

1 PHILIP GOULD, *Writing the Rebellion: Loyalists and the Literature of Politics in British America* (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 2013), 217 pages.

5 “Of the reasons which influenced, of the hopes and fears which agitated, and of the miseries and records which are left of the Loyalists—or, as they were called in the politics of the time, the ‘Tories’—of the American Revolution, but little is known. The most intelligent, the best informed among us, confess the deficiency of their knowledge.”<sup>1</sup>

10 To say that nothing has changed since Whig politician and historian Lorenzo Sabine (1803-1877) wrote those lines would be stretching the point. From the early 1820s when he moved to Maine, Sabine devoted himself to the history of the *other side* of the American Revolution. His publications were extremely controversial, for prior to that time it was an undisputed and common understanding that there was only one story to be told about the American Revolution, and that the good and the bad characters in this story were to be easily identified as the Patriots and the Loyalists. More recent studies on the Loyalists, like those of Mary Beth Norton or Maya Jasanoff,<sup>2</sup> have definitely influenced our understanding of this marginalized group and may even have raised awareness of the importance of studying Loyalists within the context of the American Revolution. However, there is no doubt that the Loyalists continue to be relegated to the shadows when it comes to historical research of this period.

20 In *Writing the Rebellion*, Philip Gould, the Nicholas Brown Professor of Oratory and Belles Lettres at Brown University, tries to shed some light upon this shadowy topic from the perspective of literary history. He begins his brief and very readable study by posing the question why has “Revolutionary literary studies largely ignored the writings that opposed the American rebellion” (6)—espe-

40 <sup>1</sup> Lorenzo Sabine, *Biographical Sketches of Loyalists of the American Revolution with an Historical Essay* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1864), vol. 1, iii.

44 <sup>2</sup> Mary Beth Norton, *The British-Americans: The Loyalist Exiles in England, 1774-1789* (London: Constable and Co., 1974); Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty’s Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 2011).

cially since those writings have not been the work of a small group of misfits, but rather represent the thoughts of a significant minority of political dissenters, who are estimated to have comprised 20 to 30 percent of the British Americans in the Thirteen Colonies. Gould’s answer is as simple as it is striking: “The winning side stands in as a synecdoche for the whole” (6). According to Gould, for generations, American literary history contributed to the development of a national narrative of “truly American” values and culture. At the core of this narrative is the year 1776, which constitutes the starting point and the manifestation of the principles of independence as the principles of the United States. Those who fought for and eventually gained independence were—of course—the Patriots. The dissenting and defeated Loyalists suddenly became “un-American” and were pushed to the margins, as were their writings. In his study, Gould challenges this very notion and is determined to return the Loyalists and their literary works to the discourse.

The book starts from the premise that both Loyalists and Patriots embraced English culture but did so in different ways. For the Loyalists, the Revolution was a process, which “actually complicated and often problematized their identification with English culture”—a counterintuitive argument that is contrary to our image “of the Loyalists as the true American Anglophiles” (8). In Gould’s eyes, the Loyalists’ dilemma was not, like Beth Norton and Jasanoff state, being both British *and* American, but feeling increasingly dislocated and alienated during the Revolutionary crisis. On the one hand, they suffered humiliation and intimidation from their patriotic counterparts. They were confronted with a “regime of terror” that disenfranchised them politically, seized their property, banned them from practicing certain professions and ultimately “robbed them of their humanity” (11) through cruel methods such as tarring and feathering. On the other hand, they felt neglected by the British authorities who often made no distinction between the complaining but still loyal British subjects and those in open rebellion, treating them with disrespect. Gould makes his argument of the Loyalists’ dislocation and alienation based on the actual Loyalists’ political writings, which “reveal the dread of no longer being British *or* American” (168).

*Writing the Rebellion* focusses on the nuances of literary style and aesthetics under-

stood as the means of Loyalists and Patriots to “leverage political authority.” Thus the question of style in written disputes was not just one of literary taste but of political positioning and controversy. According to Gould, “the sometimes tendentious arguments about Parliament’s sovereignty, the common law, and actual and virtual representation segued almost seamlessly into those concerning literary style as a touchstone to political credibility,” (32). Also, Gould’s “focus on aesthetics assumes that the subject is always already politicized; it functions as the means by which British Americans were reimagining their cultural relations to one another and to Britain itself” (25). The choice of certain forms of style became political dispute itself: To attack one’s opponent’s style and writing ability was to attack him politically.

Gould organizes his book in five chapters, each of which analyze a few sample Loyalist and Patriot documents of a certain genre with regard to the dispute over style. Through the chronological order of his study, he clarifies his argument of the Loyalists’ increasing sense of alienation and dislocation during the progress of the Revolutionary crisis.

