

# H-Net Reviews

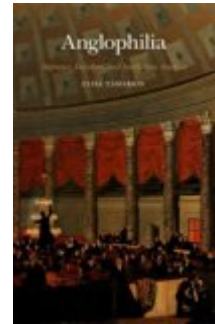
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Elisa Tamarzin. *Anglophilia: Deference, Devotion, and Antebellum America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008. xxxiii + 400 pp. Illustrations. \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-226-78944-6.

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## England Uber Alles

Love for and hatred toward England were such powerful forces in the early nineteenth-century United States that the absence of recent studies on these subjects is astonishing. Therefore, the appearance of this book is a very welcome and overdue event. Elisa Tamarzin's deeply researched book examines several of Anglophilia's most important manifestations: Americans' admiration for the British monarchy, the rehabilitation of the empire and loyalism in revisionist histories of the colonial and Revolutionary periods, antislavery Anglophilia, and English influences on antebellum college life. Partly because the chapters stand by themselves and partly because this book, despite its long introduction, lacks an overall thesis, *Anglophilia* is a difficult work to summarize.

Certainly, the author wishes to reorient scholarship on the antebellum period towards international themes. This development is long overdue. Subscribers to this list well know how work on the Atlantic World has enriched colonial scholarship for the last twenty or so years, although that literature for obvious reasons has long focused on transatlantic developments. Late nineteenth-century and twentieth-century United States scholarship also foregrounds the nation's engagement with the wider world. For reasons that are not entirely clear, work on the early national and antebellum periods has been far more limited—in every sense of that word—by national boundaries.[1] Tamarzin undercuts her effort to internationalize antebellum history by arguing that Anglophilia was

more often a function of domestic concerns than an expression of genuine engagement with England, however (p. xxxiii).

Tamarzin begins her story by looking at Americans' strange love affair with the British monarchy. Focusing on the delirious reception accorded to Edward Albert, Prince of Wales, during his 1860 tour of the United States, as well as American attitudes toward Queen Victoria, this chapter probes the strange spectacle of republicans prostrating themselves to a monarchy they had repudiated just a few decades before. Tamarzin argues that Americans could enthuse about Victoria and her son because so little was at stake in doing so. Seeking a dance with the prince or reading about the minutiae of the queen's toilette did not signify subordination to the monarchy, because American independence was beyond question. *Anglophilia's* discussion of the rehabilitation of Britain in antebellum histories of the Revolutionary and colonial periods helps explain much of this royal-love. While nationalist works like the writings of George Bancroft are well known, Tamarzin foregrounds lesser-known works—textbooks, reviews, popular histories, novels, and the like—to show that early nineteenth-century histories rehabilitated America's British past. In these texts, the American Revolution seems less like the inevitable, and fully justified, movement of a distinct and democratic people, and more like a foolish, even regrettable, impulse forced though by a small number of bullies. Among the most interesting topics pursued in this chap-

ter is a comparison of nineteenth-century treatments of Major André and Nathan Hale. André, the spy discovered negotiating with Benedict Arnold for the surrender of West Point, was reimagined as the epitome of British gentility—patriotic, genteel, gallant. Hale’s reputation did not suffer, but Tamarkin finds it telling that this American hero languished in historical accounts while André’s rose so remarkably.

Among the most remarkable expressions of antebellum Anglophilia are to be found in the writings of African American abolitionists. Tamarkin’s research into these sources reveals the depth of black abolitionists’ identification with England. She is sensitive to the reasons why fugitive slaves would feel appreciation toward Britain, a sentiment that could easily shade into identification. But Tamarkin is keen to probe beyond these surface feelings, to ask why ex-slaves, who might be expected to resist any sort of subordination, might enthusiastically proclaim their dependence on the British monarch. The crucial difference between dependence to American masters and deference to a British queen was choice—fugitive slaves elected to pay respects to the monarch, a sort of agency they were not free to exercise toward their American masters. But if African American Anglophilia had antislavery roots, Tamarkin persuasively argues that its enthusiasm went well beyond politics. Fugitives expressed a love for England that antislavery politics cannot come close to explaining. Anglophilia was such a powerful force within the community of white abolitionists, she suggests, that black abolitionists were powerless to resist it.

