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Julie Flavell, *When London Was Capital of America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010). Pp. xii, 306. \$32.50.

Those who study the eighteenth-century British American colonies are well aware of Julie Flavell's main argument in *When London Was Capital of America*: well-to-do colonial Americans looked to London as the standard-bearer of culture, taste, and education. We know that wealthy colonials traveled there, sent their sons there to be educated and professionally trained, bought goods from there for their homes, followed metropolitan fashions, and imported or reprinted books and periodicals from the London press. They even tried in many ways to reproduce the finer qualities and practices of metropolitan life in the colonies themselves. One might say, then, that London was "part" of British America, even the centerpiece of a colonial imaginary.

This is not really shocking news to scholars in the field. In fact, *When London Was Capital of America* does not attempt to make an intervention in transatlantic studies, for example, or more particularly, Anglo-American cultural relations. It instead targets an audience of educated readers interested in a series of lively, detailed narratives about eighteenth-century Americans who resided in London. "How America's colonial forebears responded to their capital," the preface states, "must be told through their many stories, stories that vividly recreate an all but forgotten world" (5). I found myself less irritated with the book's clichéd observations ("In London, New Englanders did look rustic" [128]), and kitschy allusions (Jane Austen and Charles Dickens characters abound) when I simply began to digest it as a lively, well-written account of personal and familial biographies. Most of them concern the family of Henry Laurens, the wealthy South Carolina planter who traveled to London with his two sons and his slave Robert (Scipio). Like so many colonial Americans, Laurens wanted an English education for his boys, but things unfolded unexpectedly—one son rebelled against his legal training, took to natural history, and befriended the quirky reformer Thomas Day of whom the elder Laurens disapproved. Robert rebelled in his own way and was arrested for burglary (with bigamy charges lurking as well for his white paramour). "For Henry Laurens," Flavell concludes, "the old, comfortable plantation dynamic fell apart in England" (59).

Subsequent chapters follow well-known figures like Benjamin and William Franklin as well as the more obscure (yet captivating) con man Stephen Sayre. The latter's story alone reads like an eighteenth-century novel: it involves rakish seduction, infidelity, wealthy heiresses, obtuse and severe patriarchs, illegitimate children, and failed land schemes in the American West. The book's method of reading imperial history through personal and family dramas culminates with the story of the falling out between the two Franklins, who took different sides during the Revolutionary crisis. I found Flavell's psychological speculations about Benjamin Franklin's state of mind during his "failure" as colonial agent in London a bit frustrating in light of the thinness of the research into other biographies and sources. The "tragedy" of the Alexander Wedderburn incident, in which Franklin

was chastised for playing a role in making public damning letters by Thomas Hutchinson and other Loyalists, is probably overplayed.

The book offers standard fare about eighteenth-century life in London: entertainments at Vauxhall Gardens, the city's notorious prostitutes, the contrasting lives of lords and servants, to name a few. Yet one of its strengths is to map the city's neighborhoods and districts, particularly with an eye for those areas frequented by colonial Americans. There are abundant prints and maps to vivify the presentation (though some, given the dress of Londoners in them, obviously come from the nineteenth century). Flavell's lively narrative surveys the fashionable West End, the business world and legal center near the Temple Bar, Fleet Street's teeming life, as well as the Royal Exchange, Mansion House, and Bank of England on Threadneedle Street. She also intelligently muses on the changes that imported goods and natural specimens, even visiting spectacles like the "Cherokee Chiefs" written and sung about on the streets of London, had on London itself.

More academic readers might be engaged by some of the (implicitly) intriguing questions about transatlantic identities and identifications raised by Flavell's book. What, for example, do we make of the "anglophilia" of colonials like Henry Laurens who in very short order became American nationals once the war and political independence occurred? (Laurens became President of the American Congress in 1777.) How did Londoners imagine regions and sections in the colonies—how, in other words, do regional identities develop in imperial (rather than strictly national) histories? What, for example, do we make of the fact that in many social circles colonial Americans were more acceptable (or less offensive?) than their Scottish counterparts? What do the many stories of colonial parvenus and con men, who are so adept at performing metropolitan manners, finally say about the category of "gentility" in Georgian London? *When London Was Capital of America* does not explore such questions, but it does offer some vivid accounts of personal stories that could serve as hard evidence for those who might later address them.