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The Talented Mr. Littlepage & The Spirit of '76:

An American Character Study

Chris R. Pullen

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

History

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Dedication

To Thuy, my Miss Saigon

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Abstract

The curious life of Lewis Littlepage, an American-born courtier in late eighteenth century Europe, revealed the true nature of the United States' exceptional identity and highlighted the negative effects of social refinement on its unique character. Initially imbued with republican values, Littlepage traveled to Europe in order to pursue a practical political education that would render him useful to the U.S. However, the Virginian's experiences overseas transformed him into a man unable to control his ambitions, incapable of feeling loyalty to any nation or set of principles, and more dedicated to his personal comfort and luxury than to any sense of republican duty. This study, in order to reach its conclusions, compares Littlepage's education to that advocated by Thomas Jefferson and examines the differences between the leadership style he eventually developed and the noble republican example modeled by George Washington. It utilizes primary evidence from the Curtis Carroll Davis Collection and the Holladay Family Papers to support its assertions.

The uniqueness of the U.S., its exceptionalism, was ultimately a product of its citizens' self-control. The earliest concern of the nation's founders, the creators of the grand American experiment to prove that humans were capable of self-government, was how to produce citizens capable of controlling themselves and supporting a republican government. Answering this question, Thomas Jefferson and other Founders concluded that Americans needed a practical republican education and proper role models. The purpose of this training was to teach them how to pursue the common good by controlling their own ambitions, dedicating themselves to republican principles rather than to rulers, and persevering in the face of hardship. Littlepage's polite education and

the process of social refinement he underwent were in opposition to these republican values. Rather than teaching the Virginian to control his own ambitions, to subordinate his interests to the importance of upholding republican values, and to persevere in these endeavors, these processes taught him to proudly display his self-interested ambitions through ostentatious dress and elaborate shows of his useless knowledge. The result was to produce an image of a character that did not conform to America's exceptional identity.

Introduction



Fig. 1. Basil Hallward and Lord Henry Admire the Portrait of Dorian Gray (Illustration by Paul Thiriat for Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 1908)

This bronze. [*Strokes it thoughtfully.*] Yes, now's the moment; I'm looking at this thing on the mantelpiece, and I understand that I'm in hell. I tell you, everything's been thought out beforehand. They knew I'd stand at the fireplace stroking this thing of bronze, with all those eyes intent on me. Devouring me. [*He swings round abruptly.*] What? Only two of you? I thought there were more; many more. [*Laughs.*] So this is hell. I'd never have believed it. You remember all we were told about the torture-chambers, the fire and brimstone, the "burning marl." Old wives' tales! There's no need for red-hot pokers. Hell is—other people!

Garcin, Jean-Paul Sartre's *No Exit*

Laws and Government are to the Political Bodies of Civil Societies, what the Vital Spirits and Life it self are to the Natural Bodies of Animated Creatures...they that examine into the Nature of Man, abstract from Art and Education, may observe, that what renders him a Sociable Animal, consists not in his desire of Company, good Nature, Pity, Affability, and other Graces of a fair Outside; but that his vilest and most hateful Qualities are the most necessary Accomplishments to fit him for the largest, and, according to the World, the happiest and most flourishing Societies.

Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees*

The artist is the creator of beautiful things. To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim. The highest as the lowest form of criticism is a mode of autobiography. Those who find ugly meanings in beautiful things are corrupt without being charming. This is a fault...The moral life of man forms part of the subject-matter of the artist...Thought and language are to the artist instruments of an art. Vice and virtue are to the artist materials for an art...All art is at once surface and symbol...It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors...All art is quite useless.

Oscar Wilde, Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

In his play *No Exit*, French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre wrote: “Hell is—other people!” Sartre’s statement, an expression of his existentialist philosophy, expressed the idea that the only “Hell” or judgment a person can receive is through other people. Since only governments and their laws have established values such as “right” and “wrong”, the only way an individual can be evaluated is by comparing his values to those of his government. The relative truth of this became apparent when studying the curious international figure Lewis Littlepage (1762-1802), an individual who served most of the major European courts between 1780 and 1801. Littlepage, born in colonial Virginia, was raised amidst the post-Stamp Act (1765) revolutionary rhetoric that led to American independence from Great Britain. Although initially defining himself, in words and actions, as a patriotic American republican, he eventually betrayed his American values in order to pursue his own social and financial aggrandizement in Europe. While his transformation and actions were not inherently wrong, they did go against the values of the American Founders. Littlepage, through his unprincipled pursuit of social refinement, did not adhere to Thomas Jefferson’s suggestions concerning a proper republican education, exhibited a leadership style different from that displayed by George Washington, and ultimately developed an anti-republican character.¹

The significance of Littlepage’s life for historians was that it revealed the nature of America’s exceptional identity and highlighted the negative effects of social refinement on its unique character. Initially imbued with republican values, Littlepage traveled to Europe in order to pursue a practical political education that would render him useful to the U.S. However, the Virginian’s experiences overseas transformed him into a

¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *No Exit and Three Other Plays* (New York, NY: Vintage International, 1989), 45.

man unable to control his ambitions, incapable of feeling loyalty to any nation or set of principles, and more dedicated to his personal comfort and luxury than to any sense of republican duty. Through an examination of Littlepage's life, it was discovered that the uniqueness of the U.S., its exceptionalism, was ultimately a product of its citizens' self-control. The earliest concern of the nation's founders, the creators of the grand American experiment to prove that humans were capable of self-government, was how to produce citizens capable of controlling themselves and supporting a republican government.

Answering this question, Thomas Jefferson and other Founders concluded that Americans needed a practical republican education and proper role models. The purpose of this training was to teach them how to pursue the common good by controlling their own ambitions, dedicating themselves to republican principles rather than to rulers, and persevering in the face of hardship. Littlepage's polite education and the process of social refinement he underwent were in opposition to these republican values. Rather than teaching the Virginian to control his own ambitions, to subordinate his interests to the importance of upholding republican values, and to persevere in these endeavors, these processes taught him to proudly display his self-interested ambitions through ostentatious dress and elaborate shows of his useless knowledge. The result was to produce an image of a character that did not conform to America's exceptional identity.

Jefferson, the father of American public education, believed that the success of the new republic depended on an educated citizenry. This revolutionary leader therefore had strong opinions about what constituted a proper republican education. It was for this reason he took great pride in mentoring and advising young people on how to advance their educations. Jefferson advised his protégés to pursue an academic regimen directed

toward practical knowledge, rather than one dedicated to the attainment of a frivolous refinement. His suggested program of study was focused on instilling his mentees with proper republican virtues, providing them with a historical understanding of human nature; and teaching them useful foreign languages. Although young Littlepage began his education according to a program Jefferson would have suggested, he eventually focused his educational efforts toward attaining European refinement. He developed and utilized his poetic skills, knowledge of polite literature and mastery of the French language to win acceptance in European court society. Littlepage exploited his apprenticeship as John Jay's private secretary in Spain to gain refinement and personal glory, not to learn republican morality or politics. The young Virginian used the resources of his patron to go on an international military campaign that won him friendships that could only serve him in Europe. He then essentially went on a grand tour of Europe, serving various monarchs and gaining little that would render him useful to the United States.

In the United States, while Littlepage was out seeking personal glory, George Washington became the living embodiment of an ideal republican leader. It was his stoic portrayal of a modern-day Cincinnatus that won him the love and respect of the American public. He provided his nation with steady military and political leadership during her period of greatest need, while carefully crafting the public persona of a disinterested leader who was above pecuniary concerns. In late 1796, when Washington reached the zenith of his popularity and had become a successful two-term U.S. president, he showcased his disinterestedness by announcing his retirement. This announcement amazed American citizens, European monarchs and Littlepage because rulers rarely, if

ever, voluntarily chose to relinquish their power in the eighteenth century. To Littlepage, a newly minted Polish knight, Washington's retirement was both an unbelievable occurrence and a personal tragedy. The Polish knight had expected Washington to continue on as U.S. president much like a European monarch. He had even expected the President to provide him with a personal reference. This was an interesting expectation considering that Littlepage stood for none of the leadership values embodied by the American Cincinnatus. While Chevalier Littlepage greatly admired Washington as his personal idol, during his time in Europe: he never served his native country in any useful capacity; was forever preoccupied with his own pursuit of wealth and glory; and became more concerned with cultivating European sophistication than a disinterested republican image.²

Historiography

The most surprising aspect of Littlepage's life was its contradiction of the sacred and beloved concept of American exceptionalism. Greatly influenced by the commentary of former French Finance Comptroller Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot and largely attributed to the writings of Alexis de Tocqueville, American exceptionalism has often been a proud assertion of America's greatness. It has also obscured the new nation's similarities to those of the Old World and the process through which America developed its sociopolitical culture. In 1750, Turgot proclaimed that "Europe shall find in [America] the perfection of her political societies and the firmest support of her well-being." By 1778, in a letter to British philosopher Richard Price, Turgot was asserting

² The term "Chevalier" is the French word for a knight. It was a term that the Polish also utilized to identify their knights. Littlepage was created a Polish knight of the Order of St. Stanislas on January 21, 1790. Curtis Carroll Davis, *The King's Chevalier: A Biography of Lewis Littlepage*, 1st ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1961), 246-247.

that Americans:

are the hope of the world. They may become a model to it. They may prove by fact that men can be free and yet tranquil; and that it is in their power to rescue themselves from the chains in which tyrants and knaves of all descriptions have presumed to bind them under the pretence of the public good. They may exhibit an example of political liberty, of religious liberty, of commercial liberty, and of industry. The Asylum they open to the oppressed of all nations should console the earth.

The concepts Turgot expressed were also to be found in French-American writer John Hector St. John de Crevecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782). In his fictitious letters, Crevecoeur wrote, "these provinces of North America in their true light" are "the asylum of freedom", "the cradle of future nations, and the refuge of distressed Europeans." Later, in *Democracy in America* (1840), Tocqueville essentially reiterated Turgot's and Crevecoeur's exceptional vision of America:

The position of the Americans is...quite exceptional, and it may be believed that no democratic people will ever be placed in a similar one. Their strictly Puritanical origin—their exclusively commercial habits—even the country they inhabit, which seems to divert their minds from the pursuit of science, literature, and the arts—the proximity of Europe, which allows them to neglect these pursuits without relapsing into barbarism...have singularly concurred to fix the mind of the American upon purely practical objects.

Tocqueville's statements, written after the death of the founding generation and the end of the early national period, embodied the beliefs of the American Founders and were readily accepted by Patrician historians and patriotic Americans who were eager to differentiate themselves from the Old World. However, by attributing American greatness and prosperity entirely to its citizens' dedication to political liberty, commercial liberty, industry and practical objects, Tocqueville and the other exceptionalist writers ignored one of Scottish economist Adam Smith's theories. According to Smith, in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), "The colony of a civilized nation which" merely "takes

possession, either of a waste country or of one so thinly inhabited, that the natives easily give place to the new settlers, advances more rapidly to wealth and greatness than any other human society.”³

The revolutionary sages Jefferson, Washington and Benjamin Franklin largely agreed with the exceptional view of America. Jefferson exclaimed, in a letter to James Monroe dated June 17, 1785, “My god! How little do my countrymen know what precious blessings they are in possession of, and which no other people on earth enjoy.” He continued by confidently asserting that “While we shall see multiplied instances of Europeans going to live in America, I will venture to say no man now living will ever see an instance of an American removing to settle in Europe and continuing there.” Of course, this was almost six months before Jefferson first met the American gentleman Lewis Littlepage. Another great statesman who believed in what would later be termed “American exceptionalism” was Washington. Washington, at his inauguration in 1789, confidently declared, “No people can be bound to acknowledge and adore the Invisible Hand which conducts the affairs of men more than those of the United States” because “Every step by which they have advanced to the character of an independent nation seems to have been distinguished by some token of providential agency...” After his conversion to the revolutionary cause, Franklin expressed similar sentiments regarding the uniqueness of the United States and its citizens. He often referred would-be

³ Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot, *The Life and Writings of Turgot, Comptroller-General of France 1774-6*, ed. William Walker Stephens (London, England: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1895), 313; Richard Price, *Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution, and the Means of Making it a Benefit to the World. To Which is Added, A Letter From M. Turgot, Late Comptroller-General of the Finances of France* (Dublin, Ireland: L. White, W. Whitestone, P. Byrne, P. Wogan, J. Cash, and R. Marchbank, 1785), 123; John Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer; Describing Certain Provincial Situations, Manners, And Customs...of the British Colonies in North America* (London, England: Thomas Davies & Lockyer Davis, 1782), xxxii; Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 2, trans. Henry Reeve (New York, NY: D. Appleton and Company, 1904), 519; Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, Part 2 (New York, NY: P. F. Collier & Son, 1902), 309.

emigrants to the U.S., who were seeking letters of recommendation from him, to read Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* in order to discourage them. This was because, like Crèvecoeur, Franklin believed that the uniqueness or greatness of Americans was their necessary dedication to rural simplicity and difficult, but useful employment. Franklin fully explained this view in his essay "Information to Those Who Would Remove to America" (1784). The aging diplomat said that it was not "adviseable" for any person to emigrate to the United States "who has no other Quality to recommend him but his Birth" because, unlike "In Europe", it was "a Commodity that [could not] be carried to a worse Market than to that of America, where People do not enquire concerning a Stranger, What IS he? but What can he DO? If he has any useful Art, he is welcome..."⁴

While exceptionalist writings have previously confused the study of the early republic, in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries they have fuelled scholarly debate over early U.S. sociopolitical development. Progressive historians of the early twentieth century, possessed with a particular affinity for studying the early republic, attempted to uncover the true process through which America developed its uniqueness. Rather than believing that the Tocquevillian concept of America existed in its entirety at the founding, these historians viewed it as a development. Moreover, these writers generally believed that American society and government developed as a result of domestic factors rather than from entirely pre-existing European influences. In 1893

⁴ Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, 17 June 1785, in Thomas Jefferson, *Thomas Jefferson Travels: Selected Writings, 1784-1789*, ed. Anthony Brandt (Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, 2006), 39; Davis, *The King's Chevalier*, 128; United States Presidents, *Inaugural Addresses of the Presidents of the United States from George Washington to Bill Clinton* (New York, NY: BiblioBazaar, 2006), 8-9; Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography and Other Writings*, ed. Ormond Seavey (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1998), 319, 322.

progressive historian Frederick Jackson Turner, in “The Significance of the Frontier in American History”, stated:

The peculiarity of American institutions is, the fact that they have been compelled to adapt themselves to the changes of an expanding people--to the changes involved in crossing a continent, in winning a wilderness, and in developing at each area of this progress out of the primitive economic and political conditions of the frontier into the complexity of city life.

Similarly emphasizing the evolution of American society and government Charles Beard, in his *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* (1913), asserted that the U.S. Constitution was less a development of pre-existing ideology and principles and more the result of ongoing social class conflict and economic self-interest. Beard was opposed to what he labeled the “Teutonic” historical school that fixated on the “wonderful achievements of the English-speaking peoples [descended from the Germanic race]” that “settled America and fashioned their institutions after old English models.”⁵

Tocqueville’s statements about the unique social, political, commercial and geographical attributes of America and its citizens have continued to inspire historical debates. Neo-Whig historians, starting with Bernard Bailyn, accepted the Progressive view that exceptional American qualities were more of a domestic development rather than entirely a derivative of European influences. However, Neo-Whigs emphasized the importance of intellectual and ideological elements in this development instead of the role of social class conflict. Bailyn, in *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (1967), asserted that it was the “intimate relationship between Revolutionary thought and the circumstances of life in eighteenth-century America that endowed the Revolution with its peculiar force and made it so profoundly a transforming event.”

⁵ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 1921), 2; Charles A. Beard, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States*, Reprint of 1935 ed. (New York, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1952), vi-xvii, 2-3.

Bailyn's protégé historian Gordon Wood, in *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (1991), asserted that the American Revolution was the radical social event "that not only fundamentally altered the character of American society but decisively affected the course of subsequent history." Essentially, Wood believed that "the Revolution, more than any other single event, . . . made America into the most liberal, democratic, and modern nation in the world." Therefore, according to Wood, the exceptional American character had a domestic pedigree, rather than a European one. The works of Jack Greene, another Neo-Whig historian, have generally emphasized the importance of social, political and economic changes within the American colonies to understanding early republican America. Greene, in *Understanding the American Revolution* (1995), supported Tocqueville's egalitarian assessment of early America and minimized the impact of British influence in American social development. Two of Greene's other books, *Political Life in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (1986) and *Pursuits of Happiness* (1988), focused on social development within individual colonies as the primary factor in the formation of America's unique culture. While Bailyn, Wood and Greene have greatly contributed to our understanding of American revolutionary ideology and internal colonial development, they have also overestimated the specific impact of the revolution on American society and have underestimated European influences that have continued to define that society.⁶

⁶ Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, Enlarged ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), xi; Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, First Vintage Books ed. (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1993), 5, 7; Jack P. Greene, *Understanding the American Revolution: Issues and Actors* (Charlottesville, VA: The University Press of Virginia, 1998); Jack P. Greene, *Political Life in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (Williamsburg, VA: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1986); Jack P. Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

The extent of these European influences on American society has fueled the debate over the origin and nature of Jeffersonian ideology during the early republic. Historian Lance Banning, in “Jeffersonian Ideology Revisited” (1986), clearly laid out the republican hypothesis, which “places major emphasis on the persistent influence in the new American republic of concepts, hopes, and fears that may be traced to England’s seventeenth-century classical republicans...” Classical republicanism (civic humanism), the dominant political philosophy of the colonial and revolutionary eras, held that a successful republic required: citizens supportive of the common good through their selfless civic virtue; and a social hierarchy where certain exceedingly virtuous citizens ruled society. Classical republicans, including most of the American Founders, feared the deleterious effects of democratic impulses and were critical of the private pursuit of social and economic self-interest. Historians like Drew McCoy, John Murrin, and Banning have advanced the republican hypothesis, asserting that the Jeffersonian Republicans and their Revolution of 1800 continued the legacy of civic humanism. These scholars have generally supported the view that the Jeffersonians, fearing the self-interested immorality of the emerging commercial world, shunned manufacturing and modern economic development in favor of a virtuous agrarianism. McCoy, in *The Elusive Republic* (1980), asserted that the “Jeffersonian vision reflected the dominant ideological strain of republican political economy in Revolutionary and early national America.” According to McCoy, this Jeffersonian vision attempted to “reconcile classical republicanism with more modern social realities and American conditions” and “emphasized the moral and political advantages of America’s social opportunity” over “narrowly economic considerations.” Murrin, in “The Great Inversion, or Court versus

Country” (1980), held that the Jeffersonians “idealized the past more than the future and feared significant change, especially major economic change, as corruption and degeneration.” While Banning did assert that the “Jeffersonians...adjusted their heritage of British opposition and classical republican ideas” to fit an increasingly modern, commercialized world, he also acknowledged that Jefferson’s Republican party represented “the hesitations of agrarian conservatives as they experienced the stirrings of a more commercial age.”⁷

Other historians have embraced the view that the roots of American social and economic liberalism extended further back in America’s history. Rather than believing that transformations in Jeffersonian ideologies resulted in modern American liberalism, these historians felt that liberal views were either present in the colonies from the beginning or had always been a part of Jeffersonian Republican political philosophy. Greene, in *Pursuits of Happiness*, rejected the popular myth that American culture was derived from traditional New England Puritanical virtue, or what historian Robert Shalhope called “the willingness of the individual to subordinate private interests for the good of the community.” Greene asserted that, instead of being dedicated to rural agrarian virtue, “southern colonies and states” like Virginia: were “almost wholly commercial from the beginning”; “were before 1800 in the mainstream of British-American development”; and “epitomized...the conception of America as a place in

