eighteenth Century* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 1994), 126. Jennifer Clark, "Poisoned Pens: The Anglo-American Relationship and the Paper War." *Symbiosis: A Journal of Anglo-American Literary Relations* 6 (2002): 45-68; Herbert G. Eldridge, "The Paper War between England and America: The *Inchiquin* Episode." *American Studies* 16 (1982): 49-68; Joseph Eaton, "From Anglophile to Nationalist: Robert Walsh's *An Appeal from the Judgments of Great Britain*," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 132 (April 2008): 141-171.

of political errors, fatal in the end to our freedom and happiness." To do so, Paulding set out to show Americans that "all Englishmen are neither Shakspeares and Miltons in poetry, nor Lockes and Bacons in philosophy, nor Newtons in science." In fact, Paulding engaged in the same wholesale dismissal of English society that he accused British writers of committing against the United States. Despite his lifelong Anglophobia, in old age Paulding expressed regret for the pervasive tone of "gall and bitterness" that marred *A Sketch of Old England*.[6]

Paulding's book may have been extreme, but it was not unique. Many Americans felt sufficiently provoked by the controversy over *Incuiquin's Letters* to defend their national character and impugn England's. The best-publicized book-length refutations were Robert Walsh's *Appeal from the Judgment of Great Britain respecting the United States* (1819) and Timothy Dwight's *Remarks on the Review of* Inchiquin's Letters (1815). But while Walsh's book sometimes got hot in its defense of the young nation's character, Dwight's was nearly apologetic. His book was an extended defense of New England – and only New England -- against British charges of American vice and vulgarity. Dwight was quite willing to confirm the applicability of British charges, so long as they were limited to the South and West. For all the noise this controversy produced, Edgeworth need not have worried too much about the direction of American opinion toward England. Despite the attention works like Paulding's received on both sides of the Atlantic, tempered accounts like those by Walsh and Dwight better reflected the drift of American opinion.

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[6] [James Kirke Paulding], *A Sketch of Old England, by a New-England Man*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Wiley, 1822) 1:5-6; Clark, "Poisoned Pens," 58 ("gall").

Although Edward Everett cattily remarked in an 1821 essay that “a voyage to England is the sovereign remedy for an excessive attachment to that country,” the burden of his argument was to show that aversion toward England had been waning since the settlement of the War of 1812. Americans were too sensible of the merits of their English heritage to be “permanently affected by the unkindness or injustice with which America is treated in England.” Old-light Anglophobes were aghast by this kind of moderation. For example, Baltimore’s staunchly Jeffersonian magazine *The Portico* expressed disappointment with Joshua White’s *Letters on England*. White revealed that he set out for the Old World with “strong feelings of prejudice, against the English people.” But, the reviewer complained, no sooner had White landed in Liverpool than “than these prejudices gave way, to an admiration, equally strong, of their politeness, civility, and hospitality.” Anglophobia would remain a pervasive feature of American cultural life well into the nineteenth century, but it would become limited to those who saw themselves as the heirs to Jeffersonianism; moreover, it would compete with an equally strong strain of Anglophilia.[7]

Everett’s measured criticism of England reappears again and again in the private writings of American travelers in England. Most of them expressed impatience with extreme expressions of national prejudice on either side of the ocean. An English critic’s insistence that the “large majority” of American travelers in Europe “were vulgar, vain, and boisterous” whose talk overflowed with “unmeasured hatred and rudeness” toward England simply is not reflected in the private and published travel writing of the period. To be sure, travelers voiced

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[7] Edward Everett, “England and America,” *North American Review* 13 (July, 1821), 36; “White’s Letters on England,” *The Portico: A Repository of Science & Literature* 2:5 (November, 1816), 359. On *The Portico’s* politics, John C. McCloskey, "A Note on the *Portico*," *American Literature* 8:3 (November 1936), 300-306. Elisa Tamarkin, *Anglophilia: Deference and Devotion in Antebellum America* (Chicago, 2007).

