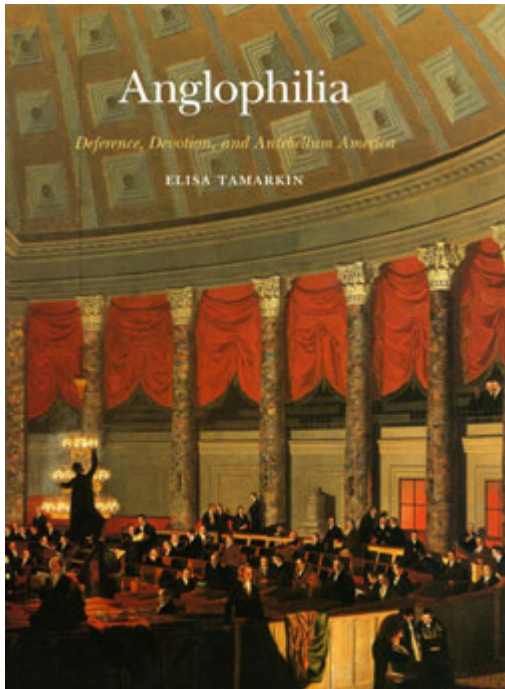


Victoria Complex

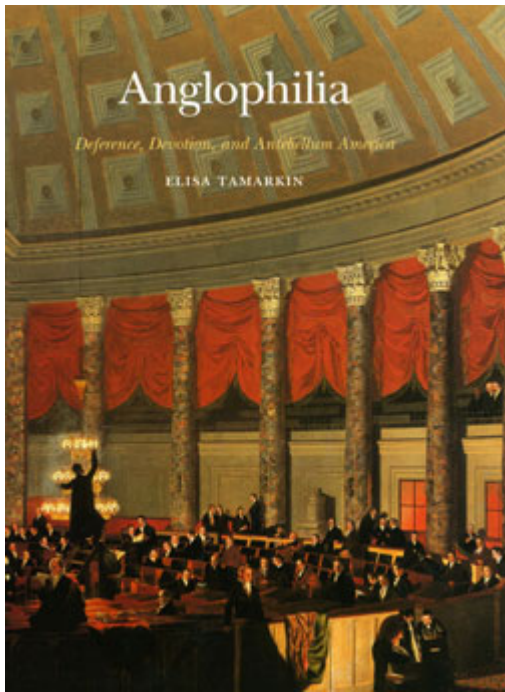


In American popular culture, the Revolution is usually depicted as a moment of rupture, a violent rejection of the British empire in favor of a new democratic social, political, and economic order. Even professional historians have often emphasized the “radicalism” of the American Revolution, lending academic legitimacy to a national mythology of Promethean rebellion and invention. How surprising, then, to find the grandchildren of the Revolutionary generation in love with all things English. This international love affair is the subject of Elisa Tamarkin’s revelatory *Anglophilia*. In an exhaustively researched, densely detailed study, Tamarkin demonstrates convincingly the extent to which Americans in the antebellum period preoccupied themselves with English manners, food, dress, history, politics, and, of course, royalty. In so doing, Tamarkin illuminates American nationalism in the decades following the Revolution through the lens of transnational affect, an abiding but difficult love born of internecine conflict.

Tamarkin begins with the story of the 1860 American tour of Albert Edward, Prince of Wales. On the eve of the Civil War, Albert Edward’s movements and activities dominated the American press. As Tamarkin puts it, “on November 3, 1860, South Carolina had committed to secede if Lincoln won, other states planned to follow, Lincoln’s winning was assured, Wall Street was in a panic, and the Prince of Wales was on the cover of *Harper’s* for the fifth time in six weeks” (5). During the months of the prince’s tour, public holidays were declared in Boston, New York, and St. Louis, as thousands of citizens of the first modern democracy thronged the streets for a glimpse of royalty. Regional differences were momentarily bridged, as papers from Richmond, Baltimore, New York and Boston carried reports from the other cities describing the remarkably

similar manifestations of public adulation for the prince. As Tamarkin explains, commentary on these public expressions of affection emphasized their voluntary and, hence, democratic character. The American people, it was said, were differentiated from European subjects and bonded into union through their "wholly improvised symmetry of affection," a spontaneous national outpouring revealing how "America is functionally classless" because "all classes are equal in their love of the prince" (12, 15). Thus, the worship of royalty became a paradoxical expression of democratic union among diverse Americans.