⁷ Lance Banning, “Jeffersonian Ideology Revisited: Liberal and Classical Ideas in the New American Republic,” *The William & Mary Quarterly*, vol. 43, no. 1 (January, 1986): 3-4, 11-12; Robert E. Shalhope, *The Roots of Democracy: American Thought and Culture, 1760-1800* (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1990), xi; Drew R. McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1980), 5-8, 10, 14-15, 23, 69; Robert H. Wiebe, *The Opening of American Society: From the Adoption of the Constitution to the Eve of Disunion*, First Vintage Books ed. (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1985), 11-13; Wood, 104-109, 230-233; Joyce Appleby, “Commercial Farming and the ‘Agrarian Myth’ in the Early Republic,” *The Journal of American History*, vol. 68, no. 4 (March, 1982): 836.

which free people could pursue their own individual happinesses in safety.” Professor Joyce Appleby, the central proponent of the liberal hypothesis, has written numerous articles in opposition to the views of McCoy, Banning and Murrin. Appleby, in “Commercial Farming and the ‘Agrarian Myth’ in the Early Republic” (1982), asserted her liberal hypothesis that the Jeffersonians had always been advocates of capitalistic development. She stated that they embraced America’s “participation in an expanding international commerce in foodstuffs”, were optimistic “about America’s future as a progressive, prosperous, democratic nation”, and offered “a new social vision owing little conceptually or practically to antiquity, the Renaissance, or the mercantilists of eighteenth-century England.” Later, in “Recovering America’s Historic Diversity: Beyond Exceptionalism” (1992), Appleby dismissed American exceptionalism as the creation of an “Enlightenment...perversion” resulting from “all the social cravings from a restless European spirit.” She held that “the American colonists” were “True heirs of European culture” who “had perpetuated the invidious distinction between the talented few and the vulgar many.” According to Appleby, the exceptionalist vision of the U.S. “found its enduring appeal” here only “because it offered eighteenth-century Americans a collective identity before they had any other basis for spiritual unity.” Shalhope, in *The Roots of Democracy* (1990), has argued more effectively that both liberalism and classical republicanism coexisted in the early republic. His more realistic viewpoint accepted the undeniable fact that the early republic remained motivated by both ancient European values and new values evolved from domestic socio-political environmental conditions.⁸

⁸ Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 4-5, 8-9, 205-206; Shalhope, xi-xii; Appleby, “Commercial Farming and the ‘Agrarian Myth’ in the Early Republic”, 836; Joyce Appleby, “Recovering America’s

Economic liberalism originated in Europe, reaching prominence during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and was transported to the American colonies via the Virginia Company. The Medici family, a family of bankers and politicians, dominated the Republic of Florence from the late fourteenth century until the republic's demise in 1533. The Medici founded the Medici Bank (1397-1494) that was, during its time, the largest bank in Europe. According to author Janet Gleeson, in 1716 the economist John Law, whose financial endeavors led to the coining of the word "millionaire", "founded the first national bank of issue in France that made money from paper on a previously unknown scale to revive [France's] ailing economy", and "formed the most powerful conglomerate the world had yet seen—the Mississippi Company—and encouraged unprecedented numbers of private investors to dabble in its shares." Law, a foreigner from Scotland, was not a rare example of prosperous financial men in eighteenth century France. Samuel Bernard, another financier, was one of the wealthiest men in all of France. According to French historian Thomas Schaeper, Benjamin Franklin's landlord in Passy, the commercial man Jacques-Donatien Leray de Chaumont, was "near the top of French society in terms of wealth" and was wealthier than "most of the farmers general" and almost all of the "members of the Parlements." Considering the financial power of such commercial men, it was little wonder that the term "laissez-faire" government first came into usage in seventeenth and eighteenth century France. French economist Vincent de Gournay was one of its strongest advocates in the eighteenth century. Turgot, in his 1759 eulogy of his friend Gournay, expressed the laissez-faire concepts that both he and his friend supported:

Historic Diversity: Beyond Exceptionalism," *The Journal of American History*, vol. 79, no. 2 (September, 1992): 419-420, 425.

M. de Gournay...[never] imagined that...the government would condescend to regulate by express laws the length and breadth of a piece of cloth, the number of threads of which it must be made, and consecrate by the seal of legislative authority four volumes in quarto filled with such important details; and besides this, statutes without number dictated by the spirit of monopoly, the object of which is to discourage industry...

It was in this manner that eighteenth century French political leaders and government began to consider the interests of commercial men and their industry.⁹

Increasingly, French commercial men wielded the power to aid and influence the government. Chaumont helped the French government avoid violent riots by devising a means to supply Paris with cheap grain. Acting on the request of the controller general, in 1766 he reminded merchants that “if 800,000 people [in Paris] were to lack bread for six hours, everything would blow up.” Schaeper asserted that Chaumont was selected for the job because he “was one of the foremost experts in all areas of grain production and marketing.” Even the controller general’s chief assistant stated that “by his fortune and by the range of his commerce” Chaumont had rendered “to the State the most essential services in the times of crisis.” Schaeper concluded that he had “demonstrated that self-interest and the general welfare could be complementary.” Another member of France’s commercial elite Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, the son of a Paris watchmaker, helped Littlepage on a few occasions. According to Schaeper, Beaumarchais had earned his wealth and social prominence by: fashioning a watch-ring for Madame de

⁹ Christopher Hibbert, *The House of Medici, Its Rise and Fall* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2003); Raymond A. de Roover, *The Rise and Decline of the Medici Bank, 1397-1494* (Washington, DC: Beard Books, 1999), 4-6; Janet Gleeson, *Millionaire: The Philanderer, Gambler, and Duelist Who Invented Modern Finance* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 15, 101, 103; Thomas J. Schaeper, *France and America in the Revolutionary Era: The Life of Jacques-Donatien Leray de Chaumont, 1725-1803* (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1995), 27-28, 99; Robert Perry Shepherd, “Turgot and the Six Edicts” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1903), 62-64; Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot, “In Praise of Gournay,” in Shepherd, 63. Examine Henry C. Clark, ed. *Commerce, Culture, and Liberty: Readings on Capitalism before Adam Smith* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2003) for a more thorough coverage of the relationship between luxury, commerce, liberty, and virtue that existed in Europe (particularly France) prior to the printing of Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*.

Pompadour; serving as the “principle music tutor of Louis XV’s... daughters”; working “with the banking firm of Paris-Duverny”; and by his notoriety as a playwright. Through his creation of the trading house Roderique Hortalez and Company, he gained wealth while helping the French government secretly support the American revolutionaries with military supplies. According to Schaeper, “Many prosperous bourgeois” like Beaumarchais were able to purchase governmental offices and some were even able to purchase their way into the nobility. Therefore, rather than attempting to buy elections, many French businessmen simply bought political offices.¹⁰

In the eighteenth century the accessibility of social refinement, a process originating with European courtiers, was expanded to the middling classes by economic liberalism. This expansion occurred first in England and France, and then in the United States after the population became more settled. In western Europe, according to French historian Peter McNeil, social refinement was a process facilitated by: “Rising incomes”; the “market economy”; “the introduction of new cottons and cheaper techniques of production and printing”; and the abandonment of sumptuary laws, laws limiting the use of luxury materials to the Church and aristocracy, in England (after 1688) and France (since the reign of Louis XV). Philosopher Bernard Mandeville’s *The Fable of the Bees* (1714) was an early expression of the effect commercialization was already having on European society. Mandeville wrote his fable in order to “shew the Impossibility of enjoying all the most elegant Comforts of Life that are to be met with in an industrious, wealthy and powerful Nation, and at the same time be bless’d with all the Virtue and Innocence that can be wish’d for in a Golden Age...” In effect, it was his opinion that

¹⁰ Schaeper, 4, 19-20, 29, 47-51; Stephen L. Kaplan, *Bread, Politics and Political Economy in the Reign of Louis XV*, vol. 1 (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1976), 245, 360, quoted in Schaeper, 19-20.

greed was good; that the pursuit of individual self-interest, commerce and luxury were necessary, natural, and beneficial to society. In France, by the 1760s, numerous writers were ridiculing the growing obsession of all social classes with refinement. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in *Émile, or On Education* (1762), warned parents that,

The child's mind is corrupted by luxury, and by all sorts of whims. Preferences like this do not spring up of their own accord...Not only do thoughtless mothers promise children fine clothes by way of reward, but foolish tutors threaten them with coarser and simpler dress as punishment. "If you do not study your lessons, if you do not take better care of your clothes, you shall be dressed like that little rustic." This is saying to him, "Rest assured that a man is nothing but what his clothes make him; your own worth depends on what you wear." Is it surprising that sage lessons like this so influence young men that they care for nothing but ornament, and judge of merit by outward appearance only?

In 1766, British traveler Philip Thicknesse commented that he was "apt to think the taking of snuff, the powdering of the hair, and the great attention shewn by all degrees of people in France, to adorn their persons, is a piece of state policy to prevent their employing their intellectual faculties." As McNeil asserted, "Throughout the eighteenth century" in England and France "social observers suggested that the spread of luxury and fashion was increasing, that emulation of the habits of social betters had become a universal pastime and fashion..." In America, following the revolution, the social refinement of the middle class was becoming similar to that which occurred during the early-to-mid 1700s among middling Europeans. Richard Bushman, in *The Refinement of America* (1992), claimed that refinement in America became more egalitarian and emphasized that this process was a collaboration between capitalism and the consumerism encouraged by polite culture. In the following chapters, readers will witness the young Virginian Lewis Littlepage successfully complete his refinement process and become a distinguished, but flawed, gentleman. Littlepage and his judges,

Jefferson and Washington, now enter upon a stage designed in Neoclassical Louis XVI style.¹¹

¹¹ Peter McNeil, "The Appearance of Enlightenment: Refashioning the Elites," in *The Enlightenment World*, eds. Martin Fitzpatrick, Peter Jones, Christa Knellwolf, and Ian McCalman (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007), 381, 386; Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees; or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits*, 3rd ed. (London, England: J. Tonson, 1724), 5 (of Preface); Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Rousseau's Emile; Or, Concerning Education: Extracts Containing the Principal Elements*, trans. Eleanor Worthington (Boston, MA: D. C. Heath & Company, 1894), 94; Philip Thicknesse, *Observations on the Customs and Manners of the French Nation* (London, England: Robert Davis, G. Kearsley, N. Young, 1766), 25; McNeil, 385-386; Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), xiii, 406-407.

Chapter I



Fig. 2. The Sir Christopher Wren Building, The College of William & Mary (Photograph by Alfred Eisenstaedt, Time & Life Pictures/Getty Images, 31 December 1942)

Of all the errors which can possibly be committed in the education of youth, that of sending them to Europe is the most fatal. I see [clearly] that no American should come to Europe under 30 years of age: and [he who] does, will lose in science, in virtue, in health and in happiness, for which manners are poor compensation, were we even to admit the hollow, unmeaning manners of Europe to be preferable to the simplicity and sincerity of our own country.

Thomas Jefferson, Letter to Walker Maury, Dated August 19, 1785

There is no place where your pursuit of knowledge will be so little obstructed by foreign objects as in your own country, nor any wherein the virtues of the heart will be less exposed to be weakened. Be good, be learned, and be industrious, and you will not want the aid of traveling to render you precious to your country, dear to your friends, happy within yourself.

Thomas Jefferson, Letter to Peter Carr, Dated August 10, 1787

I am still undecided with regard to my future peregrinations, ten months experience has too well initiated me into the Spanish mode of besieging, to admit of a belief that Gibraltar will be the work of a day!... a month at least must elapse before the troops here can possibly be embarked...in the interim, instead of going immediately to St. Roque, I have thoughts of making a short tour to Rome: I may never perhaps find so convenient an occasion; with regard to the expence it can be but trifling, as I shall perform the whole voyage by sea...I can be furnished with letters to the first nobility in Rome...these considerations, joined to the pleasure and instruction which I promise myself from the journey, induce me to think seriously of it.

Lewis Littlepage, Letter to John Jay, Dated March 17, 1782

He definitely wanted to see Greece. He wanted to see Greece as Dickie Greenleaf with Dickie's money, Dickie's clothes, Dickie's way of behaving with strangers. But would it happen that he couldn't see Greece as Dickie Greenleaf? Would one thing after another come up to thwart him...?

Thomas Ripley, Patricia Highsmith's *The Talented Mr. Ripley*

On July 29, 1791, the U.S. Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson wrote a letter to the Chevalier Lewis Littlepage, an American expatriate who had served most of the major European monarchs of the late eighteenth century. In this epistle, Jefferson proudly informed the seasoned American monarchist that “Mr. Paine’s Rights of man have been...read here with great avidity & pleasure. A writer...having attacked him, has served only to call forth proofs of the firmness of our citizens in their republicanism.” Jefferson went on to celebrate the success of “the revolution in France”, stating that it contributed to “the happiness of mankind” and encouraged America’s resolve in its republicanism. To Littlepage, a man who made his living by serving French, Spanish, Russian and Polish monarchs, Jefferson’s statements presaged a serious threat to his livelihood. The French Revolution of 1789 had initiated a wave of anti-monarchical reform and conflict across continental Europe. Just prior to his receipt of this letter, on May 3, 1791, the Polish Revolution had occurred. This “glorious revolution” provoked the Russian invasion that eventually led to the forced abdication of King Stanislas, the last king of Poland and Littlepage’s principal employer.¹

Jefferson’s letter was only his latest communication with Littlepage; these two men kept up a relatively regular correspondence over the period between 1785 and 1802. There were several reasons why Jefferson kept up this correspondence with Littlepage: he was often a fixture in Paris and Versailles during Jefferson’s tenure as U.S. Ambassador to France, 1785-1789; he had extensive experience and knowledge in European affairs; he was a talented Virginian who, like Jefferson, was an alumni of the College of William & Mary; and he was, through marriage, the nephew of Jefferson’s

¹ Thomas Jefferson to Lewis Littlepage, 29 July 1791, box 2, folder 15, Curtis Carroll Davis Papers, Swem Library of The College of William and Mary; Nell Holladay Board, *Lewis Littlepage* (Richmond, VA: Whittet & Shepperson, 1970), 157.

beloved Law professor George Wythe. However, Jefferson's interest in Littlepage was most likely due to his interest in mentoring and educating talented young men for public service. On October 17, 1785 the Scottish physician Dr. James Currie recommended his "friend Captain Lewis Littlepage", who had "both pleased and instructed" him, to Jefferson's "particular attention." Currie made this recommendation, "Well knowing [Jefferson's] respect for merit wherever (or in whomever) found, and Patronage for genius." This American revolutionary, and future U.S. president, saw education as vital to the survival of a virtuous republic. He viewed it as schooling for liberty that produced both: good republican leaders; and a citizenry capable of selecting the most virtuous and capable public servants. As will be asserted in this chapter, Jefferson's view of a proper republican education was one that: produced literate citizens; provided these citizens with a historical understanding of the human race; taught them about classical republican virtues, including a selfless dedication to the public welfare; and gave them knowledge of useful modern foreign languages. He was opposed to education, like Littlepage's, that was largely for the sake of refinement and success in the world of politesse. There was truth in Jefferson's viewpoint, considering that it was Littlepage's polite education that weakened his youthful classical republican values, gained him entry into European court society, and eventually turned him into a monarchist.²

A Jeffersonian Education

Of all the American Founders, excepting perhaps Franklin, Jefferson placed the highest value on education's ability to ensure a successful republic. In a letter to Wythe in 1786 Jefferson wrote, "No other sure foundation can be devised for the preservation of

² Board, 53-68, 92-120; Davis, *The King's Chevalier: A Biography of Lewis Littlepage*, 23-26; Dr. James Currie to Thomas Jefferson, 17 October 1785, The Thomas Jefferson Papers, ser. 1, The Library of Congress.

freedom and happiness...Preach a crusade against ignorance; establish and improve the law for educating the common people” and “Let our countrymen know that the people alone can protect us against the evils [of misgovernment].” This was the purpose of his “Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge”, which was presented (but never passed) in the Virginia legislature in 1778 and 1780 and revised into his successful “Act to Establish Public Schools” (1796). Jefferson wrote in the former bill’s preamble, “experience hath shewn, that even under the best forms, those entrusted with power have, in time, and by slow operations, perverted it into tyranny” and that “the most effectual means of preventing this would be, to illuminate, as far as practicable, the minds of the people at large...” As Bailyn, in *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, explained, American revolutionaries like Jefferson envisioned “power” as an aggressive predator whose “natural prey, its necessary victim, was liberty, or law, or right.” In *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, Wood illustrated how republicanism desacralized the power of governmental authority (formerly represented by the English monarchy) and thus increasingly enabled the American people to boldly defend themselves against its predatory power. This transformation occurred, Wood explained, as the monarchical government of the colonial era, which “restrained” individuals through “fear of force, by patronage or honor”, gave way to an American republican government that could only rule through persuasion. It was this governmental change, as political theorist Hannah Arendt asserted, that informed Jefferson’s term “the pursuit of happiness” in the Declaration of Independence. She believed that the term referred not only to the pursuit of “private welfare” and “well-being”, but also to “the public right to happiness” and the right to be a “participator in public affairs.”³

³ Thomas Jefferson, *The Jeffersonian Cyclopaedia: A Comprehensive Collection of the Views of*

This transfer of power from government to the people not only bestowed greater freedom upon individuals, but also burdened them with greater responsibilities. Jefferson, entrusting American citizens with maintaining a virtuous republic and safeguarding it against tyranny, wrote in his “Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge” that it was essential to “give [citizens] knowledge of those facts, which history exhibiteth” so that “they may be enabled to know ambition under all its shapes, and prompt to exert their natural powers to defeat its purposes...” His bill, influenced by John Locke’s *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), aimed to “produce virtuous, useful, and able men in their distinct callings...” Through this type of education, Jefferson hoped to develop in young citizens the virtues described in the nativistic writings of the ancient Roman senator Marcus Portius Cato and those exemplified by the austere ancient republic of Sparta. In his second-century B.C. work *Origins*, Cato described perfect citizens as those that lived plainly, were useful to their homeland, and were devoted to serving their state. He declared that it was “from the tillers of the soil that spring the best citizens, the staunchest soldiers; and theirs are the enduring rewards which are most grateful and least envied.” Jefferson, in the 1780s, essentially reiterated Cato’s sentiments in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*. It was there that he also wrote, “It is the manners and spirit of a people which preserve a Republic in vigor. A degeneracy in these is a canker, which soon eats to the heart of its laws and constitution.” John Adams expressed this same idea in the 1770s when he stated that, “Public virtue cannot exist in a Nation without Private, and public Virtue is the only Foundation of Republics.”

Thomas Jefferson, ed. John P. Foley (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1900), 274; Thomas Jefferson, *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*, Federal ed., vol. 2, ed. Paul Leicester Ford (New York, NY: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1904), 414; Bailyn, 56-57; Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 95-109; Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (London, England: Penguin Books, 1990), 132.