criticisms of England that sometimes crossed the line into Anglophobia. As a sympathetic English writer explained, "If America has been violent in this war of words, it is clear that we have not been moderate: even her [F]ederalists have been insulted by us." But if travelers often voiced sharp criticisms of England, theirs was usually an ambivalent Anglophobia. Overwhelmingly Anglo-American, privileged, and Federal, they took great pride in the English roots of the United States. To their Jeffersonian and, later, Jacksonian critics, such admiration seemed like a betrayal of American nationalism. But these travelers did not see it that way. Forging an American character without English influence would be like amputating a healthy limb. Staunch nationalists, they nevertheless could not imagine an American nationality shorn of its English roots.[8]

Given the virulence of England-hatred in domestic politics, as well as the period's simmering geopolitical tensions, the relative rarity of Anglophobia among European travelers may seem surprising. But it was not entirely absent. Some Americans abroad could muster nothing positive to say about England or the English. For William Quynn, a Revolutionary War veteran studying medicine in Edinburgh in 1783, London was remarkable for nothing except its "Luxury, dissipation, and extravagance." Like many of his compatriots, he found the manners and morals of Scotland more congenial. Twenty years later another medical student, Virginian Thomas Massie, made a similar observation. He also preferred Scotland to England partly because of the honesty and integrity of its inhabitants. Londoners took advantage of Americans, he wrote; the professors' fees there "are exorbitant to an excess bordering on

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[8] "On the Complaints in America Against the British Press," *New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* 1:2 (1821), 150; [Thomas Campbell], "Preface," *Ibid.,* x. See the explanation for Campbell's apology for the preceding article in Cyrus Redding, "England and America," *New Monthly Magazine* 106 (1856), 409.

robbing." Other travelers made more wholesale – and more politically barbed – denunciations of England. John Brown Cutting, a New York veteran of the Revolutionary War visiting London in 1790, told his South Carolina friend John Rutledge Jr. that his observation of the House of Commons demonstrated that "the love of lucre was . . . the ruling passion of John [Bull]." The hypocrisy of hearing "the buyers and sellers" – meaning members of Parliament – "talk of virtuous voters, independent freemen, representatives, [and] popular liberty" put into relief for Cutting "the true principles of our glorious constitution!" Fifteen years later, the young Virginian George Watson observed the British government cracking down on dissent by flooding its streets with soldiers. Watson urged his brother to tease a family friend by telling him "that his federal principles would soon be abandoned, if he could see the effects of *true Federalism* in the dominions of George III."[9]

These one-dimensional portrayals of perfidious Albion had their counterpart in the equally unsubtle Anglophilia articulated by some gobsmacked Americans. Joseph Stevens Buckminster, a young Massachusetts minister, found even "the least ornamented part of England" superior in refinement to the United States during his 1806 tour. It was, he judged, "the most charming country on the face of the earth" Ten years later George Ticknor, part of a new generation of New England intellectuals who shunned their predecessors' Anglophilia, nevertheless found nothing to complain of in England. He assumed that the United States and

[9] William Quynn to Allen Quynn, November 12, 1783, in Dorothy Mackay Quynn and William Rogers Quynn, eds., "Letters of a Maryland Medical Student in Philadelphia and Edinburgh (1782-1784)," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 31:3 (September, 1936), 195; Thomas Massie to Henry Massie, November 1, 1805, Massie Family Papers section eleven, folder one (Virginia Historical Society, Richmond); John Brown Cutting to Rutledge, July 5, 1790, John Rutledge Jr. Papers, #948, (Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill); George Watson to Joseph S. Watson, September 25, 1805, section three, folder three, Joseph S. Watson folder, Watson Family Papers (Virginia Historical Society).

