

DEMOCRACY, REVOLUTION,
AND MONARCHISM IN EARLY
AMERICAN LITERATURE

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CHAPTER I

Monarchophobia: reading the mock executions of 1776

In metaphorical terms, the colonials killed their king in 1776.
(Edward Countryman, *The American Revolution*, 125)

The body is with the king, but the king is not with the body.
(William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* iv.ii 29–30)

Philip Freneau was the poet laureate of American anti-monarchism. As early as 1775 (in “A Political Litany”), he was calling for delivery from “a royal king Log, with his tooth full of brains,” (Freneau, *Poems*, III, 141), and in the aftermath of the war he put as much effort into reminding his readers of what had been left behind as into imagining what was to come. For Freneau, the United States were fundamentally post-monarchic:

Forsaking kings and regal state,
With all their pomp and fancied bliss,
The traveller owns, convinced though late,
No realm so free, so blest as this –
The east is half to slaves consigned,
Where kings and priests enchain the mind.
 (“On the Emigration to America,” in Freneau,
Poems, II, 280)¹

Twenty years later, in the wake of the French Revolution and with Thomas Paine’s *Rights of Man* by his side, Freneau remained passionate about the object of patriotic loathing:

With what contempt must every eye look down
On that base, childish bauble called a crown,
The gilded bait, that lures the crowd, to come,
Bow down their necks, and meet a slavish doom.
 (“To A Republican With Mr. Paine’s Rights of Man,”
in Freneau, *Poems*, III, 90)

Freneau’s political theatre always had a place for the prince’s crown. The rejected crown in “To A Republican With Mr. Paine’s Rights of Man”

remains capable of drawing the poet's eye – and that of the contemptuous populace – even in disgrace: every eye looks down on what once had captivated them. Monarchism had certainly not disappeared from the world in 1795, but one might have thought that in the United States, in 1795, there would be little need to reiterate the message of 1776. Instead, Freneau celebrates his republic with an insistent refrain: “Without a king, we till the smiling plain; / Without a king, we trace the unbounded sea” (91). In fact, “To A Republican” has more to say about kings than about republics. It cannot take its gaze away from the king even after nineteen years of independence. And the final line of the poem, hesitating between prophecy and prayer, suggests that this will be the eternal condition of the American republic:

So shall our nation, formed on Virtue's plan,
Remain the guardian of the Rights of Man,
A vast republic, famed through every clime,
Without a king, to see the end of time.

(91)

To the end of time, the United States will be “Without a king.” One could almost begin to suspect that this is a poem that mourns, that does not want to forget, that feels the weight of a loss. Philip Freneau does not want to let go of his absent king.²

The pre-revolutionary struggle between colonial governments and the British parliament involved parties who both claimed allegiance to the crown of England, who both signed themselves in the king's name and who both celebrated their British subjecthood. This intra-national political struggle became a revolution when – and only when – Americans turned against the crown. The American repudiation of George III, Hannah Arendt suggested in 1963, was also a “rejection on principle of monarchy and kingship in general” and, thus, it constituted what Arendt claims was, “perhaps the greatest American innovation in politics as such” (*On Revolution*, 129, 153). At the same time, however, it is important to acknowledge that as long as the revolutionaries defined themselves with respect to this monarchic other, they were participating in an event and a political structure that we would still have to call “colonial.” We know this, because we have witnessed many “revolutions” since 1776 that turned out to have been “uprisings” or “rebellions,” mere disturbances by a group of disaffected individuals within a single state. In order for the revolt to have been a revolution (in order for there to be a post-revolution) something had to happen to the absolutely antagonistic

relationship between the revolution and its monarchic other. There had to be, in other words, a redistribution – I will call it a translation – of the structures and characteristics of monarchism within the new political order.

“The great social antagonists of the American revolution,” writes Gordon Wood in his Pulitzer prize-winning study, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (1991), “were not poor vs. rich, workers vs. employers, or even democrats vs. aristocrats.” “They were,” he continues, “patriots vs. courtiers – categories appropriate to the monarchical world in which the colonists had been reared” (*Radicalism*, 175). In the years before 1776, American anti-monarchism was fueled by a growing frustration with the abuse of royal patronage by would-be courtiers in the colonies, an abuse which increased with the accession of George III in 1760. Wood writes: “Americans steeped in the radical whig and republican ideology of opposition to the court regarded these monarchical techniques of personal influence and patronage as ‘corruption,’ as attempts by great men and their power-hungry minions to promote their private interests at the expense of the public good and to destroy the colonists’ ‘balanced constitutions and their popular liberty’” (174–5). As early as 1750, Jonathan Mayhew could be heard proclaiming that “Nothing can well be imagined more directly contrary to common sense, than to suppose that *millions* of people should be subjected to the arbitrary, precarious pleasure of *one single man*” (“Discourse,” 406). And in his 1765 “Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law,” John Adams, never one to mince his words, praised the Puritan settlers of New England for seeing clearly that “popular powers must be placed as a guard, a control, a balance, to the powers of the monarch and the priest, in every government, or else it would soon become the man of sin, the whore of babylon, the mystery of iniquity, a great and detestable system of fraud, violence, and usurpation” (*Political Writings*, 9).³

Nevertheless, the political force of anti-monarchism in the revolutionary era is out of all proportion with American attitudes towards monarchy before 1776. “Despite overwhelming evidence of George III’s complicity in the policies that were driving them toward revolution,” writes Peter Shaw, “Americans of all classes on the patriot side sustained their loyalty to the king throughout the period from 1760 to 1776” (*American Patriots*, 14). He continues: “The king’s name was loudly upheld and his health drunk enthusiastically at the earliest Stamp Act demonstrations, the dedication of Liberty Trees, Stamp Act Repeal Ceremonies, and subsequently at virtually every anti-British demonstration up to 1776.