Franklin, in his “Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania” (1749), declared, “The good education of youth has been esteemed by wise men in all ages, as the surest foundation of the happiness both of private families and of commonwealths.” As Shalhope wrote, many leaders of the early American Republic called “for a return to a ‘Christian Sparta’—a simple, austere, egalitarian society based upon mutual social and moral obligations rather than market calculations.” When Jefferson took the Presidential Oath of Office in 1801 he expressed this desire, asserting that the “strongest Government on earth” was “one where every man, at the call of the law, would fly to the standard of the law, and would meet invasions of the public order as his own personal concern.”⁴

Jefferson, realizing that citizens needed virtuous leadership, concerned himself with the education of potential republican leaders. In his “Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge”, this champion of higher education asserted that it was “expedient for promoting the publick happiness that those persons, whom nature hath endowed with genius and virtue” to “be rendered by liberal education worthy to receive, and able to guard the sacred deposit of the rights and liberties of their fellow citizens...” It was through education that Jefferson aimed to train republican leaders to subordinate their own selfish interests to the public good. As he told his nephew Peter Carr, “pursue the interests of your country...with the purest integrity... Give up money, give up fame... give the earth itself and all it contains rather than do an immoral act.” These were good instructions on how a talented young man could make himself fit to serve a

⁴ Jefferson, *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*, 414-415; John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education and Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, eds. Ruth W. Grant & Nathan Tarcov (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996), 8; Kenneth J. Atchity, ed., *The Classical Roman Reader* (New York, NY: Henry Holt, 1997), 20; Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Richmond, VA: J. W. Randolph, 1853), 176-177; Paul H. Smith, et al., eds., *Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774-1789*, vol. 3 (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1976-2000), 538; Benjamin Franklin, *The Works of Benjamin Franklin: Containing Several Political and Historical Tracts Not Included in Any Former Edition*, vol. 1 (London, England: Benjamin Franklin Stevens, 1882), 569; Shalhope, 34; United States Presidents, 25.

commonwealth. This advice also conformed to historian Lawrence Cremin's assertions concerning Locke's educational views. Cremin, in *American Education* (1970), wrote that of Locke's "four great ends of education...virtue, wisdom, breeding, and learning...learning explicitly comes last" because Locke felt it was "of little value unless joined to a properly formed character..."⁵

Central to Jefferson's vision of virtuous republican leadership was the concept of a commonwealth. It was political philosopher James Harrington, in *The Commonwealth of Oceana* (1656), who first tied the notion of a commonwealth to the ancient definition of government. Harrington claimed that a commonwealth was "a Civil Society of Men... instituted and preserv'd upon the Foundation of common Right or Interest" and that government was merely the art of maintaining such a society. He held that under this "government" the "common Right, Law of Nature, or Interest of the whole...[was] more excellent, and so acknowleg'd to be by the Agents themselves, than the Right or Interest of the Parts only." Banning, through his interpretation of Harrington in *The Jeffersonian Persuasion* (1978), showed that the political theorist actually "insisted on a place [in government] for [a] natural aristocracy" that was selected not "by virtue of...birth alone." He also illustrated how disinterested public servants with the leisure to study public issues were essential to the rational government of Harrington's commonwealth. It was for similar considerations that Jefferson, in his educational bill, stated that a natural aristocracy, comprised of young men who "nature hath fitly formed and disposed to become useful instruments for the public", should be selected "without regard to wealth, birth or other accidental condition or circumstance." Moreover, he felt that these talented

⁵ Jefferson, *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*, 415; Thomas Jefferson to Peter Carr, 19 August 1785, in Jefferson, *Thomas Jefferson Travels*, 52; Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The Colonial Experience, 1607-1783* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1970), 361-362.

young men “should be sought for and educated at the common expence of all.” Jefferson thus believed that ingenious and talented young men from all backgrounds should be educated; at public expense, if necessary. These men, he held, should receive a liberal education so that they could “become useful instruments for the public.” It was for this purpose that Jefferson mentored promising young scholars.⁶

The educational regimen Jefferson advocated to his mentees was one that gave them useful knowledge that rendered them valuable to their country. It was to this end that he: encouraged educational diligence; advocated studying useful subjects, rather than frivolous ones like poetry and novels; opposed the tradition of the Grand Tour, where young men were sent to Europe for education; and was supportive of political apprenticeships. Jefferson was exceedingly critical of laziness and thought that students should be diligent in their studies. In a letter to his daughter Martha on March 28, 1787, Jefferson even associated educational perseverance with the exceptional character of Americans. Advising Martha against “indolence”, he told her that it was “part of the American character to consider nothing as desperate; to surmount every difficulty by resolution and contrivance” and to consider “the conquering” of “[her] Livy as an exercise in the habit of surmounting difficulties, a habit...necessary” for maintaining esteem in America. The subjects Jefferson regarded as essential to a republican education were those that instilled virtue, informed students about the real world in which they lived, and provided them with useful knowledge. The specific studies he advocated pursuing were: “Classical knowledge, modern languages and chiefly French, Spanish, and Italian; Mathematics; Natural philosophy; Natural History; Civil History; Ethics.”

⁶ James Harrington, *The Oceana and Other Works of James Harrington, Esq.*, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (London, England: A. Millar, 1747), 37, 46; Lance Banning, *The Jeffersonian Persuasion: Evolution of a Party Ideology* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), 26-28.

This distinguished statesman called French language “an indispensable part of education for both sexes” because it had “become that of the general intercourse of nations” and “the depository of all science.” He regarded “novels” and “poetry”, literary forms he associated with women, as a “mass of trash” and a “great obstacle to good education.” It was his view that this material “infects the mind destroys its tone and revolts it against wholesome reading”, makes it reject “reason and fact, plain and unadorned”, and causes “a bloated imagination, sickly judgment, and disgust towards all the real businesses of life.” Jefferson also believed that “Of all the errors which can possibly be committed in the education of youth, that of sending them to Europe [was] the most fatal.” This American Founder felt that “no American should come to Europe under 30 years of age” and asserted that those that do “will lose in science, in virtue, in health and in happiness, for which manners are poor compensation.” However, he did believe in apprenticing young men to ambassadors serving in Europe. In 1801, Jefferson informed the incoming U.S. Minister to France Robert Livingston that he would be assigned a Secretary of Legation primarily because he “[considered] it advantageous to the public to make these apprenticeships to prepare subjects for principal duties hereafter.”⁷

Littlepage’s Education: The Effects of a Purely Polite Education

While Lewis Littlepage’s education began much like that advocated by Jefferson, it eventually became a process that polished him into a monarchist. This refinement process, which served to acculturate him into elite royalist society, was commenced during his colonial American education and concluded during his extended European

⁷ Thomas Jefferson to Martha Jefferson, 28 March 1787, in Jefferson, *Thomas Jefferson Travels*, 62-63; Thomas Jefferson to John Banister, Jr., 15 October 1785, in Jefferson, *Thomas Jefferson Travels*, 57; Jefferson, *The Jeffersonian Cyclopaedia*, 274; Thomas Jefferson to Walker Maury, 19 August 1785, in Jefferson, *Thomas Jefferson Travels*, 55; Thomas Jefferson to Robert R. Livingston, 24 March 1801, Jefferson Papers, ser. 1, The Library of Congress.

residency. In colonial and revolutionary Virginia Littlepage was tutored in the Classics and progressed in schooling until he was accepted into the College of William & Mary, Jefferson's alma mater, in 1778. Jefferson would have approved of the young Virginian's attendance there as he asserted in 1785 that education, excepting instruction in modern foreign languages, could be "as well acquired at William & Mary College as at any place in Europe." After Littlepage's first semester at the College, the young Virginian was awarded the Nottoway Foundation scholarship because of his financial need, "Ingeniousness, Learning, Piety, and good Behaviour, as to [his] Morals", and literary talents. These talents included a gift for Latin translation, a genius for poetic verse and an extensive knowledge of the belles lettres. While such skills won Littlepage a scholarship and exhibited his patriotic values, they also developed him into a man frequently plagued by boredom and prone to whimsical, fanciful behavior. As a result, Littlepage became a person unable to persevere in attaining practical ends that might have advanced a career in the United States. However, during his time in Williamsburg, VA, he was recognized by Virginia Delegate to the Continental Congress Thomas Adams "as a young gentleman whose talents and disposition merited better opportunities of improvement" and was recommended for service in Jay's diplomatic mission to Spain. It was following Littlepage's year at William & Mary, in January of 1780, that the seventeen-year-old traveled to Europe to serve as Jay's private secretary in Madrid. His experiences in this polished ancient world, built upon the foundation of his genteel education, served to fully catalyze him into a royalist.⁸

⁸ Davis, *The King's Chevalier*, 19-23, 26-29; Thomas Jefferson to John Banister, Jr., 15 October 1785, in Jefferson, *Thomas Jefferson Travels*, 57; The College of William and Mary, "Journal of the President and Masters or Professors of William and Mary College," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 15, no. 3 (January, 1907), 26; The College of William and Mary, "The Statutes of the College of William

The first important stage in Littlepage's refinement was his education in colonial and revolutionary Virginia. The young Virginian, having completed his studies before the implementation of Jefferson's educational program, essentially received the education of an elite colonial gentleman. The primary goal of this instruction was not to produce a good republican leader or citizen, but to acculturate a colonial subject into the hierarchical, monarchical British culture that the American colonies were then still a part of. Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* influenced this educational program, as well as Jefferson's to a certain extent. In this work, Locke asserted that it was most important to take "care of...the gentleman's calling. For if those of that rank are by their education once set right, they will quickly bring the rest into order." As Wood illustrated, in *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, this colonial American education was almost exclusively for the colonial gentry. He described how training in Latin and Greek acted to "confine education only to a few, when in fact republicanism required everyone to be educated" and noted that it was increasingly ridiculed in the early American Republic as being "time-consuming, useless, and unrepublican." It was this type of useless, unrepublican educational endeavor that Littlepage thrived at. Littlepage, privately tutored in the Classics, became a master of Latin and of poetry in general. By age seventeen in 1779, when he first sailed to Europe, he had already: seen two of his poems published; written a third poem that would later be published in the *Southern Literary Messenger*; and produced a translation of the 22nd Ode in the First Book of

and Mary in Virginia," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 16, no. 4 (April, 1908), 252. The belles lettres and its English equivalent "polite literature" refer to almost any poetry, rhetoric or prose that has an artistic, elegant flair. It only excludes works in scientific fields such as those in mathematics or philosophy. "Belles-lettres," *The Encyclopedia Americana*, vol. 2, Frederick Converse Beach, et al. (New York: The Americana Company, 1904); John Jay to Lewis Littlepage, 26 October 1781, in John Jay, *Letters, Being the Whole of the Correspondence Between...John Jay, Esq.; and Mr. Lewis Littlepage*, A New and Correct ed. (New York, NY: Francis Childs, 1786), 22.

Horace that would later be reprinted six times and praised by famed writer Edgar Allan Poe as being “superior” to all the other translations of it.⁹

Littlepage’s extensive knowledge of and obsession with the belles lettres was well documented. In 1780, after making Littlepage’s acquaintance in France, American merchant Elkanah Watson claimed that the Virginian was already considered a prodigy “by all the Americans at Nantes and a giant in literary acquirements—In languages--& even in polite literature.” These literary acquirements included an extensive knowledge of ancient literature and many of the major written works of the early Modern Era. The young gentleman was apparently familiar with Miguel de Cervantes’s *Don Quixote de la Mancha* (1605, 1615), a farcical story about a man obsessed with chivalric adventure, as he utilized elements of its storyline in his witty remarks. Littlepage, writing to Jay on March 25, 1782 about his military service in Spain (the setting of Cervantes’s novel), told his patron that his “military Quixotism [was] not yet abated” and that he wished to participate in yet another battle (the Siege of Gibraltar) before returning to Madrid. Later, in his “Private Political Memoir” (1795), the Virginian criticized Prince Potemkin (a Russian military leader he once assisted in combat) by calling the prince “a man who creates monsters for himself in order to appear a Hercules in destroying them.” When Littlepage wrote his *Answer to a Pamphlet* (1787), a polemical response to Jay’s *Letters* (1786), he introduced his work with the famous opening line of Cicero’s *First Catilinarian Oration*: “Quo Usque Tandem Abutere Patientia Nostra?” (When do you mean to cease abusing our patience?). The young man went on, in his pamphlet, to criticize Jay’s lack of courage and to call his “name... a satire upon honor”. He cruelly

⁹ Susan H. Godson, et al., *The College of William & Mary: A History*, vol. 1 (Williamsburg, VA: King and Queen Press, 1993), 130-132; Locke, 8; Wood, 28, 349; Davis, *The King’s Chevalier*, 19-23.

told his patron that “One ingredient more”, courage, “in your mental composition would have qualified you to act the part of a CATALINE; the want of it has left you a JAY.”

Another instance of Littlepage’s biting satirical wit was in 1791 when, in a letter to the U.S. Minister to France and fellow William & Mary alumnus William Short, he lampooned the ineptitude of the Polish foreign ministry. In this letter, the young Virginian referenced lines from the British political satire *The Rolliad*, a work: disguised as a literary criticism of an epic poem; that criticized the administration of William Pitt the Younger and John Rolle, a socially awkward member of Parliament who supported Pitt.¹⁰

There was other evidence that marked Littlepage as a man mentally immersed in polite literature. This proof existed in the extensive references he made to literature in his writings, as well as in the books he owned. Criticizing Potemkin again in his “Private Political Memoir”, Littlepage wryly commented that “At times he appeared worthy of ruling the Empire of Russia; and at times scarcely worthy of being an office clerk in the

¹⁰ Elkanah Watson, “Lewis Littlepage,” in MS volume entitled “Mixt Medley”, D., 541-543, Watson Papers, New York State Library, in Curtis Carroll Davis, “Massachusetts Meets Virginia in Nantes, France: Elkanah Watson Writes to Lewis Littlepage, 1781,” *Manuscripts*, 7 (Fall, 1954), 23; Apparently *Don Quixote* was a book popularly used by Americans studying the Spanish language. Thomas Jefferson during his voyage to France read the book in an attempt to master the Spanish language. Littlepage most likely read the book for similar reasons. Jefferson, *Thomas Jefferson Travels*, 2; Lewis Littlepage to John Jay, 25 March 1782, in Jay, *Letters*, 45; Lewis Littlepage, “Memoire Politique et Particulier,” vol. 361 (f. 462-470), Archives of the Kingdom of Poland, Central Archives for Old Documents, Warsaw, Poland, in Curtis Carroll Davis, trans. and ed., “An American Courtier in Europe: Lewis Littlepage’s ‘Private Political Memoir’ (Hamburg, 1795),” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 101, no. 3 (June 20, 1957), 259; Lewis Littlepage, *Answer to a Pamphlet, Containing the Correspondence Between...John Jay...and Lewis Littlepage, Esquire*. (New York, NY: Francis Childs, 1787), 9, 34; Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Cicero’s First Catilinarian Oration*, with Introduction, Running Vocabularies, and Notes by Karl Frerichs (Wauconda, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, Inc., 1997), 3; Littlepage wrote, “Their ready tongues with sophistries at will, Can say, unsay, and be consistent still.” He wrote this in response to the Polish Foreign Ministry’s sanctioning of all his “ostensible proceedings by founding upon them alone their present public communication with the Court of Madrid” while refusing to acknowledge the legality of his mission to Spain. Lewis Littlepage to William Short, 16 February 1791, box 2, folder 14, Davis Papers; *The Rolliad, In Two Parts; Probationary Odes for the Laureatship; and Political Ecologues*, 21st ed. (London, England: J. Ridgway, 1799), 12; The social awkwardness of John Rolle was forever immortalized in John Martin’s 1839 painting *Coronation of Queen Victoria*, which depicts the eighty-two year old rolling down the steps to the Throne during the coronation of Queen Victoria.

Empire of Lilliput.” This was essentially a nod to Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726), a fantastical adventure novel, which satirized eighteenth century British and French politics and parodied the travel journal genre. On March 21, 1795, the polished Polish knight wrote a letter to King Stanislas requesting to visit him in his exile. In this letter, Littlepage paraphrased a couple of lines from John Milton’s epic poem *Paradise Lost* (1667), a work concerning Mankind’s expulsion from the Garden of Eden: “The world is all before me, where to choose, My place of rest, and providence my guide.” Shortly after writing this letter, the Polish knight borrowed an epigram for his political memoir from the royalist writer and satirist Count Antoine de Rivarol: “Politics, Like the Sphynx, devours every one who cannot explain its riddles.” When the American adventurer died in 1802 his fixation with the belles lettres was readily apparent. In the inventory of Littlepage’s estate, almost all the books found in his possession could be considered polite literature. His library was devoid of formal histories, such as those of Livy and Tacitus, and consisted almost entirely of adventure fiction, poetry, and travel journals. Littlepage’s library contained: a collection of voyage journals; Tobias Smollett’s *The Life and Adventures of Sir Launcelot Greaves* (1762), a novel similar to *Don Quixote*, and *Travels through France and Italy* (1766); Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*; Goldsmiths Poems; Grays Poems; *Tales of Terror*, a collection of horror themed poems; and two volumes of plays.¹¹

¹¹ Davis, “An American Courtier in Europe: Lewis Littlepage’s ‘Private Political Memoir’ (Hamburg, 1795),” 257, 259; Lewis Littlepage to King Stanislas, 21 March 1795, box 6, Davis Papers; By January, 1795, the Russians had crushed the Polish Revolution of 1794 and were occupying Poland. Catherine the Great exiled King Stanislas to Grodno and prevented Littlepage from visiting him. Board, 213-214; John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, bks xi-xii, ed. A. W. Verity (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1918), 52; “List of Books Belonging to the Estate of Lewis Littlepage decd,” in Virginia Historical Society, *MSS1H7185a, Holladay Family Papers, 1728-1931, Spotsylvania and Louisa Counties, Virginia* (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1996), microfilm, a89-101, sec. 5, slide 340.

The original purpose of Littlepage's journey to Europe was not to continue his polite education, but to receive useful, experiential political instruction. According to Jay, the young Virginian was sent to Europe to prepare for a career in "law and politics". In other words, Jay offered Littlepage a political apprenticeship in order to give him "opportunities of acquiring two useful languages, and of applying to such pursuits and studies, as might conduce to qualify [him] for the bar, and for public employments." This political sponsorship was in accordance with Jefferson's advocacy of recruiting talented young men into public service. In the summer of 1780, prior to Littlepage's arrival in Spain, Jay wrote a series of letters detailing the course he intended to pursue with his new protégé. In these, the newly appointed Minister to Spain advised Littlepage to "do nothing by halves" and told the young man that he had "a wide and glorious field before [him]; and virtue, learning and prudence" would enable him "to reap laurels", to become "useful to [his] country" and to be "happy hereafter". In another letter, Jay instructed his student to read books that "would teach [him] things as well as language", especially "those which lead to a knowledge of mankind" such as "History and memoirs". When, in November, Littlepage finally arrived in Madrid and met Jay, his new patron notified the young man's guardian Benjamin Lewis. Jay, in this correspondence, told Mr. Lewis that while he thought "highly of [Littlepage's] talent for poetry", he also thought it "ought not...to be the first object of his care." It was his opinion that the young man should "turn his attention principally, to such sciences, as tend to qualify him for the law and for politics" and "read men as well as books..." Jay, expressing his dedication to the education of Mr. Lewis's nephew, concluded his letter by noting that his "endeavors [would] not be wanting, to fix and confirm those liberal principles of morality and

honour” on Littlepage and “to extend his ambition beyond the limits of this life.” The problem with this plan was that Littlepage had already set his ambition beyond the limits of this life by the time he entered Europe.¹²

It was most likely Littlepage’s fixation with poetic verse and other polite literature that prevented him from completing his political education and led to his later inability to persevere in useful, practical pursuits. The young man’s mind, filled with vivid chivalric fantasies, was bored with the sober, realistic pursuits that may have made him a successful American leader. As Jefferson would have concluded, Littlepage’s strong interest in polite literature was a “great obstacle” to his education, caused him to reject “reason and fact, plain and unadorned”, and developed in him “a bloated imagination, sickly judgment, and disgust towards all the real businesses of life.” Even a few days after his arrival in Madrid, on November 25, 1780, the young adventurer was expressing his fantastical expectations to a friend:

...inflam’d with Curiosity & anxious expectation to view the riches and grandeur of this extensive Kingdom, I first cross’d the Pyrenees: my imagination had already painted with every flattering exaggeration, the treasures of Peru and Mexico, blended with the refin’d arts of Europe; -- judge then my surprise, when after these gay suggestions. I found myself in the midst of a rugged mountainous Country; uncultivated, unadorn’d with the least prospect of verdure...everything indicated poverty and misery...

