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"Those 'Old Colonial Establishments' and The New Negro: The Problem of Slavery in The Career of William Dunlap"

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> I can speak of myself now, at the age of sixty-nine, as of *another*, better known than *any other* could be known. If it were not for this *intimate* knowledge, one might almost doubt one's identity.
>
> William Dunlap, *History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States*, 1:243[1]

THERE is a familiar argument about mid-nineteenth-century American literature. Amid renewed interest in the roots of American national life toward the jubilee of independence, American writers revisited the history of the colonial era to offer alternative, and often critical, narratives of the postrevolutionary nation's origins. James Fenimore Cooper returned to the Puritans and the Seven Years War, Catharine Sedgwick and Lydia Maria Child to the Pequod War, and, later, Nathaniel Hawthorne revisited Salem. This return to schismatic crises in the past, even as Americans were celebrating fifty years of political independence and championing an emergent cultural independence, indicates a dialectic historiography that not only revises the represented past but also intervenes in the politics of contemporary culture.[2]

As with Hawthorne, sifting through boxes in the customhouse and ferreting out Hester Prynne's scarlet letter, writers picked through

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prerevolutionary Americana to work through the *relationship* of present to past, not merely to correct the historical record. In light of these trends, William Dunlap's memoirs—shoehorned into his antebellum histories of the American theater and the arts of design—are exceptional. While like period novelists Dunlap sought to bring "disparate periods of time into productive relation,"[3] the period he recuperates is not some remote past, but his own personal history. Like the revisionary novels of the mid-nineteenth century, Dunlap's return to the colonial and early national era indexes an abiding impulse to work through the traumatic relationship of colony to nation. And so, as with the more familiar novels of the period, Dunlap's histories both break with the colonial period as they testify to certain recognized features of an "independent" national culture and simultaneously manifest supposedly severed connections as colonial material is summoned forth. If this suggests a feedback loop, it is curiously intensified in Dunlap's writing with the writer's career serving as a synecdoche for both the series of the broader narrative of cultural progress and the refracted loop through which the past returns. Here the personal and the political are structured by similar coordinates of repression and desire:

> I am so dissimilar to what I was, that I can with difficulty realize *sameness*. I am *not* what I was; but the knowledge of what I was produces the conviction of identity. (1:243)

As with the uncanny experience of seeing one's double, the mind oscillates between sameness and difference. Here, where the encounter with the self as other straddles a temporal gap, Dunlap opts for a third term, "identity," to capture himself neither in the present nor in the past, but in between, in the relation between then and now. The emphasized break with the past, the "I am *not*," has to be corrected, its zeal tempered by the "conviction of identity." Thus, we might say, as Dunlap reviews his past, this conviction of identity punctures its negation in the present. What has been repressed returns.

As Dunlap's histories came to press, his contemporaries offered celebrations befitting a cultural patriarch. In 1833, Dunlap was honored with a benefit presented by the citizens of New York who "convened to express their deep sense of the services rendered by you to the promotion

of the fine arts, and the dramatic literature of our country" (*AD*, 1:311). At sixty-eight, Dunlap had finally won the recognition that had evaded him during the course of his career. In the midst of celebrations of American distinction, Dunlap appeared to stand as confirmation that the long struggle to create a substantive culture of arts and letters had been achieved. When the contemporaries of the American Jubilee celebrated Dunlap's life in the 1830s, they were, in essence, celebrating themselves. The present generation believed it had achieved the long-anticipated goal of cultural legitimacy and understood the past as a record of the inexorable march toward national apotheosis. Difficulties and uncertainties that had preoccupied the producers of culture in the past were understood as the requisite struggles toward a national culture. This view was not isolated to the arts, but had implications for the ways in which U.S. citizens interpreted the entirety of the colonial past. Viewed from the perspective of antebellum nationalism, the founding of the United States could be construed both as a fundamental break with colonialism and as a natural outgrowth of the struggles of colonial experience. To reconcile the paradox, lineal historical ties had to be carefully drawn and delimited. Elements of colonial experience that crossed the gap across the revolutionary divide had to be consistent with the new national imaginary. Those elements that were not consistent with the narrative of national becoming were minimized or discarded. The birth of the nation, thus, warranted a collective forgetting of the material and cultural legacy of colonialism.[4] Nineteenth-century nationalists reinterpreted the colonial past as the prequel to national independence, effectively "disowning" features of it that did not fit the already-scripted plot.[5] They explained the colonizing project of the past and the ongoing project of continental expansion in terms of the unfolding of an immanent national design already evident in the Puritan errand into the wilderness, but epitomized by the War of Independence.[6]

Revisionary nationalism was both teleological and political: it allowed postrevolutionary Americans to think of themselves as engaged in an ongoing *anti*colonial project (of cultural distinction) even as many of the institutional and economic components of the colonial enterprise remained intact. While by the 1830s William Dunlap's career could be construed as evidence of cultural distinction, the author

nonetheless felt compelled to return the material and cultural features of colonial society in which his aesthetic and political identity was forged. In what follows, I aim to amplify discrepancies between how cultural nationalism has assimilated late colonial and early national American literature and how one particular artist worked through a personal aesthetic awakening that seemed traumatically alienated from that collective national experience. I will argue that Dunlap's return to his early career through memoir also offers a powerful interpretation of the play for which he is most remembered today, his tragedy *André* (1798). Below, I will explain how slavery, abolition, and the fear of race warfare surface in Dunlap's memoirs as the recuperated subtext of the playwright's infamous historical tragedy.

1. Remembrance of Things Past: Memories of a Colonial Subject

Dunlap's memoirs gravitate toward the problem of slavery in colonial and early republican America. References to slavery, the slave trade, and the emancipation project aimed to return former slaves to Africa preoccupy him even as he focuses his attention on his education and his career in the arts. In the historical narrative as well, Dunlap detours from his putative agenda to record anecdotes associating slavery with trauma. For example, in chapter 18 of the *History of the American Theatre* (1832) Dunlap offers sketches of the members of the orchestra at New York, beginning with the observation that many either had fled from either revolutionary France or had "sought refuge from the devastation of St. Domingo" (*HAT*, 206). The sequencing of anecdotes here warrants attention. After writing that "the stories of these men would fill volumes" (210),Dunlap decides instead to take a detour, to relate an anecdote that is precisely not exemplary. The story he chooses first relates the suffering of a former Swiss priest who had been persecuted under the Inquisition in Madrid. The anecdote—uncannily similar to Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum" (1842)—serves as a counterweight to the untold stories of those "victims of democracy" for whom America was also refuge in the 1790s. Adopted for a time by Dunlap's family to teach them German, the Swiss musician is a model for Dunlap's alienation:

> Most of his companions considered themselves as the victims of democracy. He knew himself to be the victim of an institution which could only exist in a monarchy or aristocracy. He was bitter in his expressions against those institutions which they loved. His hate of monarchies and hierarchies was deep; *they* adored the source of their former ease and splendour. (210)