During this period his birthday continued to be celebrated with similar enthusiasm throughout the colonies” (14). The repeal of the Stamp Act in 1766 was celebrated by Americans as the work of the king, intervening in his proper sphere as protector of the rights of ordinary Englishmen, and in 1768 George was looked to as the colonists’ best hope of repealing the Townshend Acts (which George had, of course, approved). What is striking about American attitudes toward monarchism, then, is how suddenly the King of England became the focus of disaffection, and thus how quickly a rebellion turned into a revolution. The crown’s final disappointing response to one of the many petitions outlining the colonists’ grievances arrived in Philadelphia in January of 1776 (although it had been written in August of 1775). “By declaring the colonies in a state of rebellion [“open and avowed rebellion”] and committing the monarchy to vigorous military measures to force the colonies to yield to parliamentary authority in August 1775,” Jack Greene explains, “George III convinced most American leaders that he was now, if he had not been all along, at the head of the plot to deprive the colonies of their liberties” (Greene, *Colonies to Nation*, 3). Within a very short space of time, this sentiment became the driving force behind the movement for independence. “Government by kings,” wrote Thomas Paine in January of 1776, “was the most prosperous invention the Devil ever set on foot for the promotion of idolatry” (*Common Sense*, 72). And by July of the same year, a very particular sense of the monarch’s injustices serves to beef-up the body of the Declaration of Independence. “The history of the present king of Great Britain,” states the Declaration, “is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this let Facts be submitted to a candid world.” There then follows a lengthy list of specific grievances against George III culminating in the charge that “A Prince, whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.”

Thus, when American patriots took to the street to celebrate independence they produced one of the most visible manifestations of their revolution in the extravagantly humiliated and executed body of a mock king. On the occasion of the public readings of the Declaration of Independence, only a few years after the king had been celebrated in colonial toasts, effigies of George III were (for the first time) hanged and given mock funerals throughout the colonies. New Yorkers pulled down the gilt equestrian statue of George III that had been commissioned after the repeal of the Stamp Act, and sent it in pieces to Litchfield,

Connecticut, where it was molded into cartridges for the use of revolutionary soldiers.⁴ Abigail Adams, writing to her husband in Philadelphia, described the proceedings in Boston: "After dinner the King's arms were taken down from the State House and every vestige of him from every place in which it appeared and burnt in King Street. Thus ends royall authority in this State, and all the people shall say Amen" (*Book of Abigail and John*, 148). Newspaper accounts of a mock funeral for George III in Savannah, Georgia claimed that the interring of the king before the court house attracted "a greater number of people than ever appeared on any occasion before in this province" (quoted in Waldstreicher, *In the Midst*, 33–4). As David Waldstreicher puts it, "From being the great protector who legitimized the execration of other (British) enemies, George III became the soul of Britain itself, reconstituted as *the* enemy. His funeral became the national birthday" (*In the Midst*, 30).

The American turn against George III was swift and decisive, then, but it nevertheless fell short, as commentators have since been quick to point out, of actual regicide. The American revolutionaries "metaphorically" killed their king, we are reminded, and for this reason, perhaps, their revolution would always be lacking. One of the earliest and most scandalous expressions of American anti-monarchism was delivered by Patrick Henry in the form of a famously elliptical warning in the Virginia House of Burgesses in 1765: "Tarquin and Caesar each had his Brutus," said Henry, "– Charles the First his Cromwell and – George the Third . . . may profit by their example" (quoted in Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence*, 104). Henry was interrupted, so legend has it, by gasps and anticipatory outcries from House members who, like most of their fellow colonial subjects, were far from ready to turn against their distant sovereign. For the first, and not the last time, the King of England narrowly avoided execution in the colonies. Indeed, while the French Revolution had its Louis XVI and the Russian Revolution its Czar Nicholas II, the American Revolution never got to "have" its George III. As far as the revolution was concerned he was "not quite all there." And this is perhaps one of the reasons why the American Revolution has not entered the imagination of the West with anything like the dramatic force of the French. At the center of the American Revolution is an absence of precisely that figure with whom the revolution seemed to be doing away. And what could be less spectacular than a revolution by proxy? The American revolutionaries had to make do with effigies, so the story goes, and when compared to the spectacle of the guillotine or the Russian Royal Family lined up and shot in their palace, can anyone be forgiven

for thinking of the American Revolution as puppet theatre? Having determined that the king and their rejection of him was at the heart of this revolution, we might be tempted to pity the colonials their need to make do with an effigy, as if even in revolution they were mocked by the king's obliviousness. What can we make of this ambiguous revolutionary inheritance: the centrality of the monarch and the monarch's execution for the revolution, on the one hand, and the humbling absence of the flesh and blood body of the deposed monarch on the other? What does it mean to be the political subject responsible for and produced by this attack on a virtual monarchic body? What, in other words, are the implications of Edward Countryman's suggestion that "in metaphorical terms, the colonials killed their king in 1776"? Prompted by these questions, I want to suggest not only that the turn against George III was central to the American Revolution, but also, that the public execution of the king's effigy, far from being the sign of this revolution's impoverished relation to real political intervention, provides us with the most appropriate and most suggestive point of entry into the originality of the American break with England. And I will begin by asking this question: what if the mock body interred in Savannah and all over the colonies in July of 1776 was not just a stand-in for the king's body? What if it was the king's other body?⁵