*Anglophilia*’s final chapter examines the development of a style of college life modeled on that which Americans believed prevailed at British universities. This chapter is really about the elaboration of this ideal at Harvard. The bulk of the evidence comes from there; occasional references are made to other institutions. Much of this evidence comes from well beyond the antebellum period. Tamarkin notes that the riots and other kinds of disruptions that enlivened eighteenth-century colleges declined sharply in the pre-Civil War decades. Curricular changes were partly responsible for this shift, but faculty and administrators also adopted an English style of academic culture that stressed collegial relations between students and professors, a relaxed attitude toward academic achievement, an insistence on an English accent as the appropriate manner of pronunciation, intimate (sometimes, Tamarkin implies, very intimate) bonds between “chums,” and the development of school spirit.

There is much to admire about *Anglophilia*. The topic is undoubtedly important, and despite the book’s length and depth of research, there is still much work to be done on the subject. And Anglophobia, which was at least as prevalent as its opposite in this era, is a completely open field. Tamarkin’s research in the period’s published sources is nothing short of remarkable. Regrettably, however, this book falls considerably short of its potential. The subject will appeal to a very wide audience, but *Anglophilia* is aimed at a very narrow group of specialists. The book is very poorly written. The long, unfocused chapters, constant references to the first person, and frequent, pretentious references to theorists and scholars will challenge even that audience. Some chapter sections are very tight, but others meander to no certain point. It is often hard to discern just what is being argued. For example, Tamarkin shows that articles covering the Prince of Wales’s 1860 tour said that Americans across ethnic, class, and religious lines welcomed him with unbridled enthusiasm. But it is unclear whether she means that these reporters constructed a unanimity that did not exist or that all Americans really did set aside their differences—and their sometimes very dim views of England—to welcome the prince. The title is misleading also. Ostensibly about the antebellum period, the book borrows evidence promiscuously from the late nineteenth and even twentieth centuries. Although the author is primarily responsible for these stylistic and evidentiary defects, the editors at the University of Chicago Press should have demanded that they be corrected before the book went to press.

*Anglophilia* also suffers from substantive flaws. In discussing black abolitionists’ notions toward England, for example, Tamarkin addresses the emergence of racial Anglo-Saxonism, but only to argue confusingly that African Americans integrated scientific racism to establish that they were part British (most American slaves being of mixed race, they said). But surely the thrust of scientific racism in the antebellum period was an insistence on the separation of the races. In arguing for the virtues of race mixing, black abolitionists were repudiating the thrust of Anglo-Saxonism, not integrating it. The burden of much black abolitionist thought about the “race question” was to reject the claims of scientific racism altogether, to argue that all people were “of one blood.”[2] An examination of the tensions between African Americans’ Anglophilia and their struggle against racial Anglo-Saxonism might have made an interesting chapter more so.

*Anglophilia*’s biggest flaw, however, is a massive

omission: a book that proposes to investigate American Anglophilia nearly ignores the South. That is a shame, because southern Anglophilia promises to be at least as interesting as the northern (especially New England) variety. For example, southerners resented the English because of what they considered antislavery meddling, but they also developed an extreme version of Anglo-Saxonism. Certain southerners considered that too plebeian, so they developed a myth of Norman ancestry for the region's whites.[3] It wasn't Anglophilia; it was hyper-Anglophilia.

This book defies simple analysis. It makes significant insights, but it also makes considerable—and wholly unnecessary—demands of its readers to pry them from its rambling prose. *Anglophilia* does historians and literary critics a great service in foregrounding an important and overlooked subject, but an accessible and thorough ac-

count of antebellum Anglophilia still waits to be written.

#### Notes

[1]. A point made recently by Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 1-7.

[2]. John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); James Brewer Stewart, "The Emergence of Racial Modernity and the Rise of the White North, 1790-1840," *Journal of the Early Republic* 18 no. 2 (Summer 1998):181-217; Paul Goodman, *Of One Blood: Abolitionism and the Origins of Racial Equality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

[3]. Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Rise of Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

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