THE YANKEE COMIC CHARACTER: ITS ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT IN AMERICAN LITERATURE THROUGH 1830

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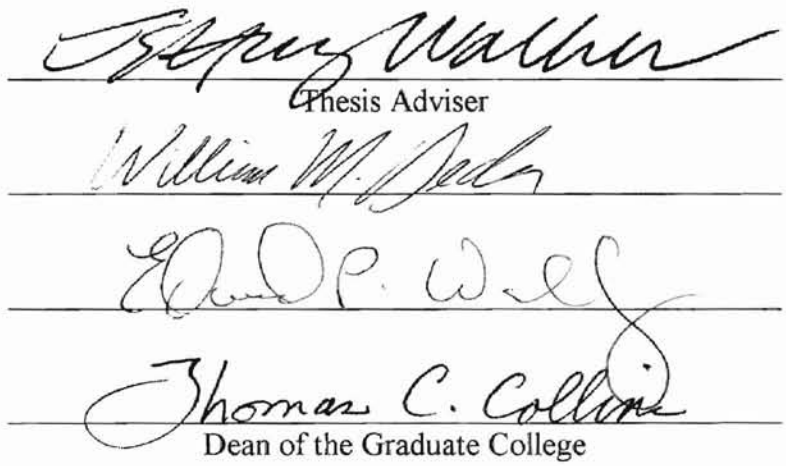

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PREFACE

This study attempts to address why the Yankee comic character became the butt of early American humor and how the character developed into an enduring comic figure in American literature. The Yankee comic character has developed into one of the most enduring comic characters in American Literature, appearing many times in Mark Twain's fiction and in various works of comedy in the twentieth century. Many scholars have addressed the development of the Yankee in American literature after the 1830s, but little attention is paid to the origins of this character type and the development of the Yankee character into the mature, well-developed type of the 1830s. The Yankee character was at once both a simple, naive rustic with a unique dialect and a shrewd, practical manipulator full of ambition and greed. As he changes and develops, the Yankee comic character embodies the complexities and incongruities of a democratic society struggling to fuse the ideal with the real, the language of culture with the language of the ordinary man.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to my thesis adviser, Dr. Jeffrey Walker, for his unlimited help, patience and encouragement of my research and writing efforts. I am grateful to the other committee members, Drs. William Decker and Edward Walkiewicz, who contributed insightful comments and helpful suggestions. Thanks also to my family for their support and encouragement; and, finally, I express my heartfelt gratitude to my husband Mark for his love and unfailing support throughout the entire project.

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CHAPTER I

AN OVERVIEW OF THE YANKEE COMIC CHARACTER

Early American literature has not been traditionally studied for its humor. In fact, the subject has been virtually ignored or summarily dismissed by most critics. W. Howland Kenney points to one scholar who asserts that "the early settlers were a serious people struggling to establish themselves in a wilderness and they had little time for polite letters or for a literature of sheer entertainment" (5). A more recent critic, Jesse Bier in *The Rise and Fall of American Humor (1968)*, asserts emphatically "The fact is that our initial excursions into humor were largely weak and immature . . . indecisive and confused, highly derivative and labored, severely topical, and otherwise inexpert" (32). Even Constance Rourke, writer of one of the most comprehensive studies of American humor, dismisses colonial comic works almost entirely, warning the reader against the "beguiling pedantry" of digging up pre-Jacksonian texts and making greater claims for them than they deserve (Micklus 139). This decided bias against looking for any glimmer of humor in early American literature has stunted the growth of interest in the development of a unique American literary genre. Walter Blair, in his study, *Native American Humor (1937)*, exemplifies this prejudice when he includes various groups of early humorists (local colorists, frontier humorists) and individual writers as purely a background to show the development of the genre, not considering humor as truly American until it comes to fruition in the celebrated American humorist, Mark Twain. Samuel Clemens is usually characterized as belonging to several of the "schools" of humor which Blair defines: the