THE KING'S TWO BODIES

The discourse of English monarchism since at least the seventeenth century had produced another way of thinking about what it was that colonial Americans were doing away with. As Ernst Kantorowicz explains it in his classic study, *The King's Two Bodies*, crucial changes began to take place in the European understanding of monarchical power in the wake of the Reformation. "The new territorial and quasi-national state," Kantorowicz writes, "self-sufficient according to its claims and independent of the Church and the Papacy, quarried the wealth of ecclesiastical notions . . . And finally proceeded to assert itself by placing its own temporariness on a level with the sempiternity of the militant church" (Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 207). The primary method for achieving this sempiternity was the concept, deployed increasingly by Elizabethan lawyers, of the relationship between the king *body natural* and the king *body politic*. The Catholic church's attempts to realize Christ's presence first in the eucharist then in the members of the church itself presented monarchism with a blueprint for establishing

a relationship between secular political authority and immortality.⁶ Kantorowicz quotes from crown lawyers who had been called upon in 1562 to decide on a matter concerning the granting of land by the child-king Edward VI. The lawyers agreed:

that by the Common Law no Act which the King does as King, shall be defeated by his Nonage. For the King has in him two Bodies, viz., a Body natural, and a Body politic. His Body natural (if it be considered in itself) is a Body mortal, subject to all Infirmitities that come by Nature or Accident, to the Imbecility of Infancy or old Age, and to the like Defects that happen to the natural Bodies of other People. But his Body politic is a Body that cannot be seen or handled, consisting of Policy and Government, and constituted for the Direction of the People, and the Management of the public weal, and the Body is utterly void of Infancy, and old Age, and other natural Defects and Imbecilities, which the Body natural is subject to, and for this Cause, what the King does in his Body politic, cannot be invalidated or frustrated by any Disability in his natural Body. (quoted in Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 7)⁷

The notion articulated here, whereby the *arcana imperii*, or “mysteries of the state” becomes detached from the *arcana ecclesiae* and is put to work in the service of a deified monarch, was part of what Michael McKeon calls a “flowering” of absolutist doctrines of royal sovereignty around the end of the Tudor period (*The Origins of the English Novel*, 178). But what the English Puritans (and later Americans like John Adams) realized was that this notion also had radically destabilizing potential. Without the concept of the king’s two bodies, Kantorowicz writes, “it would have been next to impossible for the [revolutionary Parliament of 1642] to . . . Summon, in the name and by the authority of Charles I, King body politic, the armies which were to fight the same Charles I, King body natural” (*The King's Two Bodies*, 21). As seventeenth-century historian Peter Heylyn put it, parliament sought to “destroy Charles Stuart, without hurting the king.”⁸ Parliamentarians argued – somewhat ingeniously – that their challenge to the king was *not* treason precisely in so far as their actions were directed at the body of Charles Stuart: “treason is not treason as it is [i.e. because it is] against [the king] as a man, but as a man that is a king, and as he hath relation to the kingdom, and stands as a person entrusted with the kingdom and discharging that trust” (*Remonstrance of Both Houses*, in Kenyon, ed., *The Stuart Constitution*, 243). Parliament declared that their actions had “*the stamp of Royal Authority, although His Majesty . . . do in his own Person oppose or interrupt the same*” (*Declaration of the Lords and Commons*, quoted in Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 21).⁹ The interesting thing about this argument is the extent to which it sets up a virtual king whose survival

authorizes activity that would otherwise be known as treason. This king, the one the parliamentarians did not kill in 1649, “stands as a person [entrusted etc.]” and is the equivalent of a “stamp of Royal Authority”; in other words, this king is a representational body, the body of the stamp, the mark, the substitute, the representation. We could, following Slavoj Žižek, call this virtual king a “sublime object” (“that other ‘indestructible and immutable’ body,” Žižek writes, “which persists beyond the corruption of the body physical . . . this immaterial corporeality of the ‘body within the body’ gives us a precise definition of the sublime object,” *Sublime Object*, 18).¹⁰ It is this virtual body of the king that the parliamentarians of the English Civil War explicitly claim to have left alone, thereby preserving their actions from the charge of treason. Under the heat of its disarticulation by the parliamentarians, therefore, the concept of the king’s two bodies reveals a peculiar correlation between the authority-preserving power of immortality and the very threat to monarchism contained in the idea of a political authority carried entirely by representational structures of legitimacy. Immortality, that is to say, opened a rupture in the ideology of absolutism that it was meant to preserve.