Filled with such strong expectations for excitement, Littlepage was often disappointed by reality and, as a result, was forever seeking a new grand adventure. The result of this tendency was for later students of his life, like former President of the College of William and Mary Lyon G. Tyler, to conclude that “His story [sounded] like a fable taken from the Arabian Nights.” King Stanislas effectively diagnosed the boredom that fueled this

¹² John Jay to Lewis Littlepage, 15 June 1781, in Jay, *Letters*, 12; John Jay to Lewis Littlepage, 19 August 1780, in Jay, *Letters*, 8; John Jay to Lewis Littlepage, 16 June 1780, in Jay, *Letters*, 7; John Jay to Benjamin Lewis, 21 November 1780, in Jay, *Letters*, 9-10.

never-ending pursuit of adventure when, in a letter to Littlepage on April 26, 1795, he wrote: “Ennui is the greater part of your illness and ennui would pursue you to death at Carlsbad where you know nobody.” The ultimate result of his boredom and irrational pursuits of adventure was to limit his political career. As Nell Holladay Boand stated in *Lewis Littlepage* (1970), a biography she wrote about her step-relative Lewis Littlepage, “His capacity to have become a statesman seems to have been frustrated by his incapacity for self discipline and the extremes of behavior that can only be described as irrational at times.”¹³

At two crucial points during his life in Europe the young Virginian exhibited a lack of judgment in his pursuit of adventure. The first of these was when he decided to abandon his political education in favor of becoming a soldier. Littlepage, in his letters to Jay, labeled his own actions as “military Quixotism” and explained the motives behind this sudden decision to go on a Spanish military adventure. These irrational motives included his: desire to learn the Spanish language; desire to escape the “painful obscurity in which [he] was secluded, and which [he] even regarded as an obstacle to [his] political hopes”; and his intent to “return to America—the éclat of having served a campaign in Europe in a distinguished post...” All of these excuses exhibited Littlepage’s poor judgment in that he: could have easily learned Spanish and enhanced his political reputation by serving under Jay; or could have simply stayed home and become a military

¹³ Jefferson, *The Jeffersonian Cyclopedia*, 274; Lewis Littlepage to “Dear Sir,” 25 November 1780, box 2, folder 2, Davis Papers; Lyon G. Tyler, “Dr. Tyler Says Littlepage Perhaps Was Greatest Genius Ever Born in Virginia,” *Richmond News Leader*, April 24, 1931, 5; King Stanislas to Lewis Littlepage, 26 April 1795, in Boand, 220; Boand, 290.

hero since, as he told Jay, “Virginia [had] been the theatre of war ever since [his] departure...”¹⁴

The second instance of the Virginian’s quixotism was when, in 1788, he abandoned his post as the Polish envoy to the Court of France in order to serve the Russians in the Black Sea Campaign. King Stanislas was swift in rendering his judgment in the matter. The king, in a letter he wrote to his agent’s replacement Maurice Glayre, criticized Littlepage for “essaying the fortune of arms once more” because it would “have so much the air of an adventurer...” He went on in the letter to render his assessment of the young man’s capricious character:

If in spite of everything I’ve said to him on this subject he persists in taking his own lead, and then isn’t happy, let him attribute the fault to himself alone. His restlessness, his impatience in breaking off from my service in so brusque a manner, will be the sole cause of it...It is really distressing that Littlepage joins to so many good points a certain way of seeing and acting which proceed originally from his notions of independence, to which he has been too much accustomed since the age of 13, when he ran away from college to become a soldier, and which, with the assist of several lucky incidents, have led him to believe he can always push forward to the limits of chance and often against all the rules.

Stanislas’s complaints against Littlepage were practical ones, considering the importance of that gentleman’s mission to Paris (1787-1788). It had been his objective to effect the Grand Quadruple Alliance, an alliance among Russia, Austria, France and Spain against Great Britain and Prussia. This alliance, although unsuccessful, would have provided the Polish kingdom with protection against its Prussian enemies and France with aid against the British. The value of Littlepage’s service was also enhanced by his ready acceptance at Versailles, which was most likely facilitated by his friendships with the Marquis de Lafayette and Thomas Jefferson, a Francophile and advocate of maintaining the Franco-

¹⁴ Lewis Littlepage to John Jay, 25 March 1782, in Jay, *Letters*, 45; Lewis Littlepage to John Jay, 15 June 1781, in Jay, *Letters*, 11; Littlepage, *Answer to a Pamphlet*, 11.

American Treaty of Alliance (1778). As the king wrote to Glayre, the Virginian's abandonment of his post was "most annoying" since he had already "acquired an access and esteem in France extremely advantageous for me and which circumstances render even more important."¹⁵

The second stage of Littlepage's refinement occurred after his arrival in Europe and involved numerous concurrent developments. One of these experiences was his Grand Tour of Europe that stretched from Spain to Russia. While this was part of the experiential education advocated by Locke, it also went against the educational program recommended by Jefferson and caused Littlepage to develop "a fondness for European luxury and dissipation and a contempt for the simplicity of his own country", a "partiality for aristocracy or monarchy"; and "foreign friendships which [would] never be useful to him". The full extent of the young adventurer's wanderlust was first expressed, in his letter to Jay on March 17, 1782, after his military service in Minorca (a Balearic Island) while he was awaiting orders to go to Gibraltar:

I am still undecided with regard to my future peregrinations...a month at least must elapse before the troops here can possibly be embarked...in the interim, instead of going immediately to St. Roque, I have thoughts of making a short tour to Rome: I may never perhaps find so convenient an occasion; with regard to the expence it can be but trifling, as I shall perform the whole voyage by sea ...I can be furnished with letters to the first nobility in Rome...these considerations, joined to the pleasure and instruction which I promise myself from the journey, induce me to think seriously of it.

Although Littlepage was unable to take this journey, it presaged the grandiose European tour he would later embark upon. Following his service in the joint Spanish-French expedition against Minorca and Gibraltar, he traveled to France with a friend he had met

¹⁵ King Stanislas to Maurice Glayre, April-May 1788, quoted in Davis, *The King's Chevalier*, 187-188; Davis, *The King's Chevalier*, 163-164; King Stanislas to Maurice Glayre, 2 April 1788, quoted in Davis, *The King's Chevalier*, 186.

during these campaigns, the Marquis de Lafayette. After parading around “Paris and Versailles...in the first circles...[attracting] marked attention” in the company of Lafayette and taking a brief trip to London, Littlepage went on another adventure with yet another friend he had met during his military service in Spain. This friend, Prince Charles de Nassau-Siegen, had been his commander at Gibraltar. With the Prince, who was searching for a water route to the Middle East, Littlepage journeyed to Istanbul and eventually to Poland. It was on this trip that the Virginian first met his greatest patron, King Stanislas, whom he served in various capacities in Spain, France and Russia. Later, he would briefly abandon this service in order to serve the Russians in the Black Sea Campaign against the Ottoman Empire. Through his various European adventures, Littlepage developed friendships with a cast of thoroughly forgettable aristocrats that could never have benefited him in the U.S (i.e. the Prince of Nassau and Prince Potemkin). The following paragraphs will illustrate the negative effect of his exposure to these aristocrats and their luxurious lifestyles.¹⁶

Another development in the process of Littlepage’s Europeanization was his rapid acquisition of French language fluency. According to the talented Virginian, it took him approximately six-and-a-half months to go from not speaking a word of French to possessing “sufficiency for the necessities of traveling and common conversation...” and for reading French authors “with tolerable facility and some degree of taste”. Within three years of arriving in France, Littlepage communicated almost exclusively in French.

¹⁶ Lewis Littlepage to Benjamin Lewis, 10 July 1784, in Virginia Historical Society, *MSS1H7185a, Holladay Family Papers, 1728-1931*, a27-29, sec. 1, folder 3, slides 165-166; John Locke advocated travel as part of an empirical education because he held that all learning came from environmental stimuli. Locke, 158; Thomas Jefferson to John Banister, Jr., 15 October 1785, in Jefferson, *Thomas Jefferson Travels*, 57; Lewis Littlepage to John Jay, 17 March 1782, in Jay, *Letters*, 44-45; Davis, *The King’s Chevalier*, 76-78, 80-87, 90-111; Elkanah Watson, *Men and Times of the Revolution; Or, Memoirs of Elkanah Watson, including Journals of Travels in Europe and America, From 1777 to 1842*, ed. Winslow C. Watson (New York, NY: Dana and Company, 1856), 113.

His French language skills were crucial to his success in elite European realms for obvious reasons of basic communication. However, because eighteenth century France was widely considered to be the European arbiter of language and literature, the importance of his French language mastery was multiplied. Since the establishment of the Académie Française (1635), whose mission was to refine and standardize the language, elite French society increasingly concerned itself with proper style and use of their language. In *Émile*, Rousseau noted that in elite social circles, “proscription of accent is followed by modes of pronunciation which are ridiculously affected, and governed by fashion, such as are noticed particularly in the young people in court circles...” However, the impact of French high society’s concern over perfecting its language was most clearly expressed by Voltaire in *The Age of Louis XIV* (1751). According to this philosophe, by 1751, French “language [had] become the language of Europe” and was “of all languages that which expresses with the greatest of ease, exactness and delicacy all subjects of conversation which can arise among gentlefolk...”¹⁷

Once Littlepage learned Europe’s cosmopolitan language, his particular personality traits and skill sets made him especially receptive to the social values of elite French society. In many ways, Littlepage’s creative life resembled those of the French Enlightenment era writers. He was an accomplished poet, skilled writer, brilliant satirist, a man who relied upon elite patronage, and a person who celebrated French culture.

¹⁷ When Littlepage first arrived in Europe (in Nantes, France) on February 11, 1780 he did not know any French. Davis, *The King’s Chevalier*, 31; By May 30, 1780, Littlepage had only attained “a superficial knowledge of a few words.” Lewis Littlepage to John Jay, 30 May 1780, in Jay, *Letters*, 6; Lewis Littlepage to John Jay, 30-31 August 1780, in Jay, *Letters*, 9; Martin Fitzpatrick, “The Age of Louis XIV and Early Enlightenment in France,” in *The Enlightenment World*, 141; Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Rousseau’s Émile: Or, Treatise on Education*, trans. William H. Payne (New York, NY: D. Appleton and Company, 1895), 38-39; Voltaire, *The Age of Louis XIV*, trans. Martyn P. Pollack (New York, NY: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1926), 371.

Similar to Voltaire and other leading French philosophes, Littlepage was a talented poet in his early life. Like Voltaire, Rousseau and the other French Enlightenment writers, Littlepage was a gifted satirist. He was uniquely adapted to the literary culture that existed in French high society. As previously noted, he was highly gifted at poetic verse and was most knowledgeable about literature in general. The young American's literary talents did not end with poetry, he also was gifted at satirical prose. By 1795 he had produced no less than three pamphlets, two of which he had published. As previously noted, Littlepage produced a twenty-nine-page pamphlet entitled *Answer to a Pamphlet* which comically questioned American diplomat John Jay's integrity and refuted this former mentor's claims to over a thousand dollars in financial compensation for unrepaid advances. Later, he produced (but never published) a footnoted fourteen page "Private Political Memoir" that: attempted to rehabilitate his image with Catherine the Great of Russia, who he believed he could appeal to for payment for his services to Poland; defended his political service record; and criticized the Polish king's administration. Littlepage's memoir came complete with an epigraph from his friend, the royalist French writer Count Rivarol. Also, in 1795, the Chevalier wrote and published a twenty-seven page pamphlet, which consisted of his letter to the Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs Baron Thugut. In this work, Littlepage contested his expulsion from Austria.¹⁸

The Old World Littlepage operated in was less concerned with the practical education advocated by Jefferson, than with the pleasures of polite society. Elite eighteenth century France, the country most European nations attempted to emulate and

¹⁸ Davis, "An American Courtier in Europe: Lewis Littlepage's 'Private Political Memoir' (Hamburg, 1795)," 255-257; Lewis Littlepage, "Letter from Mr. Littlepage... To His Excellency Monsieur le Baron de Thugut..." in Virginia Historical Society, *MSS1H7185a, Holladay Family Papers, 1728-1931*, a36, sec. 1, folder 4, slides 190-197.

the one Littlepage spent much of his time in, was a socio-political space where social competition was necessarily expressed through dress and adherence to the demands of polite society; that was often concerned more with entertainment than with intellectualism; and where select intellectuals could gain access to elite patronage. It was a realm with distinctly non-intellectual characteristics where aristocrats entertained themselves and vied for social prestige and attendees competed for elite patronage through theatrics, poetic talent, and social wit. In his *Letters on England* (1733), Voltaire described the French court's lack of intellectualism, and its capricious interests when he wrote, "at the present time the taste at Court is far removed from letters. Perhaps in a short time the fashion for using one's mind will come back – a king has only to have the will and he makes what he likes of a nation." American socialite Anne Willing Bingham wrote, in a letter to Jefferson on June 1, 1787, that in Paris "The Arts of Elegance are... considered essential, and are carried to a state of Perfection; the Mind is continually gratified with the admiration of Works of Taste." Rousseau, in *Émile*, criticized some of the absurd social manners of court life. Lauding the simplicity of commoners, he joked that "instead of putting accent into his speech [a noble Frenchman] puts it in his manner". French historian Sharon Kettering described how court life gravitated around ambition and "the search for patronage", the "major court [activity] that helped to set the tone of life at Versailles." Another historian Antoine Lilti illustrated how elite French social venues, such as Parisian salons, were mere extensions of court society. Moreover, he noted that their attendees were more concerned with elite entertainment and acquiring "the material and symbolic resources of elites" than with intellectual pursuits.¹⁹

¹⁹ Antoine Lilti, "The Kingdom of Politesse: Salons and the Republic of Letters in Eighteenth-Century Paris," *Republics of Letters: A Journal for the Study of Knowledge, Politics, and the Arts* 1, 1

Littlepage initially gained access to this elite society by using his political connections. During the invasion of Minorca and the Siege of Gibraltar, battles initiated by the Treaty of Aranjuez (1779) that secretly allied France and Spain against Great Britain, Littlepage served officially in the Spanish forces but was placed under the command of the French general Duc de Crillon. Through his stylishly valorous service in these joint Spanish–French military campaigns (1781-1783), the Virginian won the friendship of the Duc de Crillon and the Marquis de Lafayette. At the conclusion of the conflict in 1783, Lafayette introduced the young man to elite Parisian society. Later, expressing the power of Lafayette’s friendship in his “Letter to Baron Thugut”, he wrote that if he “had been a revolutionary character, France for six years would have presented to [him] a career more vast than Poland, and that during the greater part of that period, the power of M. de LaFayette could easily have opened the way for me.” By 1788, after he had served King Stanislas for some years at Versailles, Littlepage gained entry into the salons of the Marchioness de la Ferte-Imbault (Madame Geoffrin’s successor) and Mme. Necker. Interestingly, it was Geoffrin’s salon that his patron the King had attended several years before. Elkanah Watson described the extent of the young man’s success in elite French social venues when he wrote, “At Paris and Versailles [Littlepage] moved in the first circles, and attracted marked attention”.²⁰

(May 1, 2009): <http://rofl.stanford.edu/node/38>, 1-11; Voltaire, *Letters on England*, trans. with intro. by Leonard Tancock (London, England: Penguin Books, 1980), 101; Anne Willing Bingham to Thomas Jefferson, 1 June 1787, in Jefferson, *Thomas Jefferson Travels*, 134; Rousseau, *Rousseau’s Émile: Or, Treatise on Education*, 38-39; Sharon Kettering, “Brokerage at the Court of Louis XIV,” *The Historical Journal*, 36, 1 (1993), 69.

²⁰ Littlepage, “Letter from Mr. Littlepage...To His Excellency Monsieur le Baron de Thugut...,” in Virginia Historical Society, *MSS1H7185a, Holladay Family Papers, 1728-1931*, a36, sec. 1, folder 4, slides 190-197; Davis, *The King’s Chevalier*, 74-77, 184-185; Lilti, 5; Watson, *Men and Times of the Revolution*, 113.

Through his participation in these salons, Littlepage was subjected to elite French social protocol. His learning and knowledge were used to entertain French elites, rather than to advance the interests of his native country. The effect of his participation in these social venues was most likely to make him increasingly admire France's socio-cultural ascendancy and to encourage him to emulate the social protocol of French court society. As historian Dorinda Outram noted, the social makeup of salons was conducive to patronage relationships in that aristocratic women generally led them and their members were generally of a lower social class than the hostess. Outram asserted that salonnières selected bourgeoisie men of letters who did not belong to the "aristocratic, legal, or administrative elites" and gave them "access to a social capital of relationships which could allow them ascension into the elite itself through the operation of patronage". Lilti emphasized the importance of these relationships to ascending middling intellectuals when he wrote that "most of the sources of revenue to which writers could aspire...could only be acquired if they were recommended and protected by powerful people with connections at court and in the high circles of power". The power of these elite French women also extended into that nation's government. As Bingham explained to Jefferson, "The Women of France interfere in the politics of the Country, and often give a decided Turn to the Fate of Empires...they have obtained that Rank and Consideration in society...which they in vain contend for in other Countries." Therefore, the ability of a writer or politician to gainfully practice in his profession was wholly determined by elites (particularly elite women) and one's ability to negotiate polite society. The effect of this noble cooptation of the largely middling writers was that, even as the eighteenth century progressed and these philosophes developed an influential public sphere critical of

absolutism, many of them like Voltaire increasingly admired France's socio-cultural ascendancy and continued to emulate the social protocol of French court society.²¹

In order to function in these elite social realms, Littlepage undoubtedly utilized his gift for comical anecdotes and witty remarks. Most of the extant examples of these either lauded French culture or satirized his opponents. In one letter he wrote to a friend, the young American praised "the Genius & disposition of that celebrated Nation [France]" and then criticized Spain's lack of those traits. In making his argument, Littlepage comically described a fight between a Castilian and a Catalan in a coffeehouse that involved one taking "a pot of hot Chocolate" and "saluting the skull of his Opponent...& discharging its contents into the recesses of his bosom, breeches, & other cavities". While these were entertaining examples, the Virginian's most memorable witticisms were to be seen in his various personal disputes. In responding to Jay's attacks on his personal character, Littlepage made reference to Jay's "awkward dignity and natural phlegm" and criticized the minister's mission to Spain. In experiencing this mission, Littlepage asserted, "one would have thought the treaty between America and Spain depended more on visiting cards than ministerial propositions". Later, in response to Jay rejecting his invitation for a duel and having him arrested, Littlepage wrote that Jay's sword "still sleeps more quietly than his conscience". The American, in his "Private Political Memoir", portrayed Catherine the Great's chief military advisor Prince Potemkin as a rather incompetent leader who acted "as if he were awaiting the arrival of an archangel, in order to lead an Army which often doesn't need even a terrestrial

²¹ Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment*, 2d. ed. (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 88-89; Lilti, 6-7; Anne Willing Bingham to Thomas Jefferson, 1 June 1787, in Jefferson, *Thomas Jefferson Travels*, 134; Fitzpatrick, "The Age of Louis XIV and Early Enlightenment in France," in *The Enlightenment World*, 134-135, 139-142.