Having no friends in the theater, the Swiss musician ultimately leaves America for Cuba, where he would die of the yellow fever. The inclusion of the Swiss's tale suggests, paradoxically, that America is hospitable only to those refugees who have political affinities at odds with a developing republican government. It aligns the pleasure of the theater—cultural production—with other debased sources of "ease and splendour" associated with tyranny.[7] The following anecdotes underscore the cost of this preference: a former French noble now acting as a pimp; a young Englishman who kills a constable sent to arrest him for failing to pay his debts; and finally the horrendous story of Monsieur and Madame Gardie, refugees from Saint Domingue, whose tragedy ends in a grisly murder-suicide. As in this series, Dunlap's references to slavery mark the dissonance between an America positioned at the vanguard of enlightenment culture and one still sullied by association with the corrupt institutions of feudal and colonial Europe. The unhappy story of the alienated Swiss musician, however, testifies to alternative sources through which a theater could be constructed and remain consistent with democracy; he was, Dunlap writes, "noble from the source of nature" (211).[8]

For Dunlap, slavery remained the gravest tie between postrevolutionary America and its former colonial condition. He actively participated in antislavery campaigns, recording these endeavors in his memoirs. A member of the New York Manumission Society, Dunlap attended a national gathering of abolitionists in Philadelphia in 1797. His diary recalls his efforts on behalf of an African school, for which he served as a trustee, and testimony he offered to Congress, which led to the condemnation of a slave ship. In a fascinating letter written in 1797 to the British playwright Thomas Holcroft and not only included in his diary but also excerpted in *The History of the American Theatre*, Dunlap aligned himself politically with ameliorationists, who opposed

slavery but favored colonization schemes or gradual emancipation (*HAT*, 174; *Diary*, 119-21).[9] Toward mid-century, Dunlap appears to have regarded the separation of the races as the only solution to slavery in America, but his attitudes shifted throughout his lifetime. That the elderly playwright would want to record acts of benevolence for posterity is unsurprising. What is peculiar, however, is the way in which Dunlap's memoirs of his career in the theater draw relevance from these references to slavery, an institution which Dunlap referred to as operating on the "old colonial establishment" (*Diary*, 376). The theater, too, was an old colonial establishment, a British import, proscribed during the Revolutionary War, but finding renewed favor following the successful campaign to win colonial independence. In working through the reintroduction of the theater and its role in the new republic, was Dunlap also thinking about the legacy and continuation of other colonial institutions?

The combination of chronological relation, personal anecdote, and memoir in Dunlap's historical writings has frustrated critics since their publication.[10] Like America's early historical romancers, Dunlap did not present himself as a professional historian. He rested his claim to chronicle the histories of the theater and the "arts of design" upon having borne witness to much of what he would survey and upon his acquaintance with many of the figures he would sketch for posterity. He also noted that he had participated firsthand in both endeavors while consistently downplaying his own skills. Always self-deprecating, Dunlap positioned himself as a negative example of the achievements he was otherwise documenting. Compared to the paths followed by Benjamin West, John Singleton Copley, and others, his own conduct was "a beacon to be avoided by all." Put to the "delicate task and great responsibility" of managing a theater "of a great metropolis," Dunlap judged himself "not fitted for the arduous task" (*HAT*, 236). While these demurrals appear to cast Dunlap's memoirs as a simple morality tale,[11] his careful self-fashioning is more profitably approached as granting the writer a creative license to work in between discursive expectations. Once again, comparison to the period's historical novelists is illustrative. At work between the degraded form of the novel and more widely esteemed historiography, historical romance occupied a "liminal political position" that warranted expressions of

cultural dissent however tame or co-optable in the end.[12] As with the porous boundary between history and historical romance that early American novelists exploited, Dunlap worked the space between the arts and political discourse to meditate on the unfinished business of the transition from colony to nation.

A closer look at how Dunlap introduces his memoirs will illustrate how the author blends self- and sociopolitical analysis. Note Dunlap's recourse to the past subjunctive as he establishes the frame for his autobiographical sketch:

> Had it been his lot to direct a theatre patronized by an enlightened government, having no care but that of selecting such dramas and such performers as would best promote the great end of human happiness, he might perhaps have been entitled to the grateful remembrance of his fellowmen; but he was now, after a trial of management in conjunction with another person, forced by previous circumstances to burthen himself with hazardous speculation, which, as far as it had been proved, was unsuccessful; and the power he once possessed of meeting temporary losses and providing the means of success, had been lamentably diminished. Instead of having an unembarrassed mind whose entire powers could be directed to that which should be the object of such an institution, he was tempted to seek resources for the supply of the treasury and the fulfillment of moneyed engagements. Instead of studying to gain the approbation of the wise, pressing necessities turned his thoughts to the common methods of attracting the vulgar. (*HAT*, 236)

The theme of Dunlap's counterfactual wish resonates with both preface and conclusion to the full volume in which the memoirs are embedded. In the preface, Dunlap describes the progress of the arts from a condition of servility during "ages of barbarism." "As the arts, in the course of progressive civilization, emancipated themselves," Dunlap explains, "like other slaves, at the moment of acquiring liberty, they were inclined to become licentious; thus the poet and the player required legal restraint" (*HAT*, 2). Having already described his moral failings, Dunlap here completes the circuit yoking the artist and the arts to the lot of a recently emancipated slave. In his conclusion, Dunlap further underscores the connection between playwright and slavery,

extending the analogy to the theater audience as well. Having identified a properly governed theater ("the theatre of a country" as opposed to a "play-house") with the highest values of an enlightened society, Dunlap praises it for preparing the people for a future "democratic world." If the people are ultimately to be governed by themselves and not "by those who have considered men as their property to be used or abused for their pleasure," he writes, "let us give to theatres that purity, as well as power, which shall produce the high moral purpose here aimed at" (*HAT*, 405). The arts, the artist, and now the audience take the place of slaves; theater is here that which prepares the emancipated slave for freedom.[13] Dunlap's analogies work to sever the connection between the theater and the English colonial system, the latter blamed for introducing slavery to the colonies. He aims to yoke the former to the progressive history of civilization; while, along with colonial subservience, slavery is to be cast aside in the course of the civilizing process, the theater is compatible with democracy. Though both institutions were present in previous stages of history, a democratic future requires that the theater cross the revolutionary bar to bring an emancipated people to full enjoyment of independence. As we turn to Dunlap's personal memoirs, the overdetermination of the conjunction of art with slavery will continue to be manifest.