Writing as *Novanglus* in 1774 and 1775, John Adams followed a similar line of attack to that of his English Puritan predecessors by first distinguishing between the king’s two bodies and then asserting that while the king body natural might hold land in America the king body politic could not. Thus “no homage, fealty, or other services can ever be rendered to the body politic, the political capacity, which is not corporated but only a frame in the mind, an idea. No lands here, or in England, are held of the crown, meaning by it the political capacity; they are all held of the royal person, the natural person of the king” (*Political Writings*, 78–9). Here again the concept of the king’s two bodies is taken at its word and used to legitimate a challenge to English rule. But in Adams’ formulation we can see the signs of a crucial American difference. For if the parliamentarians in the 1640s directed their explicit antipathy towards the “body natural” of Charles Stuart, Adams here, speaking for the colonies, is engaged in a quarrel with “the body politic . . . which is not corporated but only a frame in the mind, an idea.” The American Revolution, coming within a year of the *Novanglus* letters, will follow Adams’ lead and celebrate the Declaration of Independence with an outbreak of public mock-executions: in killing the effigies of George III, these revolutionaries could be said to have been killing the “frame in the mind,” the king body politic that has no natural body. The American Revolution was a revolution – was “treason” (following parliamentary logic) – precisely

in so far as it failed to direct its revolutionary public violence against the body natural of George III. The American Revolution realized itself in a turn against (even as it was also an important acknowledgement of) the political power of the English monarch's constitutive non-presence, his virtual body. From this perspective it is possible to think of the American Revolution, its original and radical intervention, as the revolution that the Cromwellians could only dream about: the revolution against the figural authority of the King of England, the revolution that would ignore the body of the prince precisely in order to challenge the whole structure of monarchic power.¹¹ It was precisely in killing the non-fleshly figure of monarchy that the colonists rejected monarchism altogether: the American republic begins with an execution of metaphor.¹² American regicide was a direct attack on monarchism's appropriation of divine authority; it rejected the divine body of monarchism's hereditary line. Those effigies, oddly enough, were meant to remind everyone that humanity is a mere effigy of the divine that perpetually tries to forget or conceal its lack of divinity. The execution of effigies was a perfectly appropriate event to establish a Puritan as well as an anti-monarchical revolution. The revolutionary executions were thus also founding acts of a political philosophy invested in the institution of bodiless (or disembodied) political authority, and the absence of the body from this scene of execution/founding is thus entirely appropriate.

But if there is a sense in which the absence of the king's real body was crucial to these revolutionary celebrations, we also have to think about what it was, precisely, that the revolutionaries were burning. For in burning effigies they were also attacking the mere stuff of the body, the mortal materiality that men share with objects. How will the United States come to think of this symbolic substitution? What is the particular significance of the effigy's role in the American founding? I want to approach this question by looking at how one American writer thought of the revolution's relationship to monarchism sixty years after independence.

THE MONARCHIC HIEROGLYPHIC

Half-way through "Self-Reliance" (1841), Ralph Waldo Emerson pauses to produce this remarkable paragraph:

The world has been instructed by its kings, who have so magnetized the eyes of nations. It has been taught by this colossal symbol the mutual reverence that is due from man to man. The joyful loyalty with which men have everywhere

suffered the king, the noble, or the great proprietor to walk among them by a law of his own, make his own scale of men and things, and reverse theirs, pay for benefits not with money but with honor, and represent the law in his person, was the hieroglyphic by which they obscurely signified their consciousness of their own right and comeliness, the right of every man. ("Self-Reliance," 38)

Emerson here offers an original reading of monarchism, one that begins by appearing to rehabilitate the symbolic value of the prince. Emerson is willing to look to monarchism not just to provide a target for patriotic contempt, but for instruction. As the passage continues, however, it becomes clear that it is the relationship between the prince and his subjects (what we might call the political subjectivity of monarchism), that Emerson wants to characterize. It is with their "joyful loyalty," Emerson suggests, that the subjects of monarchism "obscurely signified their consciousness of their own right . . . the right of every man." The monarchic subject is one whose sense of his own and others' political rights takes a detour through the body of the prince. The movement from monarchism to republicanism is thus also a movement of clarification within a semi-otic economy. The political subjectivity of the acquiescent monarchist was a "hieroglyphic," writes Emerson; democratic subjectivity was always, he implies, the opaque signified of this archaic signifier. Given this understanding, we are encouraged to read the break with monarchism as, simultaneously, a break with the very order of the hieroglyph. The age of subservience to noblemen has passed along with the age of the hieroglyph, and Emerson's use of the word "hieroglyphic" here cannot but remind us of the etymological relationship between democracy and demotics. Democratic subjectivity, Emerson's analogy suggests, belongs to the order of the demotic signifier. Democracy replaces the hieroglyph of monarchic subjectivity with a demotic citizenship.

Emerson's explicit claim, then, is that in a democracy the object of democratic reverence, the citizen himself, will coincide with the subject who reveres. There will be no more "obscure" signification of men's rights because those who "joyfully" suffer the sovereign people to "walk among them by a law of [their] own" are the self-same members of the sovereign people. There will no longer be a gap, a deferral, a detour, separating the political subject from the political sovereign. The movement towards this kind of political order, Emerson suggests, corresponds to a movement beyond the order of the hieroglyphic. But is this model, the model of a one-to-one relationship between the citizen as subject and the citizen as sovereign, the model of the demotic signifier? In fact,

it might be more accurate to consider Emerson's model here as corresponding to that of the "pictograph" with its suggestion of a one-to-one relationship between the concept signified and the simple signifier. The democratic subject, according to Emerson, is a walking pictograph of his own significance, a pictograph "within which the being of the subject distinguishes itself neither from its act nor from its attributes" (Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 279).¹³ If we draw Emerson's analogy out, therefore, we are led to consider the idea that the relationship he imagines between the subject of democracy and the object of democratic reverence, which is to say the self-doubling relationship of the citizen as source of and subject to the law's authority, is not simply post-hieroglyphical: it is outside of all language as disruption, detour, opacity, or deferral.