Britain shared, and must continue to share, a common civilization. During a discussion of the relative merits of English and French literature, Ticknor indignantly conceded the superiority of French comedy, "for I deprecate the character and principles out of which it grows, and should lose no inconsiderable proportion of my hope for England and America, if they had reached or were approaching that ominous state of civilization and refinement in which it is produced." Predictable as the view of these second-generation New England Federalists were, they were not limited to that cohort.[10] James Oldden, a young Philadelphia Quaker on a trip through northern Europe in 1800, conceded that "every patriotic mind" must prefer his own country to all others. Still, he concluded that "when you come to combine comfort with pleasure, variety with charms, abundance with luxury, improvements with arts & sciences, and in fine every thing that one may suppose necessary to the enjoying of life to the greatest summit, the little spot of old England carries far away the palm."[11]

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Comment: Note that in the book chapter, this point from the footnote needs to be elaborated on; I think Foletta exaggerates both the degree of alienation from England and the nationalist orientation of this cohort. They're still pretty New England-centric, based on their sociability patterns. Might want to extend the chronology through the 1820s to expand the sources, since this cultural tension went on for a while.

Most early nationals who traveled in England fell between these extremes. They were hardly unaware of, or uninfluenced by, the views of literary nationalists, and their views of

[10] Eliza Buckminster Lee, ed., *Memoirs of Rev. Joseph Buckminster, D.D., and of his Son, Rev. Joseph Stevens Buckminster*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Ticknor, Reed, and Fields, 1851), 269; *Life, Letters, and Journals of George Ticknor,* 2 vols. (Boston: James B. Osgood and Company, 1876), 1:150. In *Coming to Terms with Democracy: Federalist Intellectuals and the Shaping of an American Culture* (Charlottesville, 2001)*,* Marshall Foletta argues that the generation of Buckminster and Ticknor experienced an "alienation of cultural sympathies" and a "reorientation of affection" toward the United States and against England as a result of what Alexander Everett called the "continual sneers of a set of heartless and senseless foreigners upon our want of literary talent" (81). Although young Federalists were certainly less Anglophilic than their elders, this was a relative, not absolute decline; "alienation" seems too strong a word to describe their orientation toward England, which might better be called "ambivalent Anglophilia." They certainly took a more nationalistic turn toward the Anglo-American relationship, but they were committed to reestablishing it on that more egalitarian foundation. For other views stressing New Englanders lingering admiration for English culture, see Anthony Mann, "'A Nation first in all the arts of civilisation': Boston's Post-Revolutionary Elites View Great Britain," *American Nineteenth-Century History* 2:2 (summer 2001), 1-34; and Tamara Plakins Thornton, *Cultivating Gentlemen: The Meaning of Country Life among the Boston Elite, 1785-1860* (New Haven, 1989), 39.

[11] James Oldden Jr., Diary, September 17, 1800 [pp. 183-84], (Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia).

Britain fluctuated with the vagaries of Anglo-American relations during this contentious period. But, to a remarkable degree, American travelers resisted giving in to the powerful attraction of Anglophobia. They remained cautiously critical of England but insisted that ties of culture, ethnicity, and politics that had bound the two together in the past as colony and mother country would in the future be reestablished on a more egalitarian footing between two independent nations. Elkanah Watson, a Massachusetts-born aide to George Washington, was sent to France in 1779 with messages for Benjamin Franklin. Provided with an opportunity to visit England in 1782, he experienced conflicted feelings: "This was the land of our rancorous foe and imperious tyrants; still it was the land of our forefathers." When Mordecai Noah was captured and taken to England en route to Tunis in 1813 he was surprised to be told by the Alien Office that he was free to roam around the country, provided he checked in with them every two weeks. Noah smarted over signs that the English still resented American independence, but he hoped that "the time will ever arrive, when Great Britain will view the United States with confidence and attachment." Likewise, he admonished Anglophiles "that we have no occasion to be ashamed of our origin." England contained "much to admire and imitate," he insisted.[12]

With so many opportunities for Anglophobia to flower in the years between independence and 1820 – lingering resentments from the Revolutionary War, impressment, Jay's Treaty, French Revolutionary tensions, the War of 1812, and the Paper War – how can the