2. Dunlap, Jane Austen, and August von Kotzebue

Those familiar with Jane Austen's novel *Mansfield Park* (1814) may recall that Sir Thomas Bertram's voyage to Antigua to tend to his plantation opens an otherwise- proscribed opportunity to produce a play. That play, an adaptation of August von Kotzebue's *Lovers' Vows*, or *Das Kind der Liebe* (1798), was also translated and adapted for the American stage by William Dunlap. At first glance, the connection between the late eighteenth-century career of Dunlap and the plot of an Austen novel published in 1814 may appear solely coincidental. But both playwright and novelist made timely use of Kotzebue's transcultural, melodramatic hit. Austen used *Lovers' Vows* as a counterweight to the imperial subtext of Sir Thomas Bertram's wealth. Play at home misdirects readers from having to contend too much with the unseemly underbelly of the country estate; leisure is sustained by

slave labor.[14] Might Dunlap have also turned to Kotzebue to register and react to the intransigent problem of the slave establishment in a postrevolutionary America at least nominally independent from the colonial past?

Written in Germany in 1791, *Lovers' Vows* was popularized through multiple English translations in England and the United States at the end of the eighteenth century. In England, Elizabeth Inchbald's censored adaptation appeared at the Royal Theatre at Covent Gardens in 1798. While Jane Austen lived in Bath (1801-5) no fewer than six productions of *Lovers' Vows* were staged there. It is Inchbald's bowdlerized edition, scandalous to Sir Thomas Bertram regardless of ample censorship, that appears in *Mansfield Park*. Discovering what his children and wards have done while he was abroad, Sir Thomas must reestablish his rule of his household much as he had left home to reestablish control over his plantation overseas. He dismisses the scene painter; directs his carpenter to tear down the makeshift stage; and, meticulous to every detail, has every unbound copy of *Lovers' Vows* destroyed. In the plot of *Mansfield Park*, *Lovers' Vows* is a symptom of unruliness, disorganization, and corruption. Its cure warrants the exercise of patriarchal force within the domestic economy.

Lovers' Vows played an equally pivotal role in Dunlap's early career as a theater manager. The success of the play in England prompted Dunlap to adapt it and another by Kotzebue, *The Stranger* (1789), for American audiences.[15] In his *History of the American Theatre*, Dunlap attributed his adaptations of Kotzebue's plays with saving the theater under his management in New York. The success of his translations and rewrites not only allowed the theater to survive the rough season that followed Dunlap's assumption of managerial control but also blunted the failure of a run of historical dramas, one written by John Daly Burk and the other, his own ill-fated *André*, the play for which he is most remembered today. A comparison of the receipts for Burk's *Joan of Arc* (first performed in Dunlap's theater on 13 April 1798) with those for the Kotzebue adaptations illustrates how compensatory the latter were for the novice stage manager. While *The Stranger* was a long running success, bringing in $624 on the night of its tenth performance, and while *Lovers' Vows* opened with receipts of $622, *Joan of Arc* gained a mere $238. *André* played only two nights. Though it brought in $824, its

opening was marred by the audience's negative reaction to a scene that seemed to disparage George Washington. Chastened, Dunlap edited the scene, but the play's reputation had been irreparably tarnished. It was, Dunlap reports, "printed, and is forgotten" (*HAT*, 2:21).

What was it about *Lovers' Vows* that made it appeal so broadly to audiences on either side of the Atlantic following the American Revolution? It is beyond the scope of this essay to offer a reading of Kotzebue's play, but it is sufficient to note that it concerns a bastard son who wins the recognition of his father and restores the virtue of his destitute, abandoned mother. In *Lovers' Vows*, the father is repentant, forgiving, a man full of feeling. The contrast with Sir Thomas's rage upon his return from Antigua is clear. So, too, with *André*: an audience member wrote to a local newspaper after the first performance of the play to accuse Dunlap of representing George Washington as "an unfeeling obdurate monster."[16] Did the melodramatic plot of Kotzebue's play offer an alternative image of the father that compensated for something missing in the exercise of patriarchal authority at the turn of the century?[17]

In *André*, Washington decides to go ahead with the execution by hanging of accused British spy John André despite pleas for mercy from the American soldier Bland and from André's fiancée, Honora. To Jay Fliegelman, Dunlap's depiction was a veiled lecture on the necessary if difficult choices of political independence. Reading *André* as national allegory, Fleigelman argues that Dunlap aimed to teach his audience that if they were "to be liberated from their British parent, the good aspects of the parent (embodied by the gentlemanly, fashionable André) must be sacrificed along with the evil ones (embodied by George III)."[18] Washington earns his legitimacy as the new father of the nation through his principled, enforced discipline. While Fleigelman's argument offers a compelling interpretation of the André affair circa 1780, when the well-known and well-loved John André was indeed hanged and his death widely mourned among otherwise-patriotic supporters of American independence, it is less instructive for a reading that emphasizes the moment of the play's production, 1791-98. I want to argue that the juxtaposition of the repentant father (*Lovers' Vows*) and the father as law (*André*) epitomizes not only the drama of national allegory but also the traumatic reckoning with the continuation of

slavery in the early republic. Here, the fantasy of alternative fathers may be read less as a diachronic rite of passage from colony to nation and more as a symptom of an unexposed national dilemma. What type of father and what type of behavior, repentance or discipline, would best bring the institution of slavery to an end? Which would expiate the sins of the previous generation and also allow the new nation to avoid race warfare? *André*, written and produced amid the Kotzebue boom in the Anglo-American theater, is Dunlap's test of Washington's suitability for the task: Could Washington's unpopular decision to hang André be taken as a sign that the general could manage through discipline the protracted legacy of slavery and colonialism?

3. The New Negro

William Dunlap's original calling was painting. He studied for three years, from 1784 to 1787, under Benjamin West in London, a distinguished placement for any aspiring painter in Anglo-America, either before or after the American Revolution. Despite having the financial support of his parents to support his artistic training, Dunlap quickly changed course, falling in love with the theater. When he returned to the United States, Dunlap's canvas would be script and stage. Though Dunlap justified his preference by noting that he was a poor artist and unlikely to survive as a painter, his career switch hardly assured an easier path to success. In 1789, when he authored his first play, Dunlap was choosing a field with much less access to cultural capital than the arts of design. Moreover, in venturing into drama and the theater, Dunlap was trading a highly patronized career for one less dependent on the economic and political establishment and thus subject to more financial and political risk.[19] He also disappointed his parents.[20]

Joining the theater, Dunlap cast his lot with the community of itinerant actors and stage managers who were negotiating the reemergence of the theater following the conclusion of the Revolution. In many ways, Dunlap could easily assimilate himself to the colonial milieu of the transatlantic theater. Dunlap had been witness not only to the seemingly endless series of intercolonial conflict during his

childhood but also to slavery, the institution that supplied the common engine for an otherwise geopolitically diversified colonial economy.