Emerson's invocation of a radical break with the order of the hieroglyph thus intimates a radical break with the order of the signifier in general.¹⁴ Monarchism, in this scheme of things, becomes the historical name for the interruption of the political sign, the failure of the political signifier to transcend its own material noise. Emerson's version of the American Revolution participates in a powerful desire to record the historical development of a perfected, which is to say transparent, writing and a perfected political subjectivity. This movement finds in monarchism all the excessive material weight of the insistent signifier. Monarchism becomes the historical name for all that comes between mankind and the grand signifieds of divinity and truth. The prince, consumed by what Freneau called his "pomp and fancied bliss" ("On the Emigration," *Poems*, II, 280) is the embodiment of a luxury that, as John Adams wrote, "effaces from human Nature the Image of the Divinity" (*Book of Abigail and John*, 217). A revolution against this monarchism derides all the signs of the prince's participation in the logic of the hieroglyph, including all his excessive ornamentation, his visual signifiers of wealth and power, his luxury, his excesses of money, time, and even pleasure. The monarch comes to stand for the hieroglyph, the signifier in all its corrupt, earthly, gaudy materiality (hence Freneau's "gilded bait" or "childish bauble called a crown" ["To A Republican"]). In this position the monarch can serve as a defining other to a whole range of disparate revolutionary ideologies: the common-sense populism of early Thomas Paine and the democratic-republicans; the enlightened federalism of James Madison, the Puritanism of John Adams and Timothy Dwight, the scientific rationalism of Thomas Jefferson, or the agricultural essentialism of a St. John de Crèvecoeur.

To read Emerson's passage, then, is to see how the ideology of the revolution's break with monarchism refuses to think through the post-revolutionary inhabitation of structures of power and authority that democracy shares with monarchism. And thus, this transcendental figuration of the democratic revolution as a break with the order of the hieroglyph and the opacity of the signifier finds a literal enactment in the public events of July 1776 themselves. For it was not, to repeat, the flesh and blood King George who was executed by the revolutionary Americans, but George in effigy. And how better to represent monarchism's relationship to the earthbound materiality of the signifier than in the form of dead stuff—the rags and straw of an effigy? It was not just that the colonials killed their king “in metaphorical terms”; it was also the king's privileged relationship to the order of the metaphor, the profane substitution, that the revolutionaries were attempting to rid themselves of even as they danced around their straw man.¹⁵ Americans, whatever else they might be said to have been doing, were also engaged in a public repudiation of the materiality of the signifier when they burned George III's dummy representations. The scandal of monarchism, by 1776, was its shameless embodiment of the material detour that mankind had to take through representation in order to claim or recognize its own rights, its own “comeliness.” The revolutionaries were also, we ought to remember, proto-transcendentalists.

AMERICAN MONARCHISM

Thus, following the lead of Emerson and Kantorowicz, we can begin to see how complex the revolution's regicide really was. On the one hand, the monarch had come to figure the corruption of materiality (with his gaudy visibility, his hereditary superiority, his interruption of mankind's self-realization), and hence the American break with this order was indicated by the public destruction of mocked matter; on the other hand, the American revolution differentiated itself from the English Civil War of the previous century by rejecting not just the mortal, vulnerable, fleshly body of one corrupt king, but by rejecting the trans-individual order of monarchism in general, by rejecting the king's “invisible” and “immortal” body. In this case, the absence of the king's real body from the scenes of American regicide was crucial: the mock bodies represented, that is to say, the king's other body, the invisible, immortal “body politic.” With their mock executions the revolutionaries were engaged in a critical act of what we would now call historical materialism. The other body, the

body that monarchic absolutism had claimed for its kings, was, said the American Revolution, a material, political, earthbound body in disguise. The artifice of the effigy here coincides with the radically political aspect of the revolutionary intervention: it is precisely *as* a representation that the effigy works to politicize monarchic charisma. Artifice and politicization are inseparable in this founding moment. (This is a structure I will return to below.) The revolution's effigies demythologized the immortal body of monarchism even as their reproducibility helped produce the transcendent political body of the United States. Thus, as they watched their mock kings burn all over the ex-colonies, patriots were witnessing the destruction of one transcendental discourse (the discourse of the monarch's immortal body) and the hegemonic intervention of another (the discourse of republicanism's transcendence of monarchism's debased materialism). Moreover, we cannot forget that in order to accomplish this transfer of power, the revolution also had to betray itself: in making mock kings and treating them like real people (taunting them, torturing them, burning them, burying them) the revolution engaged in precisely that idolatrous over-valuation of the merely material that would seem to have characterized monarchism. The King of England was never more alive in America, we might provocatively suggest, than when he was paraded, humiliated, abused, and interred all over the country in 1776. The new nation brought itself into being by giving itself a very uncanny monarch: a monarch conjured out of mere matter, a monarch produced – and reproduced – by street theatre, a monarch to be buried on American soil, a monarch, in other words, who was given the capacity for resurrection in the very moment of his repudiation: a ghost-monarch for a new nation. “We commit his political existence to the ground,” went the words of one mock funeral oration for the king, “corruption to corruption – tyranny to the grave – and oppression to eternal infamy, in sure and certain hope that he will never obtain a resurrection, to rule again over the United States of America” (quoted in Hazelton, *The Declaration of Independence*). 1776 was a year of exorcisms in the colonies; which is to say, a year of conjurings: the mock funeral was, to quote Jacques Derrida talking about other times and places, “a matter of a performative that seeks to reassure but first of all to reassure itself by assuring itself, for nothing is less sure, that what one would like to see dead is indeed dead” (*Specters of Marx*, 48).¹⁶ In eighteenth-century English culture, Robert Blair St. George points out, the official use of effigies “had long been recognized as a way to exalt and commemorate individuals who had died in the service of their country” (*Conversing by Signs*, 251). But