local colorists, the southwestern humorists, and the literary comedians. Kolb claims for Twain the "production of a succession of major works, from 'Old Times on the Mississippi' to *Connecticut Yankee*, that weave together an extraordinary blend of compelling narrative, humorous observation, and perceptive understanding of the human condition" (56). In the character of Hank Morgan, in *The Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, Twain incorporates the major social and political conflicts from which the Yankee comic character is formed: city/country, aristocracy/peasant, rich/poor, educated/ignorant. Twain truly exhibits qualities that no other writer of American humor had thus far embodied; however, to assert, as Blair seems to, that American literary humor did not fully exist before Twain brought together vivid character types and appropriate form, ignores much good literature that must be accounted for in some other way. People laughed and enjoyed the character types produced by various writers, including Knight, Franklin, Irving, and Stowe, proving that American literary humor did indeed exist (if, arguably, in an inferior form) before Twain's appearance.

However, modern critics do not bear all the blame for the exclusion from serious study of humor in early American literature. At least two other elements influenced the characterization of this literature as unworthy part of scholarly review. Early Americans suffered from a cultural and literary inferiority complex that encouraged the view that the potential to create anything authentically American was virtually non-existent. In 1805, Hugh Henry Brackenridge stated that "the American has, in fact, yet no character; neither the clown nor the gentleman; so that I could not take one from our country which I would much rather have done as the scene lay there" (Blair 14). This perceived lack of

foundational myth and tradition co-existed with the idea that humor was a non-legitimate form of literature. Smith suggests that "the usual assumption in this country was that no merger was possible between serious literature and humor. Literature was a part of high culture; and humor, certainly the backwoods variety, was considered irremediably low" (59). Harold H. Kolb, Jr., in an essay on Twain, reiterates the same assertion:

> Humorous writing in nineteenth-century America, like sex, was privately enjoyed by many people but publicly defended by few. An appetite for laughter seemed to represent man's lower instincts. Art and literature, in the view of many critics, are "ever pointing upward, and the influence of true art upon man is to make him look upward, too, to the vast where his Ideal sits, pinnicled in the lofty ether dim." (52)

Both men and women continued to write comedy, parody, wit, and satire, knowing they would most likely never receive fame nor fortune for it. As late as 1865, this distinction between high forms of literature (serious) and low forms of literature (comic) existed. Even Mark Twain, America's greatest humorist, suffered from this prejudice, as demonstrated in a letter that he wrote to his brother:

> I have had a "call" to literature of a low order -- i.e. humorous. It is nothing to be proud of, but it is my strongest suit, & if I were to listen to that maxim of stern <u>duty</u> which says that to do right you <u>must</u> multiply the one or the two or the three talents which the Almighty entrusted to your keeping, I would long ago have ceased to meddle with things for which I

was by nature unfitted & turned my attention to seriously scribbling to excite the laughter of God's creatures. Poor pitiful business. (Kolb 6)

Early American humorists struggled themselves to give serious recognition to their scribblings, thus giving credence to the same attitude among modern critics. With the exception of a handful of recent scholars, little serious study has been given to humorous literature written before the Revolution and even the decades after the war; it is no wonder that colonial Americans are shrouded in a humorless haze of piety and prudity. Certainly, "by inheritance and tradition they were ambitious, by necessary training diligent, and through experience self-confident" (Fox 220). But to say with Dickens in the 1840s that Americans "certainly are not a humorous people, and their temperament always impressed me as being of a dull and gloomy character" (Blair & Hill 20) is to make a mistake of gigantic proportions. Colonial Americans enjoyed comic anecdotes and humorous aphorisms, as evidenced by the popularity of the almanac that hung by every chimney side. By the time Franklin published *Poor Richard's Almanac*, one in every hundred Americans owned an almanac. Interlaced with proverbs and entertaining anecdotes, the almanac embodied an old traditional taste of earthy humor, a tradition on which Franklin capitalized and improved.