The son of Samuel Dunlap, a British officer who served under General Wolfe in the French and Indian War, William Dunlap grew up among British loyalists who sought the protection of the British army during the American Revolution. He was both too young to fight in the war and ill-suited for a soldier's life. A childhood injury had deprived him of the use of his right eye. As a child and adolescent, Dunlap kept close to home. It was at home where he recalls that his cultural sensibilities were formed. In reviewing his childhood, Dunlap began with his association with his family's black slaves. He regarded the family kitchen as his first school. Like almost every other house in Perth Amboy, the Dunlap residence, in William's words, "swarmed with black slaves" (*AD*, 1:288-89). The black children were his playmates. Their games and amusements were his as well. In recounting these early affiliations in the autobiographical chapters of his history of the arts of design, Dunlap included this anecdote to lament the deleterious effects of slaveholding on slaveholders and their children. Slaveholding was inconsistent with the republican ethos of postrevolutionary America, Dunlap argued. In reproducing the slaveholding class, "the infant is taught to tyrannize, the boy is taught to despise labor, the mind of the child is contaminated by hearing and seeing that which is not understood at the time, but remains with the memory" (*AD*, 1:244). Dunlap himself, however, seems to have evaded such contamination, and he credits his kitchen-school with the formation of his "taste."

The memory of childhood interracial communality leads Dunlap to recount another powerful influence on his adolescent development, Thomas Bartow. Bartow, a land agent for the original colonial proprietors, was an older gentleman who took interest in the young Dunlap. Under Bartow's instruction, Dunlap developed a love of reading and the visual arts. In reading Homer, Virgil, Pope, and Dryden, as well as the history of ancient Rome, Dunlap supplemented the sociality developed in his kitchen-school with a classical, intellectual regimen. The link between Bartow and Dunlap's black companions was what Dunlap referred to as "peculiarities in [Bartow's] conduct and household, probably little thought of by me at the time, but making their due impression" (*AD*, 1:246). Bartow's was the only household not

to keep black slaves, Dunlap reports. Thus, for Dunlap, both sociality and intellectual curiosity are fostered outside of the dominant material and social relations of prerevolutionary British North America. As with the decontextualized play among children black and white, Bartow is also a figure who seems at a remove from historical time. As a colonial land agent, Bartow represented an earlier moment in colonial history; he was a substitute, much as the interracial kitchen-school was also a substitute, for the conflict-ridden environment that would otherwise have formed Dunlap's sense of self: colonial rebellion and the relation of master to slave.

For reasons Dunlap does not explain, the beginning of the Revolution severs the young boy's relationship with Bartow, who removes to Pennsylvania, presumably to avoid the dangers of war. History intercedes. Remembering Bartow's departure, Dunlap compares himself to Shakespeare's Caliban "with the disposition to weep for a renewal of my dreams" (*AD*, 1:246). The citation is notable for more than just connecting the tenure of Bartow to Dunlap's future interest in the theater. In the passage Dunlap references, Caliban expresses his desire to "dream again" as if in sleep he could recover access to the riches of his island denied to him by the presence of Prospero. Only "when Prospero is destroy'd" (3.2.135-46), one of Caliban's most rebellious, antipatriarchal lines of *The Tempest*, will his dream world be revitalized. Prospero's presence represents historical time, labor, and struggle to Caliban. The departure of Bartow, likewise, marks a profound immersion in history and struggle for Dunlap. Communality and intellectual nurturing are replaced by the ravages of war. Dunlap writes of the lamentations of the women and children of Piscatawa after the village was plundered by British troops, an anecdote of the hearth destroyed. They cried, he writes, "as the soldiers carried off their furniture, scattered the feathers of beds to the winds, and piled up looking-glasses, with frying-pans in the same heap, by the roadside" (*AD*, 1:248). The violence of war stands in stark contrast to the gentility of Bartow and to the relaxed communality of the kitchen-school. Now but elements of a fantasy world to be recovered in dreams, these unconventional relations, outside of history and social conflict, perhaps encouraged Dunlap's interest in role-playing, in the deliberate transformation of self and society through play.

Memories of childhood, both with Bartow and with the interracial community of the kitchen-school echo, in Dunlap's analysis elsewhere of the importance of play—and of the theater as its mature, public, and institutionalized form—to the progress of civilization, a theme present throughout the *History of the American Theatre*. Explaining that all advancing civilizations had public amusements, Dunlap argued that play builds a sense a community and fellow feeling: "Mankind, when congregated for the purposes of innocent pleasure, or the higher purposes of receiving lessons in life, morals, or religion, are, by the sympathy of such association, more firmly bound and knit together in the kindlier feelings of our common nature. The merely meeting together for the same purpose, if that purpose is not evil, tends to good" (*HAT*, 70). The utopian space of the kitchen-school thus prefigures Dunlap's lifelong commitment to the arts as the nexus of pleasure and morality, where virtue is a product of, not a precondition for, socially valuable forms of entertainment. "The stage is Virtue's school," a veritable axiom for Dunlap, trumpets Thalia, the muse of drama, in the prologue to his *The Father of an Only Child* (1807).[21] Here, the commitment to the social value of communal play cuts against delimited political and social practices in postrevolutionary America.

For Dunlap, the continuation of slavery and the slave trade after the end of the War of Independence signaled that political independence did not bring about the end of colonialism. Could the principle of play resolve the intransigent legacy of colonialism and colonial conflict? While the interracial companionship of the hearth indicated the triumph of communality, the realities of the slaveholding economic establishment continued to evidence a darker alternative. Dunlap captured the complexity of the dilemma in a description of an older slave that he had designated the "new negro." Unlike the rest of the slaves held by Dunlap's parents, the "new negro" had not been born in North America. Links to an African past were visible on his tattooed face and heard in his "scarcely intelligible language." For Dunlap, the "new negro" was a sign of both continuity and difference. He was "new" according to Dunlap despite having "been long in the country . . . and an old man" (*AD*, 1:244). Literally, the old man's newness corresponded to his recently having been purchased by Dunlap's father. Figuratively, however, the appellation "new" pointed to the continuing presence of

slavery despite the revolution that had ended the colonial status of British North America. In the new United States, the "old colonial establishment" of slavery remained (*Diary*, 376). The new negro, tattooed and unintelligible to the young white master, explodes the domesticated arena of Dunlap's kitchen-school. He is encompassed neither by Dunlap's ameliorist antislavery nor by the utopian domestic economy within which Dunlap found sanctuary from the fraternal schism between England and the North American colonies. The new negro is the unincorporated remainder of the Revolution. His presence defies the narrative of separation and independence both physically and symbolically.[22] Unsettling and yet central, the "new negro" and the continuities of colonialism that he stands for provide a conceptual structure for a reinterpretation of *André*.