their inverted use to mock or parody was also an established practice. St. George writes, “[as] memorials of living people, effigies were commonly believed to have sympathetic magical powers. They were thus related to the cloth poppets used by witches to afflict their victims; their potential was very ‘real’” (251).¹⁷

In one of the moments of its founding, then, the United States demonstrates a very complex and ambivalent relationship towards monarchy and towards structures of political representation. If, at this same moment, Americans were celebrating the end of mankind’s self-alienation in the structures of a monarchical representation, *and* founding themselves via a crucial deployment of representation (the mock king), we have to consider the possibility that what announces itself from one perspective as the revolution against monarchic materialism simultaneously presents itself as a new economy of the relationship between the subject of political power and the material signifier. Viewed from this perspective, the revolution could also be said to participate in a defense of the order of the hieroglyph in the face of its corruption at the hands of an individual – the monarch – who insists that he and he alone has transcended the order of the signifier and that he has combined the contingent materiality of the hieroglyph and the eternal ideality of the signified truth in his monarchic body. In the revolutionary resistance to the singular, hereditary association of reverential right and freedom with one man, we can detect a desire to restore – by democratizing – the mediation of the hieroglyph. Emerson precedes his remarks on the monarch with a reference to the transfer of “lustre” from kings to “gentlemen.” These “gentlemen,” Emerson’s lines intimate, would become their own hieroglyphics, heirs to a lustre that proceeds from the capacity to embody a universal right, a lustre that is coterminous with the enigmatic duplicity of a subject who is both outside the law (he moves by a “law of his own”), and at the center of the law (the law would be “represented” “in his person.”). In other words, Emerson’s lines help us to articulate one of democracy’s founding uncertainties: is it the body of the monarch that American democracy rejects (the particular bio-historical body of the royal bloodline that carried the weight – all the excess weight – of a political hieroglyphic) or the charisma – the black magic – of hieroglyphic representation itself? Is it the “King’s real, or his stamped face,” to borrow from John Donne, that democracy seeks to forget? The sacrifice of the mock monarch in 1776 substitutes the violence of a literal regicide for an almost heretically figural or materialist gesture which, by treating rags and sticks like a man, announces the beginning of a political order

that will find many more uses for material representations. The mock executions remind us from the start that the revolution did not succeed in transcending the order of the signifier any more than it succeeded in escaping, for once and for all, the spell of monarchism. The democratic citizen's political subjectivity (his institutionalized self-reliance) is hieroglyphically structured, just as was his monarchic subjectivity, which is to say that Emerson's remarks, rather than suggesting a rupture, might be used to suggest a redistribution – a shifting – within the obscurely signifying economy of political subjectivity. What, we would then want to ask, came to take the place (either in a scapegoated or a venerated capacity) of the monarch in the post-revolutionary United States? How did democratic citizens signify their consciousness of their “right and comeliness”? How did post-monarchic political culture figure the relationship between empirical “men” and the subject of “right”? What new detours attempted to erase the distance that had been collapsed into the “lustre” of the monarch? The revolutionary mock kings (the objects that spelled for the king) were the first of many stand-ins, inaugurating a whole politics of the stand-in (the representative) even as they attacked the debased nature of any stand-in, of any material that comes between man and the divine.

MONARCHOPHOBIA'S DISPLACEMENTS

In the eleventh of Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur's *Letters From an American Farmer*, we are introduced to John Bertram (a fictional version of the botanist, William Bartram) on his homestead in Pennsylvania. He is another of the book's examples of what it means to be a successful American. Here is how the narrator describes dinner time on the farm:

We entered into a large hall, where there was a long table full of victuals; at the lowest part sat his Negroes; his hired men were next, then the family and myself; and at the head, the venerable father and his wife presided. Each reclined his head and said his prayers, divested of the tedious cant of some and of the ostentatious style of others. (*Letters*, 188–9)

While the narrator goes on to stress the community's differences from the Old World (“I never knew how to use ceremonies,” says Bertram, “they are insufficient proofs of sincerity”; and again, “We treat others as we treat ourselves,” 189), it is clear that what is celebrated is a divinely ordained structure of hierarchical authority whose patriarchal legitimacy is only emphasized by the distinct lack of pomp or extravagance.

For a moment, however, this American ideal (no “tedious cant,” no “ostentatious style”) is threatened from the outside: towards the end of the meal in the great hall, the narrator thinks he hears the sound of “a distant concert of instruments” (190). “However simple and pastoral your fare was, Mr. Bertram,” he remarks, “this is the dessert of a prince; pray what is this I hear?” (190–1). But Bertram reassures him: “It is of a piece with the rest of thy treatment,” he explains, the “music” is merely “the effect of the wind through the strings of an Eolian harp” (191).