General to march to victory.” The fore-mentioned witty criticisms were just a sampling of what this hyper literary man wrote. However, these illustrated Littlepage’s ability to publicly criticize public figures in a comical, entertaining way.²²

Entertaining anecdotes useful in social settings could be acquired through various means. However, gallant and picturesque displays of valor in battle were among the most highly prized methods in elite eighteenth century French society. At court, it was often more important that officers won battles in style, rather than merely being victorious. As one Spanish commander noted during the Siege of Gibraltar, “the Courtiers of that nation [France] are fit for nothing but their pleasures, they thought they would have a hunting party of it—they got tired and want to return”. During the invasion of Minorca, French officers seemed as concerned with composing poetry and winning highest honors at Versailles as they were fighting the battle. Through similar shows of gallant valor, Littlepage won honor in the invasion of Minorca and at the Siege of Gibraltar. At the Siege of Gibraltar, according to Watson, Littlepage “was on board one of the floating batteries, and was blown up, but saved...[and] participated, in a conspicuous manner, in the thrilling incidents of that memorable siege.” After being blown off the floating battery, Littlepage climbed onto the Spanish Admiral’s ship and “occupied himself, upon the quarter-deck, during the battle, in sketching the various positions of both fleets”. These sketches, according to Watson, “exhibited to the minister an ingenious and scientific view of the battle” and won the Virginian “great applause and distinction at the

²² Lewis Littlepage to “Dear Sir,” 25 November 1780, box 2, folder 2, Davis Papers; Littlepage, *Answer to a Pamphlet*, 12; Davis, *The King’s Chevalier*, 122; Davis, “An American Courtier in Europe: Lewis Littlepage’s ‘Private Political Memoir’ (Hamburg, 1795),” 259.

court of Madrid.” Moreover, Watson wrote that Littlepage “exhibited the sketch” at “Dr. Franklin’s, in Passy” to great response.²³

Another captivating quality that Littlepage possessed was his skill at fawning over European elites. This was important considering that, as Lilti explained, French elites were more interested in hearing compliments than with “straight-talking”. There were several instances showcasing the Virginian’s obsequiousness. In 1785 when Littlepage went to visit his family in Virginia, he promised King Stanislas that “royal goodness has long been the highest incentive to my ambition...No prospect, certainly, that my native country presents would ever...[rank] for a moment in competition with the happiness and glory of serving a Monarch...” In a letter to Jay requesting a recommendation from the U.S. Congress to serve a European monarch, Littlepage proudly proclaimed that “the name of the King of Poland [reflected] sufficient honour upon all who boast his patronage...” and that he was “Encouraged by the condescension of” this “great and benevolent King, who has deigned to recommend me to Congress...” Earlier, in 1781, he had boasted to Jay that he was “the first [citizen of America] ever recognized as such by the court of Spain...[and] the first Protestant who was ever publicly authorized to serve in the army of the Catholic King...” It was obvious that Littlepage, toward the end of his European public life, had fully devoted himself to serving European monarchs and enjoying a genteel lifestyle.²⁴

Littlepage, like many middling French writers of the period, envied the seemingly unattainable social status and public respectability of the elites. Repeatedly reminded of their pecking order in society, men like philosopher Jean le Rond d’Alembert were often

²³ Davis, *The King’s Chevalier*, 51, 63; Watson, *Men and Times of the Revolution*, 112-113.

²⁴ Lilti, 5; Lewis Littlepage to King Stanislas, 6 October 1785, in Boand, 74-75; Littlepage, *Answer to a Pamphlet*, 2, 9.

denied courteous greetings at elite venues. Another philosopher, Rousseau, was socially slighted during his service as private secretary to Comte de Montaigu, the incompetent French Ambassador to the Venetian Republic. While Montaigu was not qualified for or skilled in diplomacy, Rousseau effectively performed the duties of Embassy Secretary. Even though Rousseau performed these functions well, he was not given an official status, was repeatedly reminded by the ambassador that he was only a domestic servant, and was eventually dismissed without his promised wages. Like Rousseau, Littlepage was most likely humiliated during his public service. However, rather than ridiculing elite society as Rousseau later did, Littlepage's envy motivated him to emulate the nobility. While King Stanislas sent Littlepage to Paris as his envoy to Versailles, the king did not give him an official status. As author Curtis Carroll Davis wrote, "Lewis had to go as a mere Agent rather than as a recognized member of the Diplomatic Corps". Later, as Davis noted, Littlepage had an argument with Filippo Mazzei, a man hired by King Stanislas to keep Littlepage apprised of French affairs while he was away from his post. The Virginian, angered by one of Mazzei's "absolutely Ministerial [letters], as to an employed Confrere" and rumors of his growing intimacy with people of importance, wrote to his note taker:

My dear prelate...the word intimacy does not accord with the circumstances; you would have to substitute kindness, or patronage.—I have been a witness to this intimacy, and I laugh at recalling it. Imagine what intimacy there could be for a hired and needy scribbler among the great!!!"

In this statement, Littlepage essentially admitted that he had experienced elite social ridicule in his earlier life. However, he was also taking on a noble tone and asserting his

newly won social status by ridiculing Mazzei's lowly status.²⁵

Although Littlepage came to Europe as a young man living on the credit of others, his experiences in elite European society and middling envy caused him to pursue a luxurious lifestyle. The young adventurer, explaining his initial financial circumstances in Europe, lamented to Jay that his "situation [was] seriously alarming:---Totally neglected by my guardians in America, for more than two years past I have subsisted upon money borrowed upon their credit..." Even though he came to Europe with such limited financial circumstances, once he experienced elite culture, he endeavored to live a lavish lifestyle. The first indications of this intent became apparent during the Minorcan invasion, when Littlepage was living among French and Spanish aristocrats. After receiving numerous suspicious requests from his protégé for additional funding, Jay disapprovingly told the extravagant Virginian on October 26, 1781:

You [were] represented to me as a young gentleman whose talents and disposition merited better opportunities of improvement than those you had; and my regard for a rising genius, opposed by difficulties, prompted me to patronize you...I early considered myself in another light than that of your banker...I thought if you [were] enabled to live in the stile of a Spanish captain of foot...you would have reason to be satisfied...You informed me, that unless your allowance was doubled, you might be infinitely distressed...though you might associate with gentlemen of fortune and expense, yet that, not being equal to them in the one, you ought not follow them in the other. I could perceive, without any difficulty, that if you meant to keep pace in expence with many of your companions, your allowance would prove very inadequate...you had been at the expence of an order for post-horses, to carry you from hence to Cadiz, yet it seems the 'extreme heat of the weather obliged you and a fellow traveler to hire a coach on the way.' This, no doubt, was a more agreeable way of going and yet...it was traveling rather like a gentleman who needed not to regard expence...I rejoice to hear that you have been left above dependence, and advise you to take care that that consideration does not reduce you to it...P.S. Messieurs French, of Bordeaux, have, as they say, by your orders, sent to Co. Livingston for you, a pair of shoe

²⁵ Sebastien-Roch-Nicolas Chamfort, *Maximes, Pensees, Caracteres* (Paris, France: Garnier-Flammarion, 1968), 193, quoted in Lilti, 5; Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. Maurice Cranston (London, England: Penguin Books, 1968), 9; Davis, *The King's Chevalier: A Biography of Lewis Littlepage*, 162; Lewis Littlepage to Abbe Ghigiotti, 24 February 1790, box 6, Davis Papers.

and knee buckles; but as the price amounts to between thirty-nine and forty hard dollars, I must decline interfering further than to give you this information.

Responding to such denials of additional funding from his patron, the middling Virginian arrogantly informed his patron that: he was “Sent” by his guardian with “letters of unlimited credit”; he was the “younger son of an honorable family” who, through his vast inheritances, would “surely” be able “to indemnify [his] uncle for generously advancing [him] the necessary sums for [his] travels, &c. &c.”; and that “Men of honor...have no superiors but benefactors; whilst you thought proper to preserve that sacred character, you had an undoubted right to command my respect and gratitude...”²⁶

Littlepage’s arrogantly extravagant behavior became even more pronounced during his service under King Stanislas. On March 2, 1786, when he was sworn into “the King of Poland’s Cabinet, as his first Confidential Secretary, with the rank of Chamberlain”, the Virginian began receiving an income of about 1,020 ducats per year. The immediate effect of this financial security was to give him the resources to gamble. The Chevalier would later write to his king about this “gambling in the winter of 1786-87” and how he had “promised then to your Majesty to stop gambling...” Littlepage became even more extravagant after 1787, when the King sent him “as secret and special Envoy to the Court of France, to assist in the negotiations for the Grand Quadruple Alliance”. Starting out as Poland’s agent to France, he already received a salary three times greater than that of his full-titled predecessor. On December 29, 1787 the polished gentleman, describing his new prosperity to his mother, wrote: “My situation has hitherto been prosperous...I have no reason to complain...my salary is sufficient to

²⁶ Lewis Littlepage to John Jay, 25 March 1782, in Jay, *Letters*, 45; John Jay to Lewis Littlepage, 26 October 1781, in Jay, *Letters*, 22-28; Lewis Littlepage to John Jay, 7 December 1781, in Jay, *Letters*, 30; Lewis Littlepage to John Jay, 20 January 1782, in Jay, *Letters*, 39.

support me genteely, and no more, being only one thousand guineas, which, in my situation, is really trifling.” He smugly added that “the King’s generosity” was “by no means confined to the limits of [his] salary.” However, even this did not seem to be enough for the young gentleman. In 1788, a French informant wrote about “the escapade of the anglo-american...[who made]...bankers... cash different sums in the [Polish] King’s name...”²⁷

At Versailles, Littlepage was forever concerned about maintaining a genteel appearance and lifestyle. Several accounts painted him as a gilded youth, or a dandy, who was greatly concerned with appearing genteel. Although, as Davis asserted, King Stanislas wanted “Poles from the minor gentry—educated and steady...but both incapable and undesirous of the display the magnates loved” to serve at foreign courts, he was graced with Littlepage. In a letter to a friend, on September 17, 1787, William Short seemed surprised that Littlepage was “reasonable in his modes of thinking...considering the mode of life he has led for some time.” Mazzei gave a similar account of the polished Polish agent’s lavishness. He told King Stanislas, on January 30, 1789, that Littlepage’s “mode of life in France seemed to [him] such that [he] wished him to return to Virginia.” Moreover, Mazzei wrote that while he “succeeded in persuading [Littlepage] that with his talent and studying law he could have made a success”, the gentlemanly Virginian merely “told [him] about the pleasures and diversions of Paris...” Littlepage’s note taker went on to tell Stanislas that, although he had encouraged Littlepage to live decently on 700

²⁷ Lewis Littlepage to Lewis Holladay, 9 January 1801, in Virginia Historical Society, *MSS1H7185a, Holladay Family Papers, 1728-1931*, a450-532, sec. 43, folder 3, slides 163-165; Davis estimated Littlepage’s pay as Chamberlain. Davis, *The King’s Chevalier*, 134, 162, 185-186; Lewis Littlepage to King Stanislas, 1794, in Board, 182; Lewis Littlepage to Elizabeth Lewis, 29 December 1787, in Virginia Historical Society, *MSS1H7185a, Holladay Family Papers, 1728-1931*, sec. 1, folder 2, slides 109-111.

guineas per year, the young gentleman “did the contrary and repeated many times that he couldn’t live in Paris on 1,000 guineas [his salary from King Stanislas]...” When Mazzei returned to Virginia, he said that Littlepage’s guardian “freely complained about his [nephew’s] behavior...and asked how a gilded youth would behave if he owed every cent of the income he spent...” The Virginian’s extravagant behavior remained constant throughout his years in Europe, even as his patron King Stanislas was being forced off the Polish Throne. When Stanislas was exiled in Russia, a few months before his forced abdication, he sent Littlepage his monthly allowance and wrote,

My good friend, I must caution you about one thing which has come back to me. Two of your table companions in coming from supper at your house, both intoxicated, said to one another, ‘Littlepage has given us good wine to drink today just the same as in other times, but where the devil is it that he gets the wherewithal to keep such a good table.’ I have spoken before my departure of these dinners that you give, and which get you into debt, and at least please use your brains.

Although the King offered his polished knight practical advise, Littlepage continued to employ his brains in frivolous pursuits.²⁸

The capstone of Littlepage’s polite education was essentially put into place when he was named Polish Agent to Versailles. At that time, the Virginian’s: literary and social skills were fully developed; his ability to successfully negotiate elite social venues was firmly established; and he had gained access to the aristocratic patronage necessary to his social and political survival in Europe. The Philadelphian grand tourist Thomas Shippen most vividly expressed the reality of these assertions in a letter to his father on December 1, 1787. Shippen wrote that,

²⁸ Davis, *The King’s Chevalier*, 162; William Short to William Nelson, Jr., 17 September 1787, William Short Papers, Library of Congress; Filippo Mazzei to King Stanislas, 30 January 1789, in Board, 116-119; King Stanislas to Lewis Littlepage, 2 March 1795, box 6, Davis Papers. This last letter was also printed in Board, 216.

After dining with [Littlepage] at the American Minister's, and seeing him at the foot of the Throne in the House of Lords, I was perfectly satisfied that he possessed all that polish of exterior which is so essential at Courts, and a more than ordinary share of those winning and captivating manners which no Stoicism can resist..."

Shippen went on to detail how the Marquis of Lansdowne, the former British Prime Minister, interrogated Littlepage during a dinner party about numerous subjects and about European affairs in general. After witnessing the spectacle, the young Philadelphian concluded that "any other man almost in Littlepage's situation...would have found the scrutiny the severest gauntlet he ever ran. Littlepage triumphed in it and gained immense honor...In all points upon all questions Littlepage was equally great". Shippen wrote that the polished Virginian so impressed his audience that "some gentlemen present" who were "famed for their colloquial wit and ability" were "perfectly silent" from "the beginning to the end of the dinner". Highlighting this fact, the Philadelphian noted that during the Virginian's performance, "Mr. Jekyle, whose wit is said to have never been equaled, far less eclipsed, confined himself to the background of the picture without saying a word", but later called Littlepage "a most wonderful man".²⁹

In the United States, Lewis Littlepage had also won fame or infamy through his dispute with John Jay. The published letters between Jay and Littlepage concerning their financial dispute, in *Letters and An Answer to a Pamphlet*, introduced many in elite circles to the name "Littlepage". This notoriety, stories passed down through the family or his personal experience with the young Virginian, prompted the incoming U.S. Minister to France Robert R. Livingston (one of Jay's in-laws) to reject Jefferson's

²⁹ Thomas Lee Shippen to Dr. William Shippen, Jr., 1 December 1787, MSS39859, Shippen Family Papers, Library of Congress.

attempt to assign him a protégé. Jefferson, writing to persuade Livingston to reconsider, on May 8, 1801 stated:

It will be a subject of real regret if the regulation we have adopted does not meet your wishes...I explained to you in my former letter the principles on which it was done, to wit, I, to teach for public service in future such subjects as from their standing in society, talents, principles and fortune may probably come into the public councils...Nor is this new. When I went to France as a member of a commission, Humphreys was named as Secretary of Legation, without my having been consulted...Humphreys lived in my family...In Sumpter's character you have the utmost security, and his instructions shall moreover be pointed. Indeed the Secretary will find his interest in cultivating the patronage of his principal, as he cannot expect to remain in his family unless he can make himself agreeable, and he must moreover know, and will be told from us, that in case of disagreement or complaint he will be immediately recalled...I am persuaded you will find the difficulties you apprehend vanish in practice. The Secretaries of Legation, though named at first by the government, find themselves so entirely dependent on their principal for their accommodation, their character and even their continuance, that I have never known an instance where they have not been as perfectly pliant as a private secretary, except in the case of Carmichael & Jay, where I believe a bickering arose. But you know a greater one arose between Jay and his private secretary Littlepage.

It was through such infamy that the extravagant Littlepage frustrated some of Jefferson's efforts to apprentice talented young men to ambassadors.³⁰

Littlepage's European refinement contrasted greatly with the traditional republican education advocated by Jefferson. Instead of learning virtues and skills that would have rendered him useful to his native country, Littlepage learned the social protocol of elite European court society. He became addicted to the lure of royal patronage, the diversions of frivolous social competitions, and elitist pride. Littlepage's immersion in poetry and polite literature seemed to make him reject "reason and fact, plain and unadorned" and caused him to have "a bloated imagination, sickly judgment,

³⁰ Davis, *The King's Chevalier*, 124-126; Thomas Jefferson to Robert R. Livingston, 8 May 1801, Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress. Robert Livingston had a personal knowledge of Littlepage's time as private secretary to Jay. There was more than one reference to him in Jay, *Letters*. One example was when Littlepage sent an order to Col. Livingston for a fancy pair of shoe and knee buckles. John Jay to Littlepage, 26 October 1781, in Jay, *Letters*, 28.

and disgust towards all the real businesses of life.” This caused the young Virginian to bore easily with the rigors of mundane life, making him unable to persist in any one pursuit. This caused him to abandon the American political career he was originally sent to Europe to train for, in order to pursue his military quixotism. Anytime he felt stress and boredom, Littlepage would engage in another military adventure. In the end, his glorious grand tour of Europe caused him to “lose in science, in virtue, in health and in happiness”. The King’s Chevalier, possessing no skills useful to America, became somewhat notorious for his immorality and died before reaching the age of forty in 1802. Ultimately, as Locke once asserted, “of all the men we meet with, nine parts of ten are what they are, good or evil, useful or not, by their education.” This was the case with Littlepage whose training limited his usefulness to the U.S., while acculturating him into monarchical European society and contributing to his particular success in the Kingdom of Politesse.³¹

³¹ Jefferson, *The Jeffersonian Cyclopedea*, 274; Thomas Jefferson to Walker Maury, 19 August 1785, in Jefferson, *Thomas Jefferson Travels*, 55; Horace Edwin Hayden, “Littlepage Family,” in *Virginia Genealogies: A Genealogy of the Glassell Family of Scotland and Virginia* (Baltimore, MD: Southern Book Co., 1959), 418; Locke, 10; The term “Kingdom of Politesse” was borrowed from Antoine Lilti’s “The Kingdom of Politesse: Salons and the Republic of Letters in Eighteenth-Century Paris”. In this work, Lilti asserted that the French court and Parisian salons shared similar social values. Therefore, since these two main elite French social institutions represented a kind of unity, elite France as a whole essentially represented the Kingdom of Politesse.

Chapter II



Fig. 3. The Washington Monument, Washington, D.C. (Photograph by the author, 20 May 2010)

I have no private intelligence on the motives for the retirement of General Washington, but I presume that this great man, who has the glory of having sacrificed even his popularity to what he believed to be the good of his country, finds himself at last in the impossibility of opposing longer the party which disapproves the treaty with England and demands common cause be made with France against the powers. As for me I see broken the sole bond which I still was holding with America: -- I will always be a citizen there, but I have no more resources either political or private...

Lewis Littlepage, Letter to Polish King Stanislaw, Dated August 5, 1796

This was the end of Dickie Greenleaf, he knew. He hated becoming Thomas Ripley again, hated being nobody, hated putting on his old set of habits again, and feeling that people looked down on him and were bored with him unless he put on an act for them like a clown, feeling incompetent and incapable of doing anything with himself except entertaining people for minutes at a time. He hated going back to himself as he would have hated putting on a shabby suit of clothes, a grease-spotted, unpressed suit of clothes that had not been very good even when it was new.