Other types of American humor, aided by political and social tensions, were developing in addition to the earthy humor of the popular almanac. The hardships of colonial life initiated several of the original character types found in the humor of the mid-nineteenth century. W. Howland Kenney, who has compiled much evidence of colonial humor in his study called *Laughter in the Wilderness (1976)*, suggests that "humor is one

part of a complex process of human perception and we can expect to encounter it in all societies even if only some of them can afford to produce specialists" (6-7). Kenney continues to argue for the existence of colonial humorists when he contends that humor is a "very human trait which often requires great courage and strength. The comic insists on telling the whole truth when the pretenders to majesty, power and control are imposing their various systems and definitions of life. One cannot quite grasp American history as a continuing reality until one poses the question 'did they never laugh?' " (5). Colonial conditions required some reprieve from the drudgery and hardships of the struggle just to stay alive. A grim reminder of the harshness of the New England coast is the account related by Master George Percy in Jamestown in 1607:

> There were never Englishmen left in a foreign country in such misery . . . We watched every three nights, lying on the bare cold ground, what weather soever came; [and] warded all the next day: which brought our men to be most feeble wretches. Our food was but a small can of barley sodden in water, to five men a day. Our drink, cold water taken out of the filth; which was the destruction of many . . . three or four in a night; in the morning, their bodies being trailed out of their cabins like dogs to be buried. (Blair & Hill 4)

This was the stark reality of colonial life--death was no respecter of persons. Amid the grim circumstances of life in the New World, more and more immigrants flocked to America, and among the vast multitudes of different people, there emerged a tradition of humor.

For most humorists, the ultimate objective is to say something more about the human condition than merely that it is amusing. Seelye suggests that one of the root causes of humor is fear, and the colonists were deluged with reasons to be fearful. The various types of cultures and nationalities with which immigrants were faced upon their arrival in the New World, and the struggles to forge a unified nation from the fragmented elements that typified the colonies emerge probable sources of fear, and, thus, as two of the primary sources of humor in early American literature.

With such a variety of people with divergent social and political backgrounds, colonial America became a fertile testing ground to test ideologies against reality. In *Comic Imagination in American Literature (1973)*, Louis D. Rubin, Jr., discusses the contrast between the ideal and the real. On one hand there are the ideals of freedom, equality, self-government--the conviction that ordinary people possess the discernment to vote wisely and understand and cherish the highest human values by embodying them in their political and social institutions. In contrast, one has to consider that the citizen is indeed an ordinary person who acts in ordinary ways, motivated by individual ideals and values (5). Rubin calls this clash "the Great American joke" and summarizes it in these terms:

> Out of the incongruity between the mundane circumstances and heroic ideal, material fact and spiritual hunger, democratic, middle-class society and desire for cultural definition, theory of equality and fact of social and economic inequality, the Declaration of Independence and the Mann Act, the Gettysburg Address and the Gross National Product, the

> Battle Hymn of the Republic and the Union Trust Company, the Horatio Alger ideal and the New York Social Register -- between what men would be and must be, as acted out in American experience, has come much pathos, no small amount of tragedy, and also a great deal of humor. Both the pathos and the humor have been present from the start, and the writers have been busy pointing them out. This, then, has been what has been called "the great American joke," which comedy has explored and imaged. (9)

This clash between the ideal and the ordinary became the catalyst for distinctive American character types. When the behavior of groups or individuals clashed too strongly with the rest of society, humor was often used as the sandpaper to smooth edges and round off the sharp corners (Blair and McDavid 159).

Satire became one of the primary tools used by colonial writers as they observed the flora and fauna as well as the people. Because it allowed the writer to ridicule the people and customs that contradicted a way of life, satire was a comfortable pose to assume, convincing him that all would become right in his own world: "The satirist used exaggeration and the juxtaposition of ideals and realities to stimulate reform. The writer of satire could thus present himself as a bastion of social and cultural purity and his humor as an instrument for social ordering" (Kenney 19). Most of the consciously humorous writing in early American literature is satirical. Satire allows the writer to elevate himself while ridiculing others, and when a reader laughs at satire, he also elevates himself, excluding himself from the writer's scorn. Micklus asserts that "throughout the colonies,

there was a sort of unspoken argument that the butt of the joke always had to be 'out there' among the British, the Indians, or, perhaps, some country bumpkin, but, before Franklin's time, rarely was it the author himself or even his persona" (140).