This scene presents us with a version of American monarchophobia, an almost paranoid sensitivity to what is figured as monarchic luxury (“the dessert of a prince”). The example suggests, however, that anti-monarchism and egalitarianism are not the same thing. Those who admire the ordered hierarchy of the independent American farmer are troubled not by (or at least not only by) the spread of democratic politics but by the possibility that their society could become infected with monarchic excess, the luxuries and trappings of wealth and power. Crèvecoeur’s narrator fears all those performances of wealth and authority that figure the excessive power of the king, or, in this instance, the power of the independent farmer. A significant gap opens up between the monarch’s (or the independent farmer’s) authority (legitimate, pre-eminent, and divinely sanctioned) and the trappings of power, those objects, conventions, and practices that convey or represent the monarch’s (or the patriarch’s) authority.

The Eolian harp on Bertram’s farm is a device for producing music without performance, but the momentary unease it produces in Crèvecoeur’s *Letters* alerts us to the half-hidden idea that this harp is in fact only the conveyor of a performance at one remove. The harp has been crafted and judiciously positioned in order to give the American listeners the illusion of a natural (or divine – Eolian from *Aiolos*, Greek god of the wind) performance. Everyone on the farm, it would appear, is comforted by the idea that there is a non-human origin for the music, that it comes from nature or God. American sovereignty, the harp announces, is blowing in the wind. A human origin for the music would disrupt this fantasy and force everyone to consider the historical production of the patriarch’s wealth and power. (The visitor to the farm is finally reassured that “It appears to be entirely free from those ornaments and political additions which each country and each government hath fashioned after its own manners,” 199.) As art, in other words (as opposed to nature), the music of the harp would also constitute a political signifier. As in the case of the mock kings discussed above, artifice reveals itself in

this instance to be inseparable from a politicizing gesture, a gesture that always threatens to question power's attempts to ground itself outside of history. The Eolian harp's music is the ghostly hum of a monarchism that the independent American farmer cannot seem to leave behind.¹⁸

While the fantasy of post-monarchic authority it helps to sustain seems relatively benign, the harp's placement on the border between the cultivation of the homestead and the wilds of the woods reminds us that it is also located at the site of (and no doubt also standing in for) those Americans who first occupied the land Bertram has come to own.¹⁹ And indeed, any device or character that can be figured as inhabiting this border space – the border between white civilization and nature – is in danger of being appropriated for the management of revolutionary monarchophobia. The fantasy registered by Bertram's Eolian harp – that nature “herself” provides the American with his monarchic trappings – is also at work in the aggressive revolutionary appropriation of the Native American as the new nation's monarchic progenitor.²⁰

John Leacock's famous song “The First of May, to St. Tammany” (from his patriotic wartime play “The Fall of British Tyranny” [1776]) is an extended toast to a Native American chief who, as Carla Mulford suggests, serves to identify white revolutionaries with an original American “in order to propagandize republicanism as a peculiarly American right” (in Lauter, ed., *Heath Anthology*, 842).²¹ But what is most striking about the song is its unabashed celebration of Tammany's monarchic status. “A king, tho' no tyrant was he”; Leacock writes, “His throne was the crotch of the tree.” He rules, of course, “without statutes or book” and he “reason'd most justly from nature,” but he is a king nevertheless. Beneath the tree and without books he is clearly an emblem – and a monarchic emblem – for the revolutionary “people out of doors.” As such, Tammany gives a body (albeit a cynically appropriated body) to what is implicit in much revolutionary rhetoric: the idea that the people make up the monarchic body of republicanism. King Tammany is a particular kind of monarch, of course, one who lacks any of the trappings of monarchic power and wealth. All the symbols of his status are resolutely “natural” (the crotch of a tree, etc.). His is a kingly demeanour, a kingly authority, and a kingly wisdom, but there is nothing to suggest that this sovereignty has anything to do with the work of man. He does not even consult a book – his very laws emanate from the forest. He does not even need to speak. And, perhaps most important of all, he is insistently dead. Tammany, that is to say, belongs to a tradition of invoking the silent, regal, and deceased Native American Indian to suggest a kind of natural American