Thomas Ripley, Patricia Highsmith's *The Talented Mr. Ripley*

In July, 1785, Lewis Littlepage returned to his native Virginia on a one-year paid leave of absence from the Polish Kingdom. Littlepage's return to his homeland was brief, lasting approximately five or six months, and was his only visit to the United States during his twenty-one-year European adventure. It was primarily a business trip to arrange his affairs and ask the U.S. Congress for permission to serve at the Court of the King of Poland. During this trip Littlepage first met one of his greatest military idols, General George Washington, whose virtues he had sought to emulate during his earlier life. The two-day meeting at Mount Vernon, preserved for posterity in Washington's diary, as well as in a letter Littlepage wrote to his stepfather Lewis Holladay, occurred on November 8th and 9th, 1785. During these unusually warm mid-Fall days, these two military men-turned-politicians discussed the recently concluded American Revolutionary War, a conflict in which both had participated valorously. Littlepage, describing the event in a letter to his stepfather Lewis, "found General Washington much less reserved in conversation than [he] had been taught to expect, and was peculiarly happy in having an opportunity of informing" himself "of many interesting circumstances of the American War which no person but the General" could "properly attest." In his diary, Washington simply described the short, five-foot-two-inch Virginian as "an extraordinary character."¹

¹ Through her research in the Polish Archives, Boand found that King Stanislas gave Littlepage "a year's leave of absence" and 1,000 Ducats to "return to America, arrange his business affairs, and obtain the consent of Congress." Boand, 67-68; Littlepage first arrived in Europe on February 11, 1780, briefly visited America between late June, 1785 and early-to-mid-December of that year, and then remained in Europe from January, 1786 until he returned to America for good on November 5, 1801. Davis, *The King's Chevalier*, 31, 112, 127, 373; George Washington, *The Diaries of George Washington*, vol. 4, eds. Donald Jackson and Dorothy Twohig (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1978), 220-221, in George Washington Papers, ser. 1b., Library of Congress; Mazzei confirmed that Littlepage participated in the American Revolutionary War. He claimed that he knew Littlepage while he was "in the College of Williamsburg in the beginning of 1779" and noted that young man's "courage...when he followed the invasion of General Matthews in Virginia..." Filippo Mazzei to King Stanislas, 30 January 1789, in Boand,

Extraordinary character was what defined Washington and made him, as U.S. Representative Henry Lee declared in his funeral oration, “first in the hearts of his countrymen.” The General was, in the eyes of many American citizens, the living embodiment of virtuous classical republican leadership. To them, he continued to be a man who: was above the unbridled lust for power and financial enrichment; and who therefore projected disinterested dedication to the general welfare of his nation. As President John Adams declared in 1797, Washington’s “name” was “a rampart, and the knowledge that he [lived] a bulwark, against all open or secret enemies of his country’s peace” and his “example” was “recommended to the imitation of his successors by both Houses of Congress and by the voice of the legislatures and the people throughout the nation”. This and other grandiose evaluations of Washington’s character were made during his later years and after his death. As a result, it has been nearly impossible for modern Americans to overcome the myth that he was born a supernaturally virtuous republican. What has oft been overlooked was that Washington’s much-honored republican character resulted from conscious refinement and was developed over a lifetime. Lewis Littlepage, the extraordinary Virginia gentleman he entertained at Mount Vernon during those two warm days in November, 1785, originally idealized his host’s republican virtue but refined his own character in a far different way. Littlepage, cursed by good fortune, blindly pursued his own self-interest, focused merely on obtaining the

116-119; Lewis Littlepage to Lewis Holladay, 9 November 1785, in Virginia Historical Society, *MSS1H7185a, Holladay Family Papers, 1728-1931*, sec. 1, folder 2, slide 113; Through an examination of Littlepage’s clothing, Davis estimated that the young man was about 5’ 2”. Davis, *The King’s Chevalier*, 32.

physical accoutrements of power, and never attempted to exert control over his personal ambitions to render himself fit for republican leadership.²

Republican Leadership Traditions

In the early American Republic there were two primary characteristics of an ideal republican leader. The American Founders and citizens paradoxically expected their rulers to be both ambitious to act upon the public stage and reserved enough to self-limit their influence and power. Although the first of these characteristics, the ambition to act upon the public stage, was the driving trait of monarchs, it was also considered a primary element in a good republican chief. As Wood explained, the American revolutionaries were raised to believe that leaders were “Men of soaring ambition...who made things happen; they were the men of ‘extraordinary Character’ who were destined to distinguish their ‘Path thro’ the World by...Great Effects.’” Moreover, as he asserted, they were considered to be “great-souled men...driven by passions that ordinary people could never comprehend, by ambition, by pride, by honor, and by ‘a Prospect of Immortality in the Memories of all the Worthy, to the End of Time.’” Historian Robert Wiebe, in *The Opening of American Society* (1984), asserted that “courage, resolution, moderation, dedication, and control” were the character traits that the revolutionary gentry felt “qualified them to lead...republican governments...” Of these five character qualities, courage, resolution and dedication corresponded to a republican leader’s ambition, or his ability to persevere in his aims in the face of opposition. While ambition was considered a necessary trait in a republican ruler, overly ambitious rulers were considered a threat to republics. In European monarchies, this threat was controlled through revolutions. As

² “Funeral Oration, By Major-General Henry Lee,” in *Eulogies and Orations on the Life and Death of General George Washington* (Boston, MA: Manning & Loring, 1800), 17; United States Presidents, 16-17.

Shalhope wrote, in *The Roots of Democracy*, the Glorious Revolution of 1688 “achieved a miraculous equilibrium: government had been framed to fit man’s mixed nature—a precarious balance between passion and reason, public spirit and the lust for power...”³

The crucial trait that distinguished republican leaders from Old World monarchs was their ability to be disinterested holders of authority who were willing to self-limit their own power for the greater good. Essentially this characteristic highlighted what Wiebe called a republican’s “control”, or his capacity to act reasonably by controlling his own “recklessness” and “passion.” This was important for a republican governor because, as Bernard Bailyn explained, “what turned power into a malignant force, was not its own nature so much as the nature of man — his susceptibility to corruption and his lust for self-aggrandizement.” The American conception of this ideal leadership trait was derived from the account of Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus in Roman historian Livy’s *Ab Urbe Condita* (circa 27-25 B.C.). Cincinnatus, as described by Livy, was an aristocratic Roman republican leader who not only possessed courage and resolution, but also exhibited the highest degree of self-control. Livy wrote that Cincinnatus was “unanimously” nominated as Dictator twice because he had the “courage and resolution equal to the majestic authority of that office” and was “the man to inspire full confidence” in Rome’s citizens during their periods of crisis. However, although he was given “supreme control of the country’s fortunes” twice, Cincinnatus: “[hesitated] to accept the burden of responsibility”; “[prayed] to God to save his old age from bringing

³ Wood, 28, 108; Wiebe, 11-12; Shalhope, 6.

loss or dishonour upon his country in her trouble”; and “resigned after holding office for fifteen days, having originally accepted it for a period of six months.”⁴

Cincinnatus, reluctant to accept power and eager to relinquish it, vigorously defended the ancient Roman Republic from all forms of potential threats. While this noble Roman republican exhibited a great deal of self-control, he also possessed what Wiebe called “moderation”, or the character to oppose the extremes of “democratic despotism” and “monarchic tyranny.” Early in his career, this statesman defended his republic from what he saw as the tyranny of common men. When he was elected consul,

Cincinnatus began his period of office with a series of speeches in which his castigation of the Senate was even more vehement than his attempts to repress the commons. According to him, it was the feebleness of the senatorial party which had allowed the tribunes to hold office for an indefinite period and...to exercise a tyranny fitter for a disorderly household than for the political life of a city like Rome. Courage, constancy, all the virtues which, in civil or military life, were the true glory of manhood, had followed his son Caeso into banishment. ‘And what,’ he cried, ‘have we in their stead? The tribunes! Those men of many words, those trouble-mongers and fomenters of political strife, who by underhand methods get themselves elected for a second, or even a third, term of office and lord it amongst us as irresponsibly as kings!

Later, after reluctantly accepting his first nomination as Dictator, Cincinnatus commanded the Republic’s infantry against an army threatening Rome. Emphasizing the dire necessity of his military service to the Republic, as well as his merit for the task,

Livy wrote,

Now I would solicit the particular attention of those numerous people who imagine that money is everything in this world, and that rank and ability are inseparable from wealth: let them observe that Cincinnatus, the one man in whom Rome reposed all her hope of survival, was at that moment working a little three-acre farm...A mission from the city found him at work on his land – digging a ditch, maybe, or ploughing.

⁴ Wiebe, 12; Bailyn, 59; Titus Livy, *Livy: The Early History of Rome, Books I-V of The History of Rome from Its Foundations*, trans. Aubrey de Selincourt (London, England: Penguin Books, 2002), 226, 230, 305.

During this particular crisis, Cincinnatus was described as being “at the head of the infantry” and deftly leading his men into battle. After he rescued the army of Minucius, the soldiers “were quick to appreciate the military qualities of the Dictator, and gave him implicit obedience...[and] when he left them [they] saluted him as their protector.”

Following this military crisis, as previous explained, Cincinnatus quickly resigned from his dictatorship. Several years later, when “he was over eighty”, the Roman patriot was called from retirement to once again serve as Dictator. This time Cincinnatus protected the Republic from a suspected demagogue, Spurius Maelius, who was supposedly attempting to make himself king. Addressing the public, Cincinnatus explained why Maelius deserved to be executed,

Maelius has been justly killed...He was born here amongst a free people protected by just laws; he knew, as we do, that the kings were expelled; he knew that in the same year Tarquin’s nephews...were executed for a plot to restore the monarchy...he knew that only the other day the decemvirs were punished with...death for arrogating to themselves the air and authority of kings; all this Maelius knew, yet in the same city of ours he himself dared hoped to reign.

The Roman Dictator essentially described Maelius as a demagogue (and would-be tyrant) who had attempted to gain political favor by promising Romans cheap grain during a period of famine. Cincinnatus ultimately called him “a rich corn-dealer of humble birth...who thought he could buy our liberty with a bag of flour...”⁵

The Virtuous Leadership of George Washington

While the historical events of their lives did not unfold in the same order, both Washington and Cincinnatus served their governments in similar ways. Washington, like

⁵ Wiebe, 12; Livy, 217, 226-227, 229, 305-307; Cincinnatus was reduced to living on a small farm because Rome imposed a high fine on him. This fine was imposed because of his son’s anti-plebeian actions. Titus Livius, *The History of Rome, Books 01 to 08* (Project Gutenberg, 2006), bk. 6, sect. 13, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/19725/19725-8.txt>.

his mythical counterpart, was an aristocratic farmer who: rendered essential military services to his nation during its time of greatest need; defended his republic from a disruptive plebeian influence; later prevented it from descending into a monarchical tyranny; and publicly adhered to the sacred republican principle of disinterested leadership. As the unpaid commander of the Continental Army, he bravely led his soldiers across the Delaware River, won the key battles of Trenton and Princeton, and held his army together at Valley Forge through the bleak winter of 1777-78.

Washington's persevering character ultimately insured that the American cause survived through the bloody hardships of the long, difficult Revolutionary War. Shortly after the end of the war, on December 23, 1783, he formally resigned his commission as Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army. After the war, the tangible value of his public service to the new nation was equally as impressive. In 1787 the General emerged from retirement in order to address the plebeian anarchy unleashed by Shay's Rebellion (1786-1787), an armed uprising led by middling Massachusetts farmers who were seeking debt relief and lower taxes. Washington, at this time, was unanimously elected President of the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia that addressed the need for a stronger central government and drafted the U.S. Constitution. Less than two years later, the gentleman farmer was once again called from retirement to serve as the first U.S. president. Washington was unanimously elected to that office twice by the Electoral College and served both terms without pay. At the zenith of his popularity, in 1797, he retired from the presidency and once again became a gentleman farmer.⁶

⁶ Paul K. Longmore, *The Invention of George Washington* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), 17; Joseph J. Ellis, *His Excellency: George Washington* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2004), 97-99, 112-120, 183-184, 215, 233; Garry Wills, *Cincinnatus: George Washington and The Enlightenment* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1984), 13; Leonard L. Richards,

Americans readily accepted Washington as their first president and deified him largely because his public life conformed to Livy's noble account of Cincinnatus. As Henry Lee declared in his funeral oration of the Great Man,

The founder of our federate republic—our bulwark in war, our guide in peace, is no more!...when nations now existing shall be no more; when even our young and far-spreading empire shall have perished; still will our Washington's glory unfaded shine...To the horrid din of battle sweet peace succeeded; and our virtuous Chief, mindful only of the common good, in a moment tempting personal aggrandizement,...converted his sword into a ploughshare...

Not only was Washington lauded for defending his republic from "external tyranny", but also, like Cincinnatus, he was praised for defending it from internal power struggles.

Bostonian George Richards Minot, as well as most other eulogizers, drew attention to the General's role as supreme legislator. Minot, in an almost biblical account, described Washington as the defender of the "tree of liberty",

which he...planted and so carefully guarded from the storms...In Convention he presides over councils, as in war he had led the battle. The Constitution, like the rainbow after the flood, appears to us, now just emerging from an overwhelming commotion; and we know the truth of the pledge from the sanction of his name.

After providing his fledgling republic with security in the midst of unprincipled internal chaos, Washington was once again called from retirement. This time his mission was to provide future American leaders with a supreme example of good republican leadership. As pamphleteer Thomas Paine eulogized, Washington was elected as the first President of the United States,

By the unanimous suffrage of an enlightened and confiding people...In this unprecedented transition of office, his character had assumed a new and astonishing attitude; the impenetrable hardihood of the conqueror was rivalled by the intelligent policy of the statesman...Appalled by the oppressive contemplation of his greatness, the 'cloud-capt' crest of AMBITION was overawed by the majesty of virtue...the incorruptible examples of his virtues shall survive,

unimpaired by the corrosion of time; and acquire new vigour and influence, from the crimes of ambition, and the decay of empires. The invaluable valediction, bequeathed to the people, who inherited his affections, is the effort of a mind, whose powers, like those of prophecy, could overleap the tardy progress of human reason, and unfold truth without the labour of investigation. Impressed in indelible characters, this LEGACY OF HIS INTELLIGENCE will descend, unsullied as its purity, to the wonder and instruction of succeeding generations...

As the three preceding episodes illustrated, Washington was always a useful implement of the American Republic. Rather than behaving like a self-interested individual who used his country to enhance himself, he was forever willing to serve the best interests of his republic.⁷

While these eulogies made the first U.S. president seem divine and entirely unmotivated by the base desires and ambitions of mortal men, Washington was actually a man intensely driven by ambition during his early life. The first expression of this ambition was during his youth in his courtesy-book, “Rules of Civility and Decent Behaviour In Company and Conversation.” Bushman concluded that courtesy-books like Washington’s “created an imaginary world, much as poetry or novels do, with plots, themes, characterizations, and myths” that undergirded hierarchical societies. This observation seemed valid considering that, in his book, Washington appeared all too eager to conform to the requirements for success in a hierarchical, monarchical society. The young man, in his rule book, reminded himself that it was “ill manners to bid one more eminent than yourself be covered...” and that “When you meet with one of Greater Quality than yourself, Stop, and...give way for him to Pass...” Such remarks caused Bushman to assert that the future president’s “respect for rank” seemed “most exaggerated and unsuited to egalitarian society.” This was an accurate assessment,

⁷ “Funeral Oration, By Major-General Henry Lee,” in *Eulogies*, 10, 12; “An Eulogy, By the Hon. George Richards Minot,” in *Eulogies*, 22, 23; “An Eulogy, By Thomas Paine, A. M.,” in *Eulogies*, 63, 65-66.

considering that Washington's first ambition was to be a success in a monarchical society. To this end, he futilely pursued the experience of an elite education throughout his life. Unfortunately, as historian Paul Longmore wrote in *The Invention of George Washington* (1988), "he missed the opportunity to complete his preparation at the College of William and Mary" and therefore considered his education "defective." Afterwards, Washington attempted to educate himself by reading polite literature, history, and geography. The young gentleman probably also wanted to go on a Grand Tour, but only traveled abroad once to Barbados. However, after the American Revolution, "he tried to learn French...ordered a French-English dictionary...and...a French grammar" most likely because he intended to finally tour France. During his pre-revolutionary years, as Joseph Ellis illustrated in *His Excellency* (2004), Washington desperately attempted to acculturate himself into the patronage-ridden British-American colonial world in order to win an officer's commission in the British Army.⁸

As detailed in the preceding paragraphs, a central element of Washington's character often forgotten in popular culture was his strong ambition. At least two American historians have drawn attention to this forgotten component of his character. Ellis said that the Great Man actually had a "bottomless ambition." Longmore, voicing a similar opinion, asserted that "Throughout his life, the ambition for distinction spun inside George Washington like a dynamo, generating the astounding energy with which he produced his greatest historical achievement, himself." In Washington's early, pre-revolutionary, life he employed this energy of self-creation in refining himself into a polished British subject. However, after the revolution, he utilized this energy to make

⁸ Bushman, 38; George Washington, *Washington's Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation: A Paper Found Among the Early Writings of George Washington*, ed. J. M. Toner (Washington, DC: W. H. Morrison, 1888), 17-18; Longmore, 8, 214-226; Ellis, 9-18, 38.

himself the American citizen most eligible for republican leadership. The public image the General cultivated, which imitated that of Cincinnatus, was predicated on his professed dedication to the general welfare of the nation above his own interests. The central act in creating this image was his resignation as Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army. Addressing Congress, Washington was modest about his abilities and cloaked his ambitions. The commander declared that he had “accepted” his appointed “with diffidence; a diffidence in [his] abilities to accomplish so arduous a task” and that after his retirement he was “commending the Interests of our dearest country to the protection of Almighty God, and those who have the superintendence of them to his holy keeping.” Washington repeated these same sentiments upon his inauguration as the first U.S. president and upon his retirement from that office. Longmore believed that Washington’s behavior represented a conscious pattern, originating from his “yearning for esteem” and desire for “historical immortality”, that ultimately served to increase his “influence and authority.” This behavior also conformed to the code of conduct Wiebe claimed characterized the American Founders. He noted that these revolutionary leaders “ritualistically... repeated the same self-abnegating, power-denying sentiments” and “assured one another that public glory held no charms and that their deepest longings always drew them from office to quiet retirement.”⁹

The central attractive quality that defined Washington, as well as Cincinnatus, and made him a good republican was his self-control, or the ability to self-limit his ambitions. Eulogizing the former president in 1799, American statesman Gouverneur Morris said,

⁹ Ellis, 38; Longmore, 1; Wills, 13; George Washington, *Writings of George Washington*, ed. Lawrence B. Evans (New York, NY: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1908), 237-238; United States Presidents, 8; Longmore, 32, 170, 182-183; Wiebe, 13.

On his front were enthroned the virtues which exalt, and those which adorn the human character...He had every title to command—Heaven, in giving him the higher qualities of the soul, had given also the tumultuous passions which accompany greatness, and frequently tarnish its lustre. With them was his first contest, and his first victory was over himself. So great was the empire he had acquired there that calmness of manner and conduct distinguished him through life.

Washington was therefore portrayed as a passionate, ambitious man who had learned to control those destructive forces in his nature. Paine more clearly expressed the true triumph of Washington over his personal state of nature. The gifted pamphleteer praised the fallen leader's "moderation" which made him different from "the erratic meteors of ambition" that shed "a disastrous light on the pages of history..." Paine went on to describe the danger of the self-interested ambition that Washington overcame: "Self, the grand hinge, on which revolve the principles and passions, that have swelled the obituary of nations, made not a unit in the calculations of [his] mind..." Minot indicated that the self-control exhibited by Washington was actually the central element in the American experiment. The Bostonian asked his audience to:

Remember that it was not for you alone he laboured; it was for your posterity also; it was for the human race. For you and for them he was first in building the noblest political system that adorns the world. It is an experiment to ascertain the nature of man; whether he be capable of freedom, or whether he must be led by the reins of tyranny; whether he be endowed with moderation and understanding which checks the extreme indulgence of his will, and by allowing to others the same rational enjoyment with himself, forms the liberty of the whole upon the partial restraint of each individual; or whether he must go on attempting to follow the dictates of selfishness, and find his only restraint in a power which will establish itself independent of his consent, and make him its slave.