To explore what might seem an attenuated reading of a play whose subject matter never directly addresses slavery or issues of race, I want to return to the image of Washington. In *André*, Washington decides to go ahead with the hanging of accused British spy John André despite pleas for mercy from the American soldier Bland and from André's fiancée, Honora. More Sir Thomas Bertram than Kotzebue's repentant father, *André*'s Washington is not the father who liberates but the father who enforces the law. In Dunlap's memoirs and diary, Washington frequently appears alongside the writer's struggle to define his views of the slave trade. What would it be like to read *André* as Dunlap's theory that Washington, the father-enforcer, might bring the institution of slavery to an end, expiate the sins of the previous generation, and also allow the new nation to avoid race warfare?[23]

Washington is central to Dunlap's memoirs, and the link between the heroic general and slavery frequently draws Dunlap's attention. In an earlier letter to Holcroft (July 1797), Dunlap defended Washington against an English critic, who attacked the first president for keeping slaves. Claiming not to be an apologist for Washington's conduct, Dunlap nevertheless begs the benefit of doubt:

> The Author does not chuse to suppose the Mr Washington is gradually preparing the minds of his slaves for emancipation & giving liberty to them as he finds them fitted to receive it, that is capable of using it for their own advantage & the benefit of those around them. He does

> not seem to reflect that Mr. Washington gives justice to his fellow citizens as well as to his slaves; or, blinded by a maxim, considered as in itself essentially right, he cannot see, that liberty, may, under certain circumstances injure the possessor & those around him, or, in other words, that . . . there are individuals in certain situations requiring restraint by coercion. (*Diary,* 121).[24]

As the last lines illustrate, Dunlap's point was less a defense of slaveholding—which he consistently condemned—than an exercise in ethical reasoning. Was it always appropriate to be guided by maxims or might blind pursuit of what is "essentially right" cause unforeseen harm? In his speculations about Washington's judgment, Dunlap seems anxious to blunt criticism of the president by softening his image, or rather by demonstrating how seemingly harsh conduct might serve more beneficent and democratic aims. Washington's strength comes from knowledge of when "restraint by coercion" is necessary.

We can see this clearly in a strange anecdote included in *Arts of Design* that also, symptomatically, yokes Washington and slavery. Though in his historical play Dunlap showed Washington unmoved by the emotional appeals on John André's behalf, Dunlap himself goes to some length in his memoirs to prove that Washington was, indeed, a man of feeling. The incident recounted takes place at John Van Horne's farm, where Dunlap lived briefly in 1783 before leaving for England to commence his training as a painter. Van Horne had "ordered" a black boy to catch a pig to cook for dinner. When the slave fails to secure the pig, Van Horne throws off his coat and jumps in to join the chase. At the moment the pig is captured, Washington rides up and bursts into laughter, "as hearty a burst of laughter from the dignified Washington as any that shook the sides of the most vulgar spectator of the scene" (*AD*, 253). Washington's vulgar laughter temporarily brings the icon down to the common level, even implying a nominal comparison to the young slave, who is himself parodically lifted; the boy's name, Dunlap strains to recall, is "Cato or Plato (for all the slaves were heathen philosophers in those days)." What provokes Washington's laughter? Is it not that slavery draws both slave and slaveholder into the dirt, that despite the window dressing of the slave names drawn from the golden ages of antiquity, slavery turns everyone

into beasts of the pigpen? Laughter is thus a sign of both Washington's humanity and his wisdom, two characteristics that mitigate the severe judgment of the idealized patriarch.

The Van Horne anecdote precedes Dunlap's narration of his career as a painter, the period that immediately precedes the memoirist's turn to drama and the composition of *André*. We can further trace the genealogy of *André* by looking at a series of images that Dunlap, in preparation for his study of painting abroad, copied and adapted much as he did the bulk of his future dramatic repertoire. These images—a portrait of Washington, an historical painting by Benjamin West, and John Singleton Copley's astonishing *A boy attack'd by a shark* (1778)—help elaborate three critical concerns that support a fresh reading of *André*: (1) the circular, intransigent legacy of colonialism; (2) the question of the "old colonial establishment" of slavery; (3) the concern whether George Washington, the new nation's new father, could achieve a lasting separation from the colonial past.

4. Portraits and the Artist

Following the end of the Revolution in 1784, at the age of eighteen, Dunlap left for England under his father's patronage to study art under Benjamin West, then the preeminent historical painter in Anglo-America. As his credentials, Dunlap carried with him two paintings that together indicate the colonial field of cultural production within which he imagined himself operating. The first painting was a portrait of George Washington following the Battle of Princeton, an important victory for the American troops. Though Dunlap's painting itself no longer exists, Dunlap's description of it is illuminating. A painting by Charles Willson Peale of Washington originally painted on the same occasion will serve as a reference image (fig. 1).

Like Peale, Dunlap depicted Washington as an icon (*AD*, 1:255). Washington stands at ease, secure that the successful battle foretells the eventual success of the campaign. Dunlap's version, however, differed from Peale's in a couple of ways: "I didn't take the liberty to throw off his hat, or omit the black and white cockade," Dunlap explains, "but in full uniform, booted and spurred, he stood most heroically alone" (*AD*, 1:255). The cockade of which Dunlap writes denoted French support

Figure 1. Charles Wilson Peale, *George Washington*, ca. 1779-81. Oil on canvas, 241.3 x 156.8 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Collis P. Huntington, 1897.

for the American cause. Such a cockade will play no small part in *André*, so it is worth remembering its appearance here. Washington's military attire inscribes him within the European entanglements of colonial politics. The rest of the painting as described does so as well. In Dunlap's version, the triumphant Washington is superimposed over "a background," Dunlap notes, "thrown to a most convenient distance." Behind Washington, Dunlap's background reveals the vanquished British General Mercer "dying in precisely the same attitude that West had adopted for Wolfe" in his famous painting *The Death of Wolfe* (1770; see fig. 2). West's painting depicts a scene from the French and Indian War, namely, the British victory at Quebec in 1759.

West depicted Wolfe surrounded by as many representatives of the British Empire as the frame could accommodate. Wolfe is flanked by a member from each rank of the British military, as well as an American ranger and a Scottish soldier. Most importantly, the inclusion of the Mohawk, who somberly contemplates Wolfe's passing, completes what historian Fred Anderson has called "an allegory of empire that unites all ranks and nationalities in symbolic witness to a martyr's death."[25] Dunlap's adaptation pays homage to the master painter while subversively resigning his trailblazing work to the backdrop. Of course, the updated personalities are important as well. The triumphant Wolfe, who died in victory, is replaced in Dunlap's notation by the death of Mercer, who dies in defeat. Washington, thus, appears to supersede the succession of dying British generals, a living hero to conquer and control the assembled imperial tableau. Dunlap's insistence, however, on the inclusion of the French cockade in Washington's hat, absent in Peale's version, lends a touch of irony to the otherwise-iconic portrayal. Where Wolfe conquered imperial France, Washington conquers England with French support, an indicator and reminder of the circularity of colonial conflict.

The second painting Dunlap carried with him to England was a copy of John Singleton Copley's *A boy attacked by a shark*, a most unforgettable image of the colonial milieu (see fig. 3).