nobility. This invocation reaches its apex (or nadir?) in Cooper's 1826 novel, *The Last of the Mohicans*.²² In Cooper, as in the poetry of Philip Freneau, monarchy, far from being dismissed, is in fact refigured, via the Native American, as natural, silent, and spectral – spectral because always presented as long since departed or, as in the case of Cooper's Mohicans, because marked in advance by imminent and unavoidable extinction.²³ If King George was only “metaphorically” executed, to use Edward Countryman's phrase, in the course of an actual rejection of his monarchy, Native Americans were actually executed while their metaphorical monarchism was repeatedly – one might say desperately – deployed. The constitutive role played by monarchism as the other of revolutionary republicanism is remarked in a displaced and therefore distanced fashion by the tradition of invoking a native American nobility. The full effect of this disavowed invocation *requires* the death of the Native American.²⁴ The Indian (spelling here for the English monarch) provides the deceased body out of which a spectral American monarchism can be summoned and put to work for republicanism. The phantasmatic monarchism of these displaced and destroyed natives allowed revolutionary Americans to claim a lost monarchism while simultaneously figuring that monarchism as the violent and threatening other of revolutionary ideology. And while the idea of an ancient American nobility required the passing away of the Indian, the threat of his savage nobility justified it. Monarchophobia is another name for the ideology of Indian-hating.²⁵ It is through the Indian that the revolution attempts to import the charisma of monarchism's immortality and thus its powerful appearance of having transcended politics and history. The Native American's noble legitimization of the Euro-American's revolution shares something, that is to say, with Charles I (body politic)'s legitimization of the execution of Charles I (body natural).²⁶ The native's nobility is always the product of a spectral existence – it is a post mortem charisma. It was precisely this feature of monarchism, this form of its power, that revolutionary ideology remained under the spell of even as it sought to exorcise it from the new order. The demonization of Native Americans was not just a political reprisal against figures such as Joseph Brant who were accused of massacring innocent patriots, but part of a logic that saw the noble savage as always also a figure for the savage noble. The revolution wanted the same transcendental legitimacy that monarchism had so perniciously claimed for itself. But the monarch had attempted to bind this transcendence to his own person; the revolution had to reject this heresy even as it appropriated the power that it offered.

The princely Native American and Bertram's Eolian harp signify some of the anxiety generated by America's post-revolutionary relationship to monarchism. One way of trying to account for the treatment of the Native American in revolutionary and post-revolutionary America is to read this treatment in the context of republicanism's disavowal of its relationship to monarchism. Seeing democracy as a form of monarchy, a translation of monarchy rather than as its binary other, would also mean renouncing the revolution's desperate claim to a natural, trans-historical, trans-political legitimacy. The demythologization of the Native American and the deconstruction of the opposition between democracy and monarchism, I am suggesting, could proceed in tandem. Initiating such a project, we could do worse than return, once again, to those Independence Day street celebrations. The troubling relationship between republican monarchophobia and republican racism is given a compelling prefiguration in this description of an Independence Day effigy:

At Huntington, Long Island [patriots] took down the old liberty pole (topped with a flag dedicated to liberty and George III) and used the materials to fashion an effigy. This mock king sported a wooden broadsword, a blackened face "like Dunmore's [slave] Virginia regiment," and feathers, "like Carleton and Johnson's savages." Fully identified with the black and Indian allies his generals had enlisted to fight the Americans, wrapped in the Union Jack, he was hanged, exploded, and burned. (Waldstreicher, *In the Midst*, 31)

This figure, the English monarch as Native American as African, is hardly one that we have inherited as a revolutionary icon.²⁷ Historians like David Waldstreicher can remind us of the specific events in pre-revolutionary history that would lead to the construction of such a figure, but we are left with an excess of association. We cannot contemplate this revolutionary object without asking after the ways in which the European monarch, the Native American, and the African could be brought together in the early American political imagination.²⁸ We are hardly predisposed to think of the most privileged of political figures (the European monarch) and the most marginalized subjects of eighteenth-century America as inhabiting any of the same political positions, and yet in the early United States there are ways in which they do.²⁹ Monarchophobia, the name I am giving to the complex structure of ambivalent responses to monarchism that can be found in the dominant discourse of revolutionary America, also has a racist legacy. Challenging revolutionary monarchophobia, in other words, would also

mean re-materializing and re-historicizing the white male body of revolutionary ideology and thereby challenging the revolution's hierarchization of this body over all those bodies it deemed marked on their surface by historicity and contingency, starting with the king's.³⁰ Monarchophobia, that is to say, is also one of the discourses of white mythology.³¹

THE MONARCHIC VOICE

The prince, in Emerson's formulation, mediates the relationship between individual men and "their own right and comeliness, the right of every man." In its most effective moment, this mediation, Emerson was willing to admit, could be experienced "joyfully": that is what it would mean to be a good subject of monarchism. But the mediation can also be registered as an interruption or an impediment: the letter that kills the spirit. Post-monarchical political culture plays out these same dynamics in response to various attempts to mediate the relationship between individual citizens and the general rights they claim. Towards the end of *Common Sense*, Paine imagines what is – even for the routinely histrionic Paine – a quite extravagant piece of democratic theatre. Looking into the future, Paine imagines a ritual crowning of the new nation's charter of laws. This is how he puts it:

Let a day be solemnly set apart for proclaiming the charter; let it be brought forth placed on the divine law, the word of God; let a crown be placed thereon, by which the world may know [that so far as we approve of monarchy], that in America, THE LAW IS KING. For as in absolute governments the king is law, so in free countries the law *ought* to be king; and there ought to be no other. (*Common Sense*, 98)

This would be strange enough (a crown on top of a charter on top of a bible), but then as if to respond to an unspoken word of caution, Paine adds: "lest any ill use should afterwards arise, let the crown at the conclusion of the ceremony be demolished, and scattered among the people whose right it is" (98). It is hard to imagine this ritual actually taking place in post-revolutionary America, but the fantasy of the charter (the Constitution) as a monarchic substitute is not simply Paine's eccentricity. One might compare Paine's crown here with the crown conjured up forty-five years later in a fourth of July address given by the then Secretary of State John Quincy Adams in 1831. "The Declaration of Independence," proclaimed Adams, "was the crown with which the people of United America, rising in gigantic stature as one man, encircled their brows, and