Colonial Americans did laugh, and often their laughter was characterized by a satiric chuckle at anyone but themselves. Aided by the diversity of the colonial population, early humorists focused on comical types of people who seemed to exist in every community or lived in a specific part of the country. One of the earliest character types to develop in American literature is the Yankee comic character. Influenced by a variety of social and political factors, the comic Yankee character has proved to be one of our most enduring character types. Complex and at times contradictory, the Yankee develops from a simple country bumpkin in the earliest colonial literature into a national symbol of pride during the Revolutionary War. Maturing through the years in almanacs, newspapers, journals and dramas, the Yankee grows in complexity, influenced by religious views, political parties, economic growth , and regional conflict. The first vestiges of the Yankee alluded to in such early works as *The Simple Cobler of Aggawam* mature into a fleshed-out character in Irving's mythical "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow." Because the Yankee comic character developed from political and social tensions present throughout two and a half centuries of American history and because he possesses such an enduring charm, the Yankee comic character maintains a vital position in American literary humor.

The origins of the Yankee comic character cannot truly be traced to a specific colonial writer or even a particular time period in American history. Scholars Blair and Hill explain how folklorists Axel Olrik and Max Luthi cite worldwide uses of "a simple

conflict ending in 'the defeat of the great by the small, the mighty by the apparently powerless' (e. g. hunters who conquer mighty beasts; and trickster, peddlers, slaves and confidence men who triumph)" (29). American writers incorporate into the American Yankee this element of powerlessness and apparent weakness. Just living in the American colonies during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries defined a person as subordinated, subject to the mighty nation of Great Britain. However, other elements influenced the colonial writers who would eventually record the first characteristics of the comic Yankee.

Great Britain, the mother country for most colonists in the seventeenth century, wielded her dominating will over the colonies and influenced the way in which colonial writers saw themselves. British literary influences in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries such as Pope, Swift, Fielding and Sterne served the colonists with early samples of exemplary literature. Characters such as Fielding's Squire Western in *Tom Jones* (1749) and Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773) were famous examples of country squires who became the butt of the joke. Colonial writers such as Franklin borrowed from writers such as Chaucer, Pope, Swift, Shakespeare, and Fielding, so the American Yankee character remains indebted to the Mother Country for her influence on early colonial writers.

An equal but, in some respects, opposing influence was the anti-intellectual movement that swept the colonies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. "Again and again, Americans would find hilarious the fact that a man's education is likely to make him think and act like a damned fool. 'The learned fool,' says Poor Richard, 'writes his nonsense in better language than the unlearned; but still 'tis nonsense.' Again: 'Tim was

so learned, that he could name a horse in nine languages. So ignorant, that he bought a cow to ride on'" (Blair and Hill 72). This anti-intellectual attitude flourished because the learned, educated immigrant coming to the wild, untamed frontier of the New World experienced aspects of rugged frontier life that all of the book-learning in the world would not address. Simple common sense was much more valuable than Latin or Greek. Besides learning how to survive, the colonists also experienced religious life away from state-controlled mandates and the tradition of centuries of learned religious scholars and ministers who taught in the prominent seminaries of the past several centuries. "From 1640 on, though, when faith spread to lower-class 'Diggers' and 'Levelers' such 'dirty-people of no name' bad-mouthed education . . . A pastor who 'would rather hear a plain country man speak in church, that came from the plough, than the best orthodox minister' welcomed to his pulpit the unschooled tinker John Bunyan . . . Quakers compared learned ministers to shopkeepers who clanged church bells to lure customers, and then conned them into buying worthless goods" (Blair and Hill 69). Sound thinking and practical experience were valued above book-learning, and the more farmers and frontiersmen succeeded, the more popular this anti-intellectual movement became.

Thus, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, two major currents could be felt in the American colonies: the self-conscious desire to please and imitate the literary circles and wits of the mother country, Great Britain, and a movement against formal education and book-learning that instead valued common sense and practical knowledge gained from experience. Both currents affected the development of the Yankee comic character in its initial stages of transformation from an Old World stock character like the

English country squire into a lasting, original American character. They influenced the colonial writer to move beyond the familiar conception formed by the rest of the world (with contempt and derision) and to actually find elements of the Yankee comic character in himself. This allowed him to laugh not only at the Yankee as an object of satire, but also with the Yankee as part of the national character of America.