The first chapter deals with the Stamp Act Crisis. At the center of attention are the *Letter from a Gentleman at Halifax* written by Loyalist Martin Howard and its patriotic replies, *The Rights of Colonies Examined* by Stephen Hopkins and James Otis’ *Vindication of the American Colonies from the Aspersions of the Halifax Gentleman* and *Brief Remarks on the Defence of the Halifax Libel*. With regard to the dispute over style, Gould sheds light on the issue of “sublime” and “bombast.”

In the second chapter, Gould takes a closer look at political ridicule. There, the contention between Anglican minister Samuel Seabury and Alexander Hamilton, which was fought via pamphlets, is examined. In 1774/75 a series of pamphlets signed with Seabury’s pen name “West Chester Farmer” and attacking Hamilton was published. Hamilton himself reacted by writing his own pamphlets, including *The Farmer Refuted*. In their writings, both Seabury and Hamilton argued over the question of the proper form of ridicule as *true* or *false wit*.

The third chapter explores the topic of satire, targeting the Continental Congress in Philadelphia, which Gould calls “a literature of outrage” (84). He picks a Loyalist burlesque (*The Association*) and Major John Andre’s

*The Cow-Chase*, a satire of the American military based on the ancient English *Ballad of Chevy Chase*, and connects both to the revival of interest in old ballads that had taken place in Great Britain since the 1750s.

Gould builds the last sections around one of the most famous and potent writings of the Revolutionary period, Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense*. In his radical pamphlet, Paine not only called for independence of the Thirteen Colonies but also designed an anti-monarchical concept of a society based on natural rights and self-government. Of course Loyalists grappled with Paine and his theories. Writings like *Plain Truth* (James Chalmers) or *The True Interest of America Impartially Stated in Certain Strictures on a Pamphlet Intituled Common Sense* (Charles Inglis) criticized Paine’s *Common Sense* and stated that its vision of society would ultimately result in chaos and disorder. Furthermore, they attacked Paine’s character and his status as an author. Inglis wrote, “[he] unites the violence and the rage of a republican with all the enthusiasm and folly of a fanatic: I find no Common Sense in this pamphlet but much uncommon phrenzy” (122). After analyzing the Loyalists’ reactions to *Common Sense*, Gould proceeds to discuss their concept of “New Englishness” and how they identified Paine’s pamphlet as being part of it. In the eyes of the Loyalists, New England and its Puritans had never been truly English. They drew a direct line from Thomas Paine as a Puritan writer to Oliver Cromwell and the English Civil War of the 1640s, connecting the Revolution with the violence and bloodshed that almost destroyed England.

In addition to comparing Loyalist and Patriot writings in his five chapters, Gould shows the development of the Loyalists’ feeling of alienation in the course of the Revolution. In the beginning of the crisis, Loyalists were engaged in a campaign to convince all reasonable Americans to avoid a rebellion against Great Britain, but as the Revolution progressed, their writings turned more and more inwards. As the initially unimaginable—independence from Great Britain—suddenly became a reality, the Loyalists stood to lose out to their Patriotic counterparts. They reacted by “embrac[ing] their position as political dissenters and outsiders” (170), giving up their claim to political leverage. This development is also very apparent in the change of the Loyalists’ preferred writing styles. While political analysis was the style of choice at the time of the

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Stamp Act Crisis, when it came to Independence, satire became the dominating genre of Loyalist writings. Distancing themselves from what was happening in Philadelphia and elsewhere, and observing it with cynicism, showed the Loyalists' growing alienation.

Gould draws a diverse picture of the Loyalists' writings as "Literature of Politics" during the American Revolution. Surely, he wrote *Writing the Rebellion* as a literary scholar, and the reader would profit from being acquainted with theories Gould refers to, especially when it comes to the British literary discourse of the eighteenth century. But his study also has a lot to offer to historians, a group to which this reviewer belongs. It is to Gould's merit that he challenges popular stereotypes. He questions the traditional depiction of Loyalists as an elite and self-interested group. He presents them instead as political dissenters who became increasingly uncomfortable with the developments in the colonies, beginning

in the 1760s—a group silenced and threatened by Committees of Safety, deprived of the individual liberties that the Revolutionaries pretended to fight for; a group that felt dislocated and alienated, being neither British nor American, instead of being both at the same time; and last but not least, a group that was not "politically aloof and out of touch with the realities of British American life" but extremely political, realistic, and skeptical, citing "American political inexperience as well as the long-standing divisions among the various colonies as insurmountable obstacle to U.S. nationhood" (172).

To return to Lorenzo Sabine's quote the reviewer started with, Gould helps us to learn more about "the reasons which influenced, [...] the hopes and fears which agitated, and [...] the miseries and records which are left of the Loyalists", which is worthy of praise.

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