Better known as *Watson and the Shark*, the title under which it hangs in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, Copley's painting represents an event that took place in the port of Havana in 1749. Brook Watson's recreational swim turned into near-fatal tragedy

when a gigantic shark made three passes at his prone body, taking off his right leg below the knee before shipmates could save him. Copley's painting shows the frantic shipmates straining to bring Watson into the boat. A harpooner in a blue buffcoat is poised to deal a blow to the oncoming shark while a black man holds out a rope with a loop that extends just beyond Watson's head. Two shipmates, steadied by an older figure, reach out for Watson while the four remaining crew members watch on in horror.[26]

There are notable biographical reasons for Dunlap's interest in Copley's painting. Brook Watson served in the same regiment with Dunlap's father under General Wolfe in the French and Indian War. Like Samuel Dunlap, Watson remained a loyalist during the American Revolution. And like the senior Dunlap, who held a household full of black slaves, Watson was an advocate for slavery. William was aware of all these facts and he aggressively made his opinion of Watson known. In his discussion of Copley, he wrote the following of Watson:

> This individual is memorable as arrayed with our enemies in opposition to our independence, and with the enemies of God and man in opposition to the abolitionists of the slave-trade in the English House of Commons. Before he avowedly joined the standard of Britain, the traitor ingratiated himself with many leading Americans, obtained as much information of their designs as he could, and transmitted it to his chosen masters. In the character of legislator, his argument in support of the trade in human flesh was that it would injure the market for the refuse fish of the English fisheries to abolish it—these refuse fish being purchased by the West India planters for their slaves. To immortalize such a man was the pencil of Copley employed. (*AD*, 1:118)

Copley's painting clearly evoked strong feelings in Dunlap. Watson—a veritable double for Dunlap's father—tethered to the black sailor, who might in other contexts be his slave, appears to be a victim of a fundamental reversal of roles. A black man holds the rope. How are we to interpret this? As a gesture of forgiveness for the wrongs of slavery? As an expression of a common human tie between white and black, former owner and former slave?

In the 1830s, Dunlap held no illusion that Brook Watson had repented for his sins by patronizing Copley. This view is supported

Figure 2. Benjamin West, *The Death of General Wolfe*, 1770. Oil on canvas, 152.6 x 214.5 cm. National Gallery of Canada (no. 8007).

in fact by Watson's views toward the end of the century, but perhaps less accurate when Watson, in the midst of the American Revolution, opposed Whiggish calls for liberty when these same Whigs supported the slave trade.[27] By the 1790s, however, Watson's position had completely changed. An advocate against gradual emancipation because of the costs to be borne by British commerce, Watson might have created a new narrative for the painting toward the end of his life. In 1807, Watson bequeathed Copley's painting to a boys' school, possible evidence that Watson reconceived the painting not to overcoming moral deficits but to withstanding physical and psychological trauma.[28] Tested by physical hardship, Watson saw himself not only as persevering but also as succeeding in life, a fit role model for young boys.[29] Regardless of Watson's views, Dunlap's published opinion of him leaves little room to doubt that the playwright thought that the slave trader had gotten what he deserved. The fact that Dunlap paired *Watson and the Shark* with a portrait of Washington is provocative as well.

In the portrait of Washington, as we have seen, Dunlap presented his hero alone. *Watson and the Shark*, by contrast, depicts the efforts of a group. Featured in the painting are two standing figures, positioned at the pinnacle of a triangle that also comprises Watson's prone, stark-white, naked body and the malevolent (ridiculously anamorphic) shark. Bodies overlapping, the black sailor, dressed in a simple cloak, stands as an equal to the harpooner, the only figure in the boat dressed in military attire, his blue buffcoat reminiscent of the continental army's regalia. Together, the black sailor and the harpooner seem to offer two means of salvation for Watson. Either the harpooner kills the shark or the black sailor retrieves Watson before the monster can make another pass. Why might Copley have added a structural redundancy to his tableau? We might postulate that the extension of sympathy from black to white (despite enslavement) and the subsequent concession of humanity from white to black would make the white harpooner's militant action against nature unnecessary or, vice versa, the harpooner's intervention would foreclose mutual recognition sans necessity. This reading hinges on interpreting the saving gestures of black man and harpooner as commensurate, one in the place of (and as well as) the other. But let us entertain another possibility, one consistent with Dunlap's view that Watson deserved no

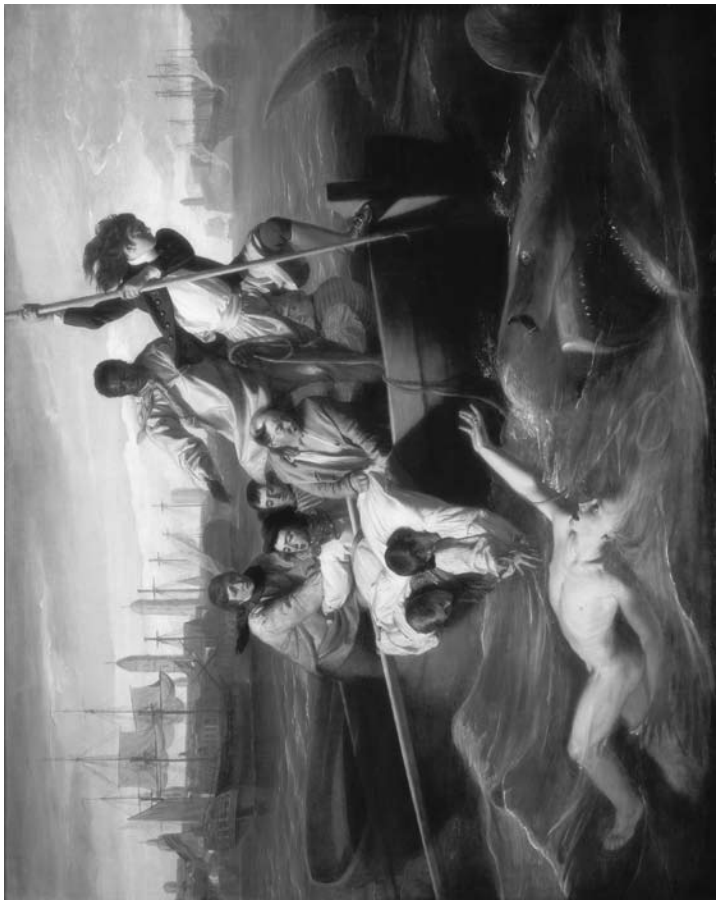

Figure 3. John Singleton Copley, *Watson and the Shark*, 1778. Oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Ferdinand Lammot Belin Fund 1963.6.1.

sympathy for the circumstance in which he found himself. Might it be possible to see the actions of the black figure and the white harpooner as incommensurate? Albert Boime is here instructive in his reading of the painting as a Manichean tableau. Having established both Copley and Watson as conservatives at the time of the American Revolution (when the painting was commissioned), Watson, he claims, wanted himself portrayed as a severed body of British rule. Watson is a victim of divine wrath leveled upon Britain for its complicity in the hypocrisy of the American rebels, who talked of freedom but held slaves. For this reason, argues Boime, "Watson prompted Copley to invert the normal hierarchical dependence, turning the social pyramid upside down with himself in the position of victim and the black man in the position of master."[30] The harpooner's act would save Watson from divine retribution. The harpooner, representative of the rebellious and hypocritical colonists, strikes out to avoid punishment from above for the sin of slavery below.