Americans were especially intrigued by the possibility of Albert Edward himself falling in love, in turn, with an American girl. Periodicals speculated over the "months of matrimonial buzz" that accompanied the prince through the balls, jubilees, and receptions staged for him in every city on his tour (4). Such speculations elicit the *eros* of the transatlantic relationship. While the dream of an "American princess" never came to fruition, this common expression of desire counterbalanced the crisis of American union in the months leading up to the Civil War. If America's own "system of representation" had ceased to hold the nation together, at least there was a nostalgic recourse in the traditions of an older, once spurned political order (7). The libidinal energies that came to a head in the pre-war years had coalesced throughout the antebellum decades; indeed, they had manifested themselves with equal urgency in 1838, when Americans went "Queen mad" (as the *New York Mirror* put it) over the coronation of Victoria (30). American painter Thomas Sully's portrait of Victoria "gingerly approaches the temporality of a striptease" (45), and Tamarkin borrows a phrase from Tom Nairn to describe the American public as engaging in an "enjoyable mode of psychic bondage" in relation to the monarchy (44). Such permutations of transatlantic desire reflected a longing for England "as a fetish and nostalgia that is just as much a politics and aspiration," an expression of a felt need for deference to authority, "a new patriotism that linked national preservation to the sentiments of obedience and reverence that a monarchy inspires" (xxiv, xxvii). The pleasure of submission to English royalty was less an evasion of the bleak realities of American disunion than it was a rechanneling of the same libidinal energies of patriotism that other scholars such as Lauren Berlant have located in icons such as the Statue of Liberty.



Elisa Tamarkin, *Anglophilia: Deference, Devotion, and Antebellum America*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008. 384 pp., \$35.

The longing to refashion identity and genealogy that underlies such expressions of deference provides the focus for Tamarkin's analysis of the curiously reverential treatment of the British in antebellum representations of the Revolution. Again and again, American novelists, historians, and painters dwelt upon scenes of deferential respect paid by American officers to their British opponents. Tamarkin connects these scenes of imagined deference to a rethinking of the politics of nationhood as they had developed in America since the Revolution. Transforming the conflict with England from a national triumph to a sentimental tale of loss, these representations dwelt with nostalgic reverence upon the bonds of affection and shared cultural identity that had once linked England to America. Tamarkin deftly links the *eros* of America's monarchophilia to this programmatic reimagining of the Revolution as a familial melodrama punctuated by moments of extravagant sentimentality on both sides. In both cases, Tamarkin persuasively argues, Americans expressed remorse for their lost place in the British empire and their dissatisfaction with the new political order of an independent democracy wrought by economic and moral conflict.

These conflicts were of course most pressing in the lives of African Americans, and Tamarkin's extended exploration of how black political leaders and writers embraced the language of Anglophilia is perhaps the most fascinating part of her study. Connecting the "material conditions of antislavery politics" (179) to the imaginative power of an England free of slavery, Tamarkin shows how English money, organization, and ideals helped to shape the American antislavery movement. While Britain of course was hardly blameless in the history of the slave trade, by the middle of the nineteenth century Britain was viewed by American abolitionist leaders, white and black alike, as a "country worth emulating," not only for having abolished the slave trade but,

intriguingly, for its cultural traditions and social rituals, for Shakespeare and for Victoria. Tamarkin finds Alexander Crummell paying homage to the excellence of English universities, and an article in *Frederick Douglass' Paper* longing for "the white cliffs of old Albion" (181). Tamarkin concludes that abolitionists found in Britain an image of the world they wished to inhabit, characterized by gentility, sociability, and aesthetic pleasure. Of course, such imaginings anticipate Du Bois's "kingdom of culture," even as they ignore the fact that life was nothing like this ideal for most of the actual inhabitants of Britain. As did the historical novelists and the crowds thronging Broadway to see the prince, American abolitionists created an imaginary England that reflected their ideals and their critique of the world they inhabited.

Throughout the book, Tamarkin makes an important distinction between feelings such as these and more overtly theorized expressions of political ideology. Borrowing from Raymond Williams, Tamarkin describes a "fugitive structure of political feeling" (175) that operates alongside more overtly partisan positions, articulating itself through languages of aesthetics and domestic love. Tamarkin's study is most fundamentally concerned with the complexity of the relationship between a nationalist ideology founded on a mythology of revolutionary separation and a countervailing affective longing for reunion. Small wonder that such an incoherent drama would play itself out through the tropes of romantic love and domestic turmoil. Tamarkin brilliantly untangles the interplay between nationalist rhetoric and feelings of deference, between official discourse and those other, less direct but no less important, channels of belonging.

The nature of the subject matter has allowed Tamarkin to produce a study that is, despite its sophistication and complexity, always lively, entertaining, and accessible. Indeed, a review of this book would not be complete without mentioning that it is beautifully written and a pleasure to read. While it will quickly establish itself as required reading for scholars, it is also easy to imagine *Anglophilia's* appeal to non-academic readers. This is salutary, for in contrast to the multiplying and derivative hagiographies of founding fathers that fill the bestseller lists these days, *Anglophilia* has much to say about American national development that is new, important, and topical. While Tamarkin could not have anticipated, at the time she was writing, the extent to which contemporary politics would turn back to the tropes and idioms of early American nationalism, *Anglophilia* should provide a welcome antidote to such cartoonish historiography for an audience much wider than academia. The fact that the book is entertaining, funny, and incisively witty (without ever trying too hard to be so), makes it a model for public scholarship.

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