[12] Winslow C. Watson, ed., *Men and Times of the Revolution: or, Memoirs of Elkanah Watson, Including Journals of Travels in Europe and America, from 1777 to 1842, with His Correspondence with Public Men and Reminiscences and Incidents of the Revolution* (New York: Dana and Company, 1856), 143; Mordecai Manuel Noah, *Travels in England, France, Spain, and the Barbary States, in the Years 1813-14 and 1815* (New York: Kirk & Mercein, 1819), 58, 36.

relative weakness of that sentiment be explained? One way to answer that question is to deny the premise: Anglophobia was not weak, but was quite vigorous. Certainly this is objectively true among some segments of the American population, such as cultural nationalists and Jeffersonian partisans. Anglophobia was also present in perception: Mordecai Noah hoped his published travel account would diminish it, and Maria Edgeworth thought England-hatred alive and well in the States in the mid-1820s. But if the virulence of Anglophobia among the followers of Jefferson and Madison cannot be denied, it seems certain that Edgeworth overestimated its hold on American culture by mistaking the views of the nationalist literati for that of the American public writ large. She reasoned where there was smoke, there must be fire. What she discerned, however, turns out to be less than an inferno than the embers from James Kirke Paulding's pipe.

In retrospect, we can see not only the accuracy of Edward Everett's 1821 judgment that Anglophila was on the decline, but of its opposite as well: both hatred for and love toward England were tempering by 1820.[13] With the War of 1812 honorably settled and memories of the Revolutionary War receding into dim memory, the post-Revolutionary generations were busy fashioning their own definition of nationhood.[14] To most Americans, Anglophobia seemed less relevant to this self-fashioning; Britain simply did not appear to be the existential threat she had been in 1780 and 1812. Likewise, republican France's potential as a model for a new

[13] Everett, "England and America," 35. Robert Walsh made the same point in his 1819 *Appeal,* xlix. Outside the older circles of New England Federalism, Anglophilia was seldom unconditional but, as Joseph Eton contends, "depended upon geopolitical circumstances that had mostly disappeared by 1819." Eaton, "From Anglophile to Nationalist," 160.

[14] Joyce Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans* (Cambridge, Mass., 2000).

American nationality looked less attractive as the Revolution devolved into the Terror and Franco-American tensions spiked in the late 1790s. Britain's stock rose as France's fell.[15]

Americans did naively come to see the British lion as benign, however; as the historian Walter McDougall observes, "Americans rightly identified Britain as the only power on Earth capable of coking their growth."[16] Partly because of that threat, Anglophobia became central to the identity of the expansionist Democratic Party, although even Democrats would come to take a less ideological approach toward Britain as a series of compromises over Maine, the Canada-US boundary, and Oregon eased Anglo-American tensions.[17] Finally, many Americans who remained skeptical of the motives of the British government easily distinguished between it and Britain's culture and people. As the nineteenth century progressed, Anglophobia had receded to the point where Britons and their largely Whiggish descendants on the other side of the Atlantic could conceive, in the words of English journalist Cyrus Redding, of two "nations that, agreeing so much in their laws and institutions, in habits, feelings, and a common language" forged in a "bond almost as strong as one of fellow-citizenship." In the ambivalent

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[15] Mathew Rainbow Hale, "'Many who wandered in darkness': The Contest over American National Identity, 1795-1798," *Early American Studies* 1:1 (2003), 127-175.

[16] Walter McDougall, *Throes of Democracy: The American Civil War Era, 1829-1877* (New York, 2008), 247.

[17] Not among expansionist and pro-slavery southerners, however. Edward Rugemer, *The Problem of Emancipation: The Caribbean Roots of the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge, 2008), 180-221; Sam W. Haynes, "Anglophobia and the Annexation of Texas: The Quest for National Security," in Haynes and Christopher Morris, eds., *Manifest Destiny and Empire: American Antebellum Exceptionalism* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 115-145. Michael O'Brien thinks that, culturally, England had lost much of its resonance for southerners by the early nineteenth century. *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1800-1860,* 2 vols. (Chapel Hill, 2004), 1:109-10.

Anglophobia of the post-Revolutionary decades, we see glimmerings of the future dreamed of by Maria Edgeworth.[18]

[18] Redding, “England and America,” 418.