Following Boime, I am tempted to see the black sailor as not being commensurate to the harpooner, or even to Watson, to whom (in some interpretations) he is umbilically tied. Rather, the black man seems best read as Boime suggests, as a slave become master. Thus, if the rope is not an umbilical cord of reconciliation but, as is suggested by the loop that appears near Watson's head, a hangman's noose, there could be an alternative end to Watson's existence should the harpooner strike true and save Watson from the omnivorous shark. Divine wrath or race rebellion? Choose your poison. Without authoritative human action against perilous forces natural or divine, the black man may take his own bite.

Scholars continue to debate the black sailor's role in the painting. His ambiguous posture and inaccessible motivation recall Dunlap's figure of the "new negro," irreconcilable yet central to the scene. Another image of a black man holding a rope removes any ambiguity (see fig. 4). This engraving, taken from a history of the Haitian Revolution published in 1805, depicts a mirror of *Watson and the Shark* with all sentimentality and all ambiguity removed.[31] Here, the colonial institution of slavery comes to a most violent end. As we turn now to *André*, we can locate the play's concern with the character of Washington in the circuit of Dunlap's anxiety about slavery in America, for in *André*, it is General

Figure 4. Engraving from Marcus Rainsford, *The Black Empire of Hayti* (1805). Courtesy of Hamilton College.

Washington who holds the rope and the swinging spy, John André, left "a mid-air spectacle to gaping clowns" (80).

5. The Spectacle of André

Written between 1791 and 1798, *André* stages the capture of John André during the American Revolution, his conviction as a spy, and Washington's decision to have him hanged for his crime. I hope we can concede that such a conjunction of circumstance was overdetermined for William Dunlap. Moreover, André had been active in the theater before the War and was well known for the elaborate, scenic backdrops he had painted for the stage. His wish, at the heart of Dunlap's drama, was to die a soldier's death by firing squad rather than face the gibbet as a dishonored spy. At the end of act 2, scene 1, André asks his friend Bland, an American soldier, to intercede on his behalf:

> O, think, and as a soldier think,
> How I must die—The *manner* of my death. . .
> A mid-air spectacle to gaping clowns.

Washington, however, could not be moved. In fact, he manages to maintain his determination despite the passionate appeals of Bland and André's fiancée, Honora. André had disguised himself and therefore had given up the prerogatives of his office; instead, he was a spy. It is worth noting the ironic circularity that Washington punished André the soldier in a way that better fit André the actor, in a highly theatrical fashion, a mid-air spectacular featured on an intercontinental stage.

The dramatic tension of *André* reaches its height in an exchange between Bland and the general. When Washington refuses to spare André or even to consider an alternative manner for his execution, the young and fraternally loyal Bland tears his cockade from his head and stomps it beneath his feet. Audiences in New York in 1798 were enraged to see the apparent glee with which a British actor, Thomas Cooper, trampled on the American military uniform, and so they booed the performance to a halt. A riot was narrowly avoided. When Dunlap had his drama printed, it issued from the press in amended form. In the revision, the general, mindful of the importance of the

insignia of his authority and the impetuosity of youth, allowed Bland to replace the cockade on his hat.

In accepting the cockade, in not taking the liberty to remove his hat, Bland commits himself to Washington, and he implicitly accepts Washington's decisive act of killing André to insure, as Washington explains in the play, the "destiny of millions, millions yet unborn, [who depend] upon the rigour of this moment" (86). Allow me to recall once again *Watson and the Shark*. There, the iconic figure in military attire stands poised to deliver a fatal blow to the shark bearing down on Watson, slaveholder and spy. Will he strike? Will he succeed in stopping the shark? In *André*, the general sacrifices his prisoner, a deliberate decision to allow justice to be meted out as called for by the dictates of law. Would the sparing of Watson be an abridgement of divine wrath? Would stopping the shark leave Watson's fate in the hands of a black man holding a rope? In copying *Watson and the Shark* and in framing *André* in its image, Dunlap appears to remain ambivalent about these questions, uncertain of which route Washington ought to choose. Recall that Washington kills André, an actor, with the help of stagecraft. Much like the cockade, a fixture of the Continental soldier's attire that inscribes him within the geopolitics of Europe, this, too, is a wink from our playwright at the ironies of a colonial circularity without end. One colonial institution falls only to be resurrected in the manner of its demise.

In the final lines of Dunlap's play, the wizened, fatherly soldier M'Donald intones the playwright's constant wish: "Never let memory of the sire's offence descend upon the son" (108). Dunlap's dramatic repertoire returns again and again to the dilemma here expressed. How will the legacy of the father influence the life of the son? Can a colonial project purge itself of its own corrupt foundations? Is it possible to pick and choose from among the old, colonial institutions which to keep and which to discard? How and when will colonialism come to an end? These are the questions that are open to us when we consider postrevolutionary American culture in the colonial field of production, when the birth of the nation is juxtaposed by the continuities of its colonial roots.

NOTES

I am grateful for the help of Ed White and my colleagues at Bucknell University, who read drafts and gave me the opportunity to present my work publicly. The Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Bucknell also provided funding to defray fees to reproduce the images above.

1. Dunlap, *History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States*, 1:243. Hereafter I will reference the former as *AD* in parentheses. The following will also be abbreviated: Dunlap, *A History of the American Theatre from its Origins to 1832*, hereafter *HAT*; and Dunlap, *Diary of William Dunlap, 1766-1839*, hereafter *Diary*.

2. See Gould, *Covenant and Republic*.

3. Insko, "Anachronistic Imaginings," 199.

4. Warner has described how "[n]ational culture began with a moment of sweeping amnesia about colonialism" (Joanne Pope 63).

5. This expression is borrowed from Melish, *Disowning Slavery*.

6. Bercovitch, *Rites of Assent*, 168-93.

7. Play, for these refugees, is akin to the dance band on the *Titanic*. Theater is a temporary respite from an horrendous, inevitable catastrophe (both the Terror in France and the violent uprising of the slave on Saint Domingue). Theater is the last vestige of the old regime that they carry with them.

8. Dunlap here references the romantic concept of nature ascendant in the United States between 1830 and the Civil War. Dunlap's use of nature to *recall* a lost political opportunity is a fine example of how romantic transcendence need not be seen as an escapist flight from history.

9. The letter to Holcroft deserves more attention than space here allows. What is crucial, for my purposes, however, is the way that a discussion about the social utility of the theater leads directly to consideration of slavery and how to bring it to an end.