Although critical of the European conception of America, former U.S. Representative Fisher Ames described how Washington's self-control became central to what would later be called American exceptionalism. Eulogizing the fallen leader on February 8, 1800, Ames said:

[Europeans] considered us a race of Washingtons... Their books and their travelers, exaggerating and distorting all their representations, assisted to establish the opinion, that this is a new world, with a new order of men and things adapted to it; that here we practice industry amidst the abundance that requires none; that we have morals so refined, that we do not need laws; and though we have them, yet we ought to consider their execution as an insult and a wrong; that we have virtue without weaknesses, sentiment without passions, and liberty without factions. These illusions... have been received by many of the malecontents against the governments of Europe, and induced them to emigrate.

The exceptional character thus described by Washington's memorialists, the character that endeared him to Americans and made him useful to his country, seemingly developed because he did not succeed in fulfilling all of his desires early in life. While he had held great ambitions to receive a formal, polite education, experience the Grand Tour, and win an officer's commission in the British Army, young Washington failed to satisfy these yearnings and matured into a seasoned leader who exhibited self-control and exuded republican values.¹⁰

Littlepage's Leadership Style: The Effects of Uncontrolled Ambition

Lewis Littlepage, the extraordinary gentleman Washington once entertained at Mount Vernon, originally possessed character traits similar to those of his host. During his youth in colonial and revolutionary Virginia, Littlepage displayed the character of a person dedicated to virtuous republican ideals. He also expressed a highly negative view of imperial rule and vainglory. In fact, in his poems, he often associated imperialism with futility and death, while linking virtue and (through implication) republicanism to eternal happiness. One of four extant poems written by Littlepage between 1777 and 1778, his "Ode on Death", ridiculed the vain pursuit of power and glory and rhetorically asked readers:

¹⁰ "An Oration, By the Hon. Gouverneur Morris," in *Eulogies*, 44-45; "An Eulogy, By the Hon. Thomas Paine, A.M.," in *Eulogies*, 60-61; "An Eulogy, By the Hon. George Richards Minot," in *Eulogies*, 27-28; "An Oration, By the Hon. Fisher Ames," in *Eulogies*, 114.

Why should Death's tremendous name
Strike with Terror every heart?

No mortal here is truly blest,
The transient joys of earth are vain,

O what is Empire's glittering show!
Ambition's empty fame
And pageant pomp proclaim,
All, all is vanity below.

Where is great Alexander? Where
Are all his gawdy triumphs now?

Friendless on a foreign land,
By a vile Ruffian's impious hand,
Deserted Pompey bled,
To liberty a sacrifice.

The once tremendous Caesar lies,
Now numbered with the dead.

What is earth or earthly joys?
Health decays and Beauty dies,
Vice distracts and pleasure cloy,
But O, the voice of reason cries,
The virtuous soul can never die,
But from Mortality shall fly
And to eternal life arise!

In "An Elegy on the Death of the Late Colonel Tarlton Fleming", Littlepage declared,

Tyrannic Death, thy triumph now is o'er,
Life's vision's past, and FLEMING is no more;
Once crowned with social virtues, here he shone,
Benevolent to all, a foe to none.

Who can without a humane, melting tear,
Your mournful sighs, ye hapless orphans, hear?
May pitying Heaven your infant years befriend,
And Cherubims your innocence defend—
Direct your steps through virtue's thorny way,
And with eternal joys your woes repay.

When to the great tribunal all shall come,
And trembling wait their everlasting doom—
Crowned with celestial pomp, O may you rise,
And view the latent regions of the skies,

O'er sin triumphant, reach the blest abode,
And face the glories of the God of Gods.

In his famous translation of the 22nd Ode in the First Book of Horace, Littlepage added words not to be found in Philip Francis's most celebrated translation of that poem.

Where Francis had described the poem's subject as being "innocent of heart" and without "guilty fear", Littlepage added that "Virtue and truth" were "his guides".¹¹

In his early adolescence, Littlepage was enamored with successful republican military figures like Washington and John Fleming, the heroic combat commander at the Battle of Princeton. In his "Ode on Death", Littlepage lamented that one day "Even Godlike Washington must die". When Littlepage eulogized Fleming he expressed his esteem for a man who selflessly died in the defense of liberty. Moreover, he indicated that virtuous conduct, such as Washington's and Fleming's, was not innately human and had to be learned:

Who dies for freedom
Has liv'd his term of nature and of glory;
And who survives it, but a single hour,
Has liv'd that hour too long.

The school of freedom, learning's awful seat,
Where WITHERSPOON, with every virtue fraught,
The generous youth his sacred precepts taught
The sage's wisdom, and the patriot's fire,
A noble love of liberty inspire.
Here early try'd, and acting but too well,
The brave, lamented, much-lov'd FLEMING fell.

When his full heart expanded to the goal,
And promis'd victory had flush'd his soul,
He fell,--his country lost her earliest boast,

¹¹ Lewis Littlepage, "Ode on Death," in Boand, 9-10; Lewis Littlepage, "Farewell to Fleming!: Lewis Littlepage Eulogizes a Patriot," ed. Curtis Carroll Davis, *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. 74, no. 4 (October, 1966): 451; "The XXII Ode, Book I., of Horace," trans. Lewis Littlepage, in Hayden, "Littlepage Family," *Virginia Genealogies*, 419; "Same Ode, By Francis," trans. Philip Francis, in Hayden, "Littlepage Family," *Virginia Genealogies*, 420.

How well hast thou thy debt to virtue paid!
 Go, happy ghost, to where the good and bless'd
 Enjoy eternal scenes of bliss and rest;

Not only did Littlepage write about his dedication to virtuous republicanism, he risked his life for it during the American Revolution. In the spring of 1779, he and other student volunteers from the College of William & Mary attempted to guard Norfolk and its hinterland from British seizure. Although this operation was ultimately unsuccessful and the British were able to wreak havoc in the area, students like Littlepage were commended for their heroism.¹²

Initially, Littlepage's acceptance into John Jay's diplomatic mission to Spain seemed the perfect opportunity for him to further develop into a public servant useful to his native country and friends. The young Virginian himself had early stated his purpose for going to Europe was merely to "[acquire] a degree of experience and reputation, which might at my return, recommend me to my countrymen, as one not unworthy or incapable of serving them..." Even Jay, in his first letter to Littlepage's guardian Benjamin Lewis, noted that the young man was already infused with the "liberal principles of morality and honour" and would "one day do honor as well as service to his country and connections" if "he [continued] to cultivate his genius properly..." To this end, Jay intended the young man to pursue an educational regimen that would "render [him] useful and respectable" in America. Littlepage's response to these high expectations of his abilities and potential for public service was a typical Cincinnatian

¹² Littlepage, "Ode on Death," in Boand, 10; Lewis Littlepage, "Sacred to the Memory of Major John Fleming, Who Fell at the Battle of Princeton," Alexander Purdie's *Virginia Gazette*, March 14, 1777; Filippo Mazzei to King Stanislas, 30 January 1789, in Boand, 116-117; Davis, *The King's Chevalier*, 26-27.

response: “the happiness of being in any degree useful to my country, is a summit to which my ambition dare not aspire: Conscious diffidence forbids me to hope it.”¹³

In Europe, this humility and dedication to public service above personal glory was quickly transformed into self-serving aristocratic arrogance. Upon his arrival in Spain in late 1780, Littlepage had criticized the Spanish obsession with aristocratic glory over utilitarian pursuits. He wrote in a letter to a friend that the country’s “present unhappy situation” could be attributed partially to the “pernicious Vanity” that causes a “Spaniard, who can trace the least vestige of nobility in his family, tho a dozen generations back” to “sooner starve in ideal pomp, than debase himself by Commerce...” By late 1785, after he had had extensive experience in aristocratic, patronage-ridden Europe, Littlepage seemingly acknowledged the superiority of familial prestige and personal glory over merit. During his service alongside Spanish and French aristocrats in the Minorcan campaign, the talented Virginian felt it necessary to remind Jay that he was a “son of an honorable family” with the resources to repay any debt and to essentially do as he pleased. Littlepage had also abandoned the attitude of a public servant, or the mindset that he was the servant of a public and needed to win its respect through useful meritorious deeds. The arrogant Virginian, in another letter, reminded Jay that “Men of honor...have no superiors but benefactors” and that he only owed his patron “respect and gratitude” as long as he remained his benefactor. Later, in his *Answer to a Pamphlet*, Littlepage reminded his readers that “politeness is as different from esteem as respect from servility.” In this remark, Jay’s protégé apparently classed “esteem” with

¹³ Lewis Littlepage to John Jay, 1 February 1782, in Jay, *Letters*, 41; John Jay to Benjamin Lewis, 21 November 1780, in Jay, *Letters*, 9-10; John Jay to Lewis Littlepage, 19 August 1780, in Jay, *Letters*, 8; Lewis Littlepage to John Jay, 30-31 August 1780, in Jay, *Letters*, 8.

“servility”. He thus failed to realize that esteem is something that is earned rather than extracted.¹⁴

There was little in Littlepage’s leadership style that would earn him esteem in the U.S. One prominent flaw that would have made him a poor American leader was his inability to persevere in the face of adversity. He stated, in a letter to his guardian, that his original purpose in Madrid was to “render [himself] known and distinguished, and by attracting attention acquire consequence.” After only “Eight months experience” he decided to desert his American diplomatic post as Jay’s private secretary because he found this objective “really impossible” to achieve. Therefore, when he felt bored and ignored during his residence with Jay in Madrid, Littlepage decided to volunteer for the joint Spanish-French military campaigns to capture Minorca and Gibraltar. Even though Jay “furnished [Littlepage] with as much money as might be necessary for his journey and outfit” and gave him “the amount of a Spanish Captain’s pay for six months”, the young adventurer continuously complained that he could not survive on that amount. As a result, Littlepage resigned from his Spanish military duty before the conflicts ended. Later, while he was serving King Stanislas, the polished Virginian suddenly abandoned his post as Polish Agent to Versailles in order to serve Catherine the Great of Russia. Unfortunately, this caused him to cease his efforts to effect the Grand Quadruple Alliance that may have saved the Polish kingdom. These instances and numerous others showcased Littlepage’s inability to persevere in fulfilling his responsibilities.¹⁵

¹⁴ Lewis Littlepage to “Dear Sir,” 25 November 1780, box 2, folder 2, Davis Papers; Lewis Littlepage to John Jay, 7 December 1781, in Jay, *Letters*, 30; Lewis Littlepage to John Jay, 20 January 1782, in Jay, *Letters*, 39; Littlepage, *Answer to a Pamphlet*, 19.

¹⁵ Lewis Littlepage to Benjamin Lewis, 15 May 1782, in Jay, *Letters*, 47; Jay, *Letters*, 16-17; Lewis Littlepage to John Jay, 8 October 1781, 21; Littlepage, *Answer to a Pamphlet*, 9; King Stanislas to Maurice Glayre, April-May 1788, quoted in Davis, *The King’s Chevalier*, 187-188; Davis, *The King’s*

Littlepage, unlike Cincinnatus or Washington, primarily served kings rather than his own republic during her time of greatest need. He eagerly joined the Spanish military campaign against Minorca, even though Jay warned him how this abandonment of his American diplomatic post might affect the “relations you stand in to your country, your family and your friends...” Littlepage’s response to his patron’s objections to his Spanish military service was, oddly enough, “I wish to return to America—the éclat of having served a campaign in Europe in a distinguished post...I doubt not [that it will] procure me a decent commission.” Therefore, while “Virginia [had] been the theatre of war ever since [his] departure”, the Virginian sought to enhance his military prestige in America by serving European monarchs. In a letter to his guardian, just prior to his participation in the campaign against Gibraltar, the adventurer even indicated that he had wanted to gain prestige in the Spanish Court, regardless of “The indecision of the Court with respect to America...” A few years after blatantly deserting his American post to pursue his self-aggrandizing adventurism, Littlepage returned to America. During this brief visit in 1785, he requested congressional approval for his service under King Stanislas. In the letter (which had several letters of recommendation from French and Spanish generals attached to it) the adventurer sent to Jay, who was then the U.S.

Secretary of Foreign Affairs, and the U.S. Congress, he ironically asserted that:

The character of a CITIZEN OF AMERICA, I consider as the first of titles; to serve my country is my highest ambition, to merit her esteem would be my noblest recompense; but as America has happily no farther occasion for the exertions of military zeal, Congress, I hope, will not think my conduct inconsistent with the duty of a citizen of the United States, when I inform them that my intention is to return to Europe, where some years of my future life will be devoted to the service of a monarch. The name of the KING OF POLAND reflects sufficient honor upon all who boast his patronage: Of his esteem, at least,

Chevalier, 163-164; King Stanislas to Maurice Glayre, 2 April 1788, quoted in Davis, *The King’s Chevalier*, 186.

I should think myself assured, under the sanction of a recommendation from Congress.

On December 2nd Jay recommended that Congress inform “Mr. Littlepage” that “his Request [was] of such a nature that Congress [could not] with propriety grant it.” His reasoning behind this decision highlighted the importance of serving one’s own country. Jay reminded Congress that it had “never recommended any private Gentleman to any Sovereign” before and if it recommended “Mr. Littlepage to his Polish Majesty”, it “would not easily find good Reasons for refusing the like Honor to any of the American officers who...possess as ample testimonials of their good conduct from their own Sovereign as these with which he has been honored by a foreign one.”¹⁶

Following this congressional rejection and Jay’s subsequent actions, the aristocratic Virginian increasingly became critical of his native country. On December 3rd, the day after Jay rendered his opinion, Littlepage’s former patron had him arrested for the 1,016 Mexican dollar debt he had failed to repay him. Defiant, Littlepage bonded out of jail using funds entrusted to him by Governor Patrick Henry to reimburse sculptor Jean-Antoine Houdin for his statue of George Washington. Shortly afterwards, just before his twenty-third birthday on December 19, Littlepage sailed to Europe disgraced at home and without the consent of the American Congress for his foreign mission. After arriving back in Europe, he wrote a rather depressing letter to his friend the Marquis de Lafayette. Lamenting his financial obligations to the State of Virginia for repaying the sum he bonded out of jail with, Littlepage wrote:

¹⁶ John Jay to Lewis Littlepage, 15 June 1781, in Jay, *Letters*, 12; Lewis Littlepage to John Jay, 25 March 1782, in Jay, *Letters*, 45; Lewis Littlepage to Benjamin Lewis, 15 May 1782, in Jay, *Letters*, 47; Lewis Littlepage to John Jay, 25 November 1785, in Littlepage, *Answer to a Pamphlet*, 2; John Jay to Congress, 2 December 1785, “Reports of John Jay, 1785-89,” in Papers of the Continental Congress, vol. 1, 229-230, The National Archives.

The sum although not considerable enough to induce me to make a voyage to America is sufficiently so to occasion me great embarrassments in my present situation; as you are to observe it will have been twice paid, once to my uncle and at present to Mr. Jefferson. If such must be the case it is indeed an affectionate farewell from my uncle and Guardian! –good heaven!—and you tell me I have no right to renounce my country?”

Apparently the animosity the King’s Chevalier felt toward his native country remained with him until the end of his life. On November 21, 1801, shortly after his return to the U.S. and less than a year before his death, Littlepage told his in-law Reverend James Stevenson that “All in this Country appears to be chicane and quibbling. Perhaps I may be compelled to wait for answers from England before I can receive one penny of what is due to me here...”¹⁷

Littlepage, during his European life, developed the view that public service was merely his pathway to glory and personal wealth. While the Virginian could have stayed in America and continued to aid in its revolution, he instead decided to fight in foreign wars that had little value to the well-being of the United States. One example of this decision was on May 15, 1782, when Littlepage anxiously warned his guardian:

if I do not receive letters from you by the month of March next, I shall no longer have the means of subsistence, and must return to you, where I shall be in the same situation, as before my voyage to Europe, at the expense of all this time and money. What business or profession can I possibly be qualified to pursue in America?

In Europe he operated as a soldier of fortune who was forever concerned about profiting from his services. Financial funding was the primary issue defining the period Littlepage

¹⁷ Littlepage, *Answer to a Pamphlet*, 3-4; Lewis Littlepage signed a statement acknowledging the 1016 Mexican dollar debt to be “just and true.” Jay used the term “Mexican dollars” in the statement he had Littlepage sign. This most likely referred to the Mexico City mintmark that many Spanish Milled Dollars of the period had. “ACCOUNT of MONEY paid by JOHN JAY, to and for Mr. Lewis Littlepage,” in Jay, *Letters*, 53; Davis, *The King’s Chevalier*, 121-126; Lewis Littlepage to Marquis de Lafayette, 12 September 1786, box 2, folder 10, Davis Papers; Lewis Littlepage to James Stevenson, 21 November 1801, box 2, folder 25, Davis Papers.

spent under Jay's care. After his former patron had him arrested for non-payment of debts and seized the funds entrusted to him by the State of Virginia, Littlepage angrily warned Jay that:

The greatest political influence [is] a private character unsullied... You perhaps think yourself above the opinion of the world, and secure from censure, under the mask of habitual gravity, and austere importance. Reflect once more, consider you are by no means arrived at a period of life which inspires veneration, and dispenses with punctilio, your brow is as yet unwrinkled, except by the assumed frown of ministerial solemnity and natural malevolence.

Soon after this warning, the polished Virginian publicized their dispute in a New York newspaper. Later this commentary and series of letters was published as his *Answer to a Pamphlet*. In this pamphlet, the soldier of fortune called his military adventure in Minorca a service to his country and accused his patron of depriving him "of all credit and resources, and [reducing him] to the hard necessity of retiring, in the midst of the campaign, or derogating from [his] own honor and the dignity of the country, by imploring the charity of strangers..." Jay's response to such claims was that he never expected to be "merely" the young man's "banker".¹⁸

This obsessive fortune-seeking behavior did not cease during his entire European adventure. Littlepage forever after remained a soldier of fortune, a man who was concerned above all else with amassing pecuniary wealth from his services. He most likely could not even fathom what would encourage a man like General Washington to refuse "every pecuniary compensation" for his services. Jefferson, when Littlepage abandoned his post as Polish Agent to Versailles in 1788, told James Madison:

Littlepage, who was here as secret agent for the King of Poland rather overreached himself. He wanted more money. The King furnished it, more

¹⁸ Lewis Littlepage to Benjamin Lewis, 15 May 1782, in Jay, *Letters*, 48; Lewis Littlepage to John Jay, 3 December 1785, in Virginia Historical Society, *MSS1H7185a, Holladay Family Papers, 1728-1931*; Littlepage, *Answer to a Pamphlet*, 9; John Jay to Lewis Littlepage, 26 October 1781, in Jay, *Letters*, 22.

than once. Still he wanted more, and thought to obtain a high bid by saying he was called for in America, and asking to go there. Contrary to his expectation he received leave...

Later, the Chevalier played King Stanislas and the Russians against each other in order to secure the twenty-four thousand ducats the King had previously promised him. In 1793, after the second partition of Poland by the Russians, Littlepage wrote to the Russian Ambassador to Poland Count John Sievers (who had recently agreed to assume the King's debts):

I should never have thought of imploring the powerful protection of the Court of Russia (to which I flatter myself I have some, and no dishonorable, claim) but from a perfect knowledge of the difficulties which I must otherwise expect to encounter. A debt of honor is not a debt in law, much less of usury, consequently not proper to be canvassed by a Commission:--I am no common creditor, nor can my business be transacted in any common way. If your Excellency can take upon yourself, without the interference of your Court, to favour me, I will immediately deposit the King's note in your hand; if not, I beg you will let me know my fate with that candour which is your acknowledged characteristic. My situation will be gloomy but I hope not yet desperate. Europe and America are before me, --the present crisis favorable for an enterprising spirit, and I am ready to seek my fortune wheresoever I may best hope to find it with honor.