One of the most recognized references to the Yankee comic character today is found in the popular ditty sung by the American troops during the American Revolutionary War.

> Father and I went down to camp
>
> Along with Captain Good'ng
>
> And there we saw the men and boys
>
> As thick as hasty Puddin.

The verse is followed by the chorus:

> Yankee Doodle, keep it up,
>
> Yankee Doodle, Dandy,
>
> Mind the music and the step,
>
> And with the girls be handy.
>
> (Green 2-3)

Besides it was a Revolutionary War song, little else about the origins of the song or the origins of the term "Yankee" can be agreed upon by historians or even etymologists. Numerous theories about the origins of the term Yankee exist, revealing interesting aspects of the legend of the Yankee character in American history.

Most scholars agree that the word "Yankee" is an Anglicized corruption of "Jan Kees" -- or "John Cheese" -- a pejorative term which the original Dutch settlers of New Amsterdam applied to colonists living in Connecticut.[1] W. Storrs Lee, an historian who wrote *The Yankees of Connecticut (1957)*, proposes a different variation on the theory that the Dutch referred to all the men of Connecticut as "Johnnies" or "Jankins." As Lee explains, "But the English 'J' was difficult for Germanic tongues, and after a while the 'Jankin' degenerated into 'Yankee,' . . ." (3).[2] One critic even writes in jest that "the term Yankey is but a corruption of Yorkshire, being simply the Indian pronunciation" (Carson 77). Many of the original Pilgrims came from Yorkshire, but Constance Rourke clarifies that "the [racial] strain cannot be proven as determining the Yankee character. . . Racial strains in the Yankee were well mixed" (9).

However the term Yankee originated, the name was not popularized until the Connecticut farm boys (or possibly Albany townspeople)[3] bounded into town wearing farm clothes and their only distinguishing article of clothing--a turkey feather stuck in their hats by loving wives and mothers (Lee 167). Such ridiculous plumage was all the provocation the British soldiers needed. Soon, the term "Yankee" was revived as a label of ridicule for the upstart colonists who demanded liberty from Great Britain. "Dandies! Popinjays! Stab my vitals, they're macoronies," cried Britishers in derision at the farm boys and frontiersmen from the rugged country of the New World (Lee 167).

A British surgeon is credited with singing the "Yankee Doodle" jingle to the familiar folk tune of "Lucy Locket Lost Her Pocket." Charles O. F. Thompson in *A History of the Declaration of Independence*, claims the song was adapted from "Nankee

Doodle" sung by Oliver Cromwell's troops in the English civil wars of the 1660s. Despite its mysterious history, the song caught on in American society. Originally meant to lampoon the absurd incompetence of the American militia as it organized to fight the well-trained and disciplined British army, "Yankee Doodle" eventually symbolized American pride as the colonists turned the tables on the British by laughing at themselves and embracing the song as their first battle hymn and national anthem (Rubin 77-78). This Revolutionary War chorus was playing in the background as the British troops surrendered at Yorktown and was played again during the Civil War when the Blue marched to it. The term "Yankee" served as a nickname for American soldiers during World Wars I and II, transforming the original disparagement into a heroic term for all Americans.

The famed song characterized a young yokel from the country on a visit to one of the troops stationed in various cities around the colonies. This image of the Yankee as a comic New England rustic bumpkin out of his element in the city--a figure both ignorant and wise--has faded into history. Gradually, the term Yankee came to signify the Northerners during the American Civil War, then expanded to include all Americans. Yet, for a brief time in American history during the mid-nineteenth century, the Yankee figure, in all his complexity, held center stage in American humorous literature.

The Yankee comic character developed into a complex character type that encompassed the simple New England rustic but expanded to include more universal characteristics that have endured through the literature of the early twentieth century,

including works by such writers as Faulkner, James, and Fitzgerald. Walter Blair and Hamlin Hill discuss the complexities of this national character:

> As complex a character as American humor has invented, the Yankee could be shrewd and cunning-- "a wily, cozening trickster, poised under a mask of ingenious and seeming good will," as Richard Dorson has called him. When he wandered into the backwoods, with his pack of notions to peddle, he was, if Sut Lovingood