10. For example, see "Art. VI," 143.

11. Maura Lyons, *William Dunlap*, 18.

12. Gould, *Covenant and Republic*, 13.

13. This is the familiar rhetoric of gradual emancipation schemes, which extended paternal authority over slaves during a period of stewardship prior to full emancipation.

14. See Edward Said's discussion of *Mansfield Park* in *Culture and Imperialism* (80-97).

15. Note, too, the relevance of the anecdote of the Swiss priest above, who provided instruction in German to Dunlap as he undertook to adapt the German-language plays for American audiences.

16. Letter signed "Z," *The Argus, or Greenleaf's New Daily Advertiser*, 3 April 1798; quoted in Philbrick, "The Spy as Hero," 113.

17. Jack Zipes, in an article that argues that both Dunlap and Kotzebue were bourgeois sentimentalists, describes Kotzebue's plays as "play[s] of cooptation, for he emphasizes how the ruling forces—fathers, governors, lords, etc.—are adaptable, admirable, and flexible, willing to move with the forces of progress, that is, just as long as they remain respected and on the throne" ("Reevaluation," 276).

18. Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims*, 218.

19. Whether those risks paid off is a matter of conjecture. Though Dunlap would leave the business of the theater penniless by 1805, he is still remembered by early Americanists as the father of American stage drama. He was the first North American-born manager of a professional theater and was the first playwright to depict George Washington on stage. While still of trivial interest, these "firsts" no longer even guarantee Dunlap space in major anthologies and textbooks. Dunlap has been most often replaced in anthologies by Royall Tyler, represented by his play *The Contrast* (1789). As the title suggests, Tyler's play focuses on the contrasting character of nationalized American citizens and their British and loyalist antagonists. Because Dunlap's work is less conducive to the pedagogic demand for cultural expressions of national difference, he is rarely read in the classroom despite the patriarchal firsts for which he is otherwise remembered. It should be noted that Jeffrey H. Richards reprints both Dunlap and Tyler in his Penguin edition, *Early American Drama*.

20. For a detailed account of Dunlap's turn from the arts to the theater and the effect of that turn on his relationship with his father, see Lucy Rinehart, "'Manly Exercises.'" My argument runs somewhat parallel to Rinehart's survey of Dunlap's memoirs, especially as regards the importance of Thomas Bartow. But where Rinehart attributes to Bartow Dunlap's decision to commit himself to the theater, I privilege Bartow's exceptionalism as the only nonslaveholding head of household in the Perth Amboy of Dunlap's youth.

21. Dunlap, *The Father*, iii.

22. The inscrutable new negro is here, in Lacanian terms, the Real. His otherness cannot be overcome through identification, narrativization, or instrumentalization. Here, we might recall Claude Lévi-Strauss's structuralist reading of tattoos in *Structural Anthropology, Volume 1*, 257. Where Lévi-Strauss asserted understanding, Dunlap is completely baffled. Juxtaposing the new slave's "scarcely intelligible language" with his tattoo, Dunlap is forced to acknowledge the limits of his acquaintance with his father's slaves.

23. Rinehart's important article offers an insightful reading of *André* that focuses on the American soldier Bland's dilemma in choosing which of three fathers to obey: André, himself, who had previously treated Bland with kindness when the latter was a British prisoner; Washington, the father of the nation, who replaces George III as patriarch; or Bland's own father, presently held by the British under the threat of execution should André be killed. My reading diverges from hers on the question of Bland's repudiation of Washington after the general executes André so as to adhere rigorously to policy. While Rinehart imagines Dunlap approving of Bland's criticism of Washington as the representative of intransigent law, I will argue that Bland's trauma is precisely the recognition that he must conform to the law, to understand its brutality, its finality, as necessary. This different perspective depends on reading Washington's "rigor" through the fantasy of resolving the problem of slavery. Only a Washington with absolute authority would be able to solve the problem of slavery without race warfare. Thus, rather than weakening Washington, Dunlap vastly expands his authority; if Bland is, like an analysand, haunted by "moral ambiguity and ontological uncertainty" (275), Washington is the subject presumed to know.

His "manly calmness / Which, assum'd or felt, so well becomes thy friend" indicates Washington's inaccessible interiority. Urged by a fellow soldier to place confidence in Washington's feigned or felt facade, Bland is pushed, not to view the general as the "obdurate monster" of Dunlap's Federalist critics, but rather to embrace him all the more. Questioning Washington's judgment, as Bland does, is but an exception that proves the rule of Washington's unwavering, unimpeachable authority.

24. This echoes Dunlap's preface to *AD*, quoted above.

25. Anderson, *Crucible of War,* 367. See also Rinehart, "'Manly Exercises,'" 286n4.

26. A small industry of scholarship has produced attempted interpretations of Watson and the Shark. These include: Roger Stein's, "Copley's Watson and the Shark and Aesthetics in the 1770s," Irma B. Jaffe's, "John Singleton Copley's Watson and the Shark," Ann Uhry Abrams's, "Politics, Prints, and John Singleton Copley's Watson and the Shark," Albert Boime's, "Blacks in Shark-Infested Waters," and Louis Masur's, "Reading Watson and the Shark." Masur reviews the former and breaks down the readings into three interpretive strategies: (1) the philosophical, (2) the political, and (3) the racial. Questions of context distinguish each from the other. The philosophical interpretations focus on Copley's repetition and adaptation of religious and philosophical tropes to bring these into dialogue with eighteenth-century debates about divinity and the power and mystery of the natural world. Political interpretations regard Copley's painting as an allegory of New World settlement and colonial/imperial relations. Racial interpretations focus on the figure of the black sailor to query the artist's and patron's attitudes concerning racial difference and human equality. As Masur points out, divining the intent of the artist rarely produces conclusive, uncontroversial results. Copley left no explanation of his motives, and so it is unsurprising that his critics would reach contradictory conclusions about the meaning of his work. Masur is rather untroubled by the range of interpretive options. Explaining changes in the role of criticism, he notes that critics are now "concerned less with the history of art than with the ways art illuminates history" (452). The same might be said of Dunlap on the occasion of his reproduction of Copley's painting. While Dunlap may represent but one "reader" among many, his decision to copy Copley's painting provides us with a unique opportunity to follow a contemporary reader's response to the image.

27. See Boime, "Blacks in Shark-Infested Waters," 30-33.

28. The inscription at the bottom of the elaborate gold frame of Copley's painting ends with the following summation of the lesson of Watson's life: "that a high sense of integrity and rectitude with a firm reliance on an over ruling providence united with activity and exertion are the sources of public and private virtue and the road to honours and respect."

29. The presence of the black sailor may have been incidental to Watson. Archivists, moreover, have discovered that the race of the sailor holding the rope was a late change to the painting. Under the black face is another of a white man (Masur, "Reading Watson and the Shark," 446). It is unclear who directed the revision of the cast of characters.

30. Boime, "Blacks in Shark-Infested Waters," np.

31. Rainsford, *Black Empire of Hayti*, .

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