While these specific ploys for his fortune were unsuccessful, he soon achieved his ends.¹⁹

A little over two years later, Littlepage remained unpaid for his services to the King. At this point, on December 13, 1795, the Chevalier threatened to publish his "Private Political Memoir" if he was "reduced to desperation, and...refused a recompense for [his] lengthy services and the loss of [his] youth..." According to Littlepage, one of the goals of this publication would be to possibly gain "enough renown to procure [his] bread elsewhere." If he had published the pamphlet, the Chevalier would have exposed

¹⁹ United States Presidents, 10; Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 31 July 1788, in Thomas Jefferson, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, Monticello ed., vol. 7, ed. Andrew Lipscomb (Washington, DC: The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1904), 94-95; King Stanislas wrote, "Je reconnais devoir a Monsieur le Chevalier Louis de Littlepage, la somme de 24,000 Ducats..." King Stanislas Receipt to Lewis Littlepage, 24 March 1793, Box 6, Davis Papers; Lewis Littlepage to John Sievers, 1793, box 6, Davis Papers.

his employer to the animosity of the Polish revolutionaries who had been fighting to overcome Russian influence. This was because in his pamphlet Littlepage explained the Kaniev Policy (or the Russian-Polish alliance) that the King pursued because he “was aware that he could no longer hope to resume political flight save under the wing of the Russian Eagle.” The King therefore asked the Chevalier not to publish his document and warned him that:

this publication would do you no good service and that on the contrary the sole effect it could foreseeably have would be to establish the common opinion that yours is a restless spirit that would like to take up the public’s time, and finds it odd that in a crisis where, one might say, the whole human species is in convulsion, the great powers which have partitioned Poland do not hasten as much as you might wish to arrange your fate, whilst mine itself remains to be done.

It was not until much later that the King’s financial obligation to Littlepage was paid. The Chevalier was finally able to tell Jefferson on January 19, 1801 that the new Russian Czar had “paid [him] very nobly the sum assigned to [him] by the King of Poland for [his] long and dangerous services.” The true motive of the Czar’s generosity was later revealed by Littlepage’s half-brother Waller Holladay in 1809. Holladay claimed that, after the Czar paid his half-brother the promised sum, his “brother was required as a gentleman & a man of honour to publish none of the secrets of the three grand imperial dividing powers & accordingly he signed a paper to that effect.”²⁰

The Polish Chevalier’s unprincipled pursuit of power and financial gain made him unable to understand the honor associated with the noble republican tradition of

²⁰ Lewis Littlepage to King Stanislas, 13 December 1795, quoted in Davis, “An American Courtier in Europe: Lewis Littlepage’s ‘Private Political Memoir’ (Hamburg, 1795),” 256; Davis, “An American Courtier in Europe: Lewis Littlepage’s ‘Private Political Memoir’ (Hamburg, 1795),” 258; King Stanislas to Lewis Littlepage, 21 August 1796, quoted in Davis, “An American Courtier in Europe: Lewis Littlepage’s ‘Private Political Memoir’ (Hamburg, 1795),” 256; Lewis Littlepage to Thomas Jefferson, 19 January 1801, box 2, folder 24, Davis Papers; Waller Holladay to Thomas Ritchie, 22 July 1809, in Virginia Historical Society, *MSS1H7185a, Holladay Family Papers, 1728-1931*, a1073-1075, sec. 72 folder 12, slides 526-528.

relinquishing power. Littlepage and his patron King Stanislas could not fathom why Washington would willingly retire from the American presidency. The King asked Littlepage to write to him about the “cause of this abdication if You know it.” The Chevalier’s reply, on August 5, 1796, expressed both his inability to understand Washington’s virtuous retirement and his continuing contempt for John Jay. The Virginian wrote that he had “no private intelligence on the motives for the retirement of General Washington” and suggested that his ulterior motives for retiring might be “the impossibility of opposing longer the party which disapproves the treaty with England [refers to events leading to the Jay Treaty of 1794] and demands common cause be made with France against the powers.” Therefore, in the mind of Littlepage, Washington’s retirement was most likely due to self-interested reasons.²¹

Another product of his unprincipled dedication to his own self-aggrandizement was his inability to devote himself to any one nation. This embroiled him in numerous international disputes that eventually forced him to return to the United States. As a soldier of fortune, he involved himself conspicuously in the troubled political relations of Poland and Russia. In 1788, Littlepage abandoned his Polish post as Agent to Versailles in order to serve Catherine the Great during the Black Sea Campaign (or the “Turkish War”). Then, against the wishes of the Polish nationalists, he and King Stanislas secretly lobbied for an alliance with Russia. This troubled situation led the Chevalier, on May 23, 1794, to complain to the Polish revolutionary General Tadeusz Kosciuszko:

After having for 10 years enjoyed the rights of hospitality in Poland, and as I flattered myself at least, the esteem and friendship of the Poles, I did not expect, in a revolution headed by an American General to see my name upon the list of suspected persons, who surround the King... General, you do not the less owe to

²¹ Curtis Carroll Davis quoted King Stanislas. Davis, *The King’s Chevalier*, 353; Lewis Littlepage to King Stanislas, 5 August 1796, in Boand, 247.

the honour of the republican name, to that of America, your second country, perhaps to your own personal honour, and above all to mine, the justice of a...examination of my conduct. You are sufficiently acquainted with the character of my nation, to know that it is the only favour which an American can stoop to ask for.

At the time, in order “To save the life of [his]...King”, Littlepage was actually serving under Kosciuszko in the Polish Revolution of 1794 against the Russians. Unfortunately, when he became a “commander-in-chief under the Revolutionary Government” and fought against Russia, he “irritated” his former employer Catherine the Great. When the revolution was lost, it was only his “former political services to Russia, and [his] military services in the Turkish War” that “saved” him from being executed like the “other chiefs of the Revolution of 1794.”²²

Littlepage eventually became notorious for his duplicity and unpredictable foreign service record. By June 1795, the Chevalier had already been expelled from both Poland and Austria for this reason. On June 15, Littlepage was formally asked to leave Austria within twenty-four hours. He was informed by the Austrian Minister of Police Count Franz Josef von Saurau that while “the rights of hospitality” were “never refused to citizens of America, nor to those of friendly or neutral powers”, he could not “regard [him] as such, having served for 15 years with different powers of Europe, and lastly in Poland.” Saurau concluded by saying that Littlepage was being expelled from Austria for the “same reasons” he had been dismissed “from Warsaw.” Another example of the convoluted nature of his national origin and loyalties was when, in 1800, the Chevalier

²² Lewis Littlepage to Lewis Holladay, 9 January 1801, in Virginia Historical Society, *MSS1H7185a, Holladay Family Papers, 1728-1931*, a450-532, sec. 43, folder 3, slides 163-165; Davis, “An American Courtier in Europe: Lewis Littlepage’s ‘Private Political Memoir’ (Hamburg, 1795), 255-258; Lewis Littlepage to General Kosciuszko, 23 May 1794, in “Letter from Mr. Littlepage... To His Excellency Monsieur le Baron de Thugut...,” Virginia Historical Society, *MSS1H7185a, Holladay Family Papers, 1728-1931*, a36, sec. 1, folder 4, slides 190-197.

felt it necessary to ask the U.S. Ambassador to Prussia John Quincy Adams “to declare officially to the Russian Government whether” he knew him “to be an American, or not” because his “existence as an American [had been] represented as equivocal.” In a letter to his step-father Lewis Holladay immediately prior to his final return to the U.S. in 1801, Littlepage provided useful insight into his European problems and the reasons for his belated homecoming:

My intention was to go to France or England, but I found myself strangely embroiled with both these governments. I have settled matters in France, but not yet in England. The Ministers there persist in believing me to be sent upon a secret mission from the Emperor of Russia, who is now at variance with England. God knows I am sick of European politics. I intended to have spent the winter in Hamburg, but was driven from that sink of iniquity by a most atrocious plot against my life and fortune. The latter is in safety; and should I perish even here under the hospitable government of Denmark, I shall leave nine of ten thousand pounds sterling so disposed of that my assassins cannot prevent its coming to my family...In the spring I shall proceed to America, either by the way of France or directly from hence, provided I escape the daggers and poison with which I am threatened here.

Upon his return to the United States, the Chevalier had difficulty understanding the government of his native country. He declared that he was “totally ignorant...of the politics and resources of [his] own Country.”²³

The diminutive Virginian’s meeting with Washington, the man who would become the first U.S. president in little over three years after their visit in 1785, was part of his last attempt to live up to the great American ideals he idolized during his youth.

Little over two years before his meeting with Washington, Littlepage had essentially

²³ Littlepage, “Letter from Mr. Littlepage...To His Excellency Monsieur le Baron de Thugut...,” Virginia Historical Society, *MSS1H7185a, Holladay Family Papers, 1728-1931*; M. Le Comte de Saurau to Lewis Littlepage, 15 June 1795, in “Letter from Mr. Littlepage...To His Excellency Monsieur le Baron de Thugut...,” Virginia Historical Society, *MSS1H7185a, Holladay Family Papers, 1728-1931*, a36, sec. 1, folder 4, slides 190-197; Lewis Littlepage to John Quincy Adams, 11 November 1800, box 2, folder 21, Davis Papers; Lewis Littlepage to Lewis Holladay, 9 January 1801, in Virginia Historical Society, *MSS1H7185a, Holladay Family Papers, 1728-1931*, a450-532, sec. 43, folder 3, slides 163-165; Lewis Littlepage to Rufus King, 28 November 1801, box 2, folder 27, Davis Papers.

doomed his future prospects as an American military or political leader. Through his financial chicaneries against Jay and his continued poor relations with this patron, the young Virginian had been denied the opportunity of carrying the definitive peace treaty concluding the American Revolutionary War back to Congress. It was immediately after his visit with Washington that Littlepage attempted to undo the damage previously done to his American political prospects. On November 18, 1785, he wrote a letter informing Jay that “every exertion has been made, on my part, to acquit myself of my pecuniary obligations towards you” and that he was “sorry...that accumulated embarrassments prevented him” from repaying Jay before he returned to Europe. This letter was primarily written as an attempt to: discourage Jay, the U.S. Secretary of Foreign Affairs, from immediately acting to secure payment of the debt; and to win his support for Littlepage’s proposed foreign service. Unfortunately, Littlepage’s campaign to rehabilitate his American political image failed. Soon after this, Jay’s *Letters* was formally published. After reading Jay’s pamphlet Washington, with a sigh and a disapproving fatherly glance, told Jay that “Mr. Littlepage seems to have forgot what had been his situation, forgot what was due to you, and indeed what was necessary to his own character...”²⁴

²⁴ Jay, *Letters*, 54-55; Lewis Littlepage to John Jay, 18 November 1785, in Littlepage, *Answer to a Pamphlet*, 1; George Washington to John Jay, 18 May 1786, in George Washington Papers, Library of Congress.

Conclusion



Fig. 4. The Obelisk of Luxor in the Place de la Concorde, Paris, France (Photograph by the author, 13 February 2008)

Ah! In what a monstrous moment of pride and passion he had prayed that the portrait should bear the burden of his days, and he keep the unsullied splendour of eternal youth! All his failure had been due to that. Better for him that each sin of his life had brought its sure swift penalty along with it. There was purification in punishment. Not “Forgive us our sins” but “Smite us for our iniquities” should be the prayer of man to a most just God.

Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

On December 25, 1776, the day before the Battle of Trenton, General Washington ordered that part of Thomas Paine's pamphlet series *The American Crisis* be read to his discouraged troops. The opening lines of Paine's masterpiece expressed both the Spirit of '76 and the true nature of America's exceptionalism:

THESE ARE THE TIMES THAT TRY MEN'S SOULS. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot, will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it now, deserves the thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered: yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheaply, we esteem too lightly: it is dearness only that gives everything its value.

Paine's eloquent words essentially expressed the American dedication to self-control and self-government. The American revolutionaries who heard his words were fighting for control over their land, their government, and ultimately over their own minds. In order to win their liberty, the revolutionaries had to first overcome the tyranny of the self that hindered their progress. They had to overcome their own, individual, states of nature and exert the same control over themselves as Turner later said they would over their land. The American soldiers, like the former British subjects who were transforming themselves into American citizens, had to learn how to persevere and dedicate themselves to principles rather than to rulers. Moreover, they had to learn to adhere to principles greater than their own individual interests. General Washington, a truly transitional character, was their stoic instructor during the process. He taught his principles to the American people, much as he led his army, through example. Although presented with numerous opportunities to enhance his personal wealth and power,

Washington ultimately chose to serve his country and provide her citizens with an exemplar of how good republicans should behave.¹

The life of Lewis Littlepage was remarkable because it deviated entirely from this noble exemplar of republican character, and therefore from America's exceptional identity. He was a young man with untamed passions and ambitions who never learned how to control himself. This was essentially the behavior of an Old World monarch who could allow his ambition to soar as high as he fancied, without restraint. Littlepage's purely polite education in colonial Virginia and his later experiences in monarchical Europe greatly contributed to his later inability to focus on practical pursuits that would have rendered him valuable to his country. The Virginian largely focused his educational efforts on expanding his knowledge of epic poetry and adventure novels, rather than on studying works like Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita* that might have been useful to a political career in the U.S.

In Europe, Littlepage failed to persevere in the useful republican training that Jay offered. Instead, he pursued an adventurism that defied rationality and exhibited similarities to the adventure novels he read. The young man's pursuit of happiness in Europe then became merely an exaggerated expression of primitive self-interest. Littlepage, without any fixed principles to bind his loyalties to America or to any other country, was free to sell himself to the highest bidder and to pursue wealth wherever the best opportunity presented itself. Operating in this unprincipled manner, the Virginian

¹ Richard M. Ketchum, *The Winter Soldiers: The Battles for Trenton and Princeton*, First Owl Books ed. (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 1999), 248; "No. 1," in Thomas Paine, *The American Crisis* (London, England: James Watson, 1835), 3. Jefferson gave an interesting description of the paradoxes and difficulties involved in the transformation of the American character from royalism to republicanism. Jefferson thoughtfully observed, in a letter to James Madison, "We were educated in royalism; no wonder if some of us retain that idolatry still. Our young people are educated in republicanism, an apostasy from that to royalism is unprecedented & impossible." Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 15 March 1789, in Thomas Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress.

willingly became a sniveling servant of kings who lived on the credit of others and on royal patronage. Moreover, in order to win personal glory and wealth, he eagerly participated in a series of pointless foreign wars that did little or nothing for American interests. Ultimately, Littlepage's frivolous actions and thoroughly self-aggrandizing behavior rendered him unfit for any official American political or military position.

During the final months of his life, after he had returned home to Virginia, the polished Polish knight perhaps examined his personal papers and lamented his transformation into a self-interested European courtier. Looking back at the historical record of his life, which showcased his lack of perseverance, his abandonment of republican principles, and his inability to effectively control his ambition, Littlepage observed a transformation of his image similar to that of Oscar Wilde's Dorian Gray. Like Gray, he had once been a virtuous lad but had morphed into a grotesque image of vice and corruption. Likely realizing the negative judgment Jefferson, Washington, and others had made regarding his character, the Chevalier was haunted by this unfavorable image that he could not erase. However, as Mandeville had said, this was merely the price of "enjoying all the most elegant Comforts of Life that are to be met with in an industrious, wealthy and powerful Nation..." Therefore, it was only by escaping America's Golden Age that Littlepage had the opportunity to enjoy Europe's golden luxuries. Interestingly, one of his last actions was to revise his will. In this document, the Chevalier gave the following instructions to his principal heir and half-brother Waller Holladay:

I most earnestly enjoin [you]...upon [your] fraternal affection & gratitude to me not to suffer my papers to be inspected, and still less circulated or printed. I request [you] to select all which have reference to pecuniary affairs and commit the rest to the flames...

Perhaps, in death, Littlepage had hoped to escape the hell represented by the negative appraisals of his character.²

The tragedy of Littlepage's life was that he never learned to control his primitive instincts so that he could serve the greater good. If he had originally been a self-interested royalist that evolved into a virtuous republican leader, Littlepage would have been similar to Jefferson, Washington and most of the other American Founders. In this case, the Virginian's story would have been a traditional, but exceptional, biography about a talented young man overcoming obstacles and becoming something different from what he once was. Washington himself had perhaps started life as merely a self-interested planter and military man, but the exceptional American quality of his biography was that he overcame his flaws in order to serve the common good of his republic. The majority of the other Founders persevered in much the same way when they overcame their devotion to the British monarchy in order to become patriotic American citizens. As these Americans attempted to subdue the wildness of their human nature and acculturate themselves into a new republic, the American pioneers likewise subdued the expansive North American wilderness. The grand American experiment to

² Mandeville, 5 (of Preface); Will of Lewis Littlepage, in Virginia Historical Society, *MSS1H7185a, Holladay Family Papers, 1728-1931*, a87-88, sec. 5, slides 330-331, 333-334. It is interesting to note that the image of Waller Holladay, the relative Littlepage appeared to favor most, did not fare much better than that of his half-brother. Horace Hayden wrote that Waller "studied law, was admitted June 12, 1801, and practiced until the large estate left him by Gen'l Littlepage so fully demanded his time that he retired from active practice." Waller inherited his fortune in July 1801, a little over a month after he was admitted to the Bar. Thereafter, rarely coming before the public eye, he lived a life of leisure that was devoted to poetry and literature. "Holladay Family," in Hayden, 364-365. Shortly after selling his half-brother's stocks and liquidating his estate, Mr. Holladay described his view of American public servants to his wife Huldah. He wrote, "Last evening I dined with several Members of Congress from the State of Massachusetts, now on their way to the City of Washington. I expected much entertainment from the Conversation. Extensive information, elegance of Diction, and politeness of Manners, I supposed would be found in the Representatives of a 'great and independent nation'. But my expectations were disappointed. Unless their Wisdom is reserved for the floor of Congress only, they would be employed to much greater advantage at the tail of a plow." Waller Holladay to Huldah Holladay, 1 December 1802, in Virginia Historical Society, *MSS1H7185b, Holladay Family Papers, 1753-1961*, b358-687, sec. 30, folder 8, slides 881-882.

see if people were capable of governing themselves was what originally made this nation exceptional, or unique, among other nations. In contemporary Europe, rulers and subjects were not trained or expected to self-limit their ambitions for the greater good. American exceptionalism therefore did not mean glorifying or reminiscing about a barbaric, self-interested past when “the life of man” was “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” It was the belief of our Founders that the negative elements of human nature could be subdued through a proper republican education. To deny the capacity of education to perform this function would be to minimize the value of both education and human experience.³

Education in the American Republic, as envisioned by Jefferson and other Founders, was meant to render talented young men eligible to perform on the public stage and other citizens knowledgeable enough of republican processes to keep their leaders in check. Littlepage, although talented, did not receive the proper training to control his own ambition and operated in an environment where there were no real checks on his pursuit of wealth and power. Moreover, during the more than two decades he spent in Europe, the young Virginian did not have a good republican role model to work alongside and imitate. Therefore, while Littlepage’s adventures were extraordinary, his character was not. Although he often traveled on the glorious wings of Victory, he did not deserve a space in the Elysian Fields with the virtuous Heroes or deification in the pantheon of American public servants. Smashed to atoms, his image should only serve as an example of what course not to follow as an American. If only Littlepage had persevered in pursuing a useful republican education he might have learned how to win

³ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Oxford World’s Classics Paperback ed., ed. J. C. A. Gaskins (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1998), 84.

the esteem of his fellow Americans (and of posterity), instead of their negative judgments.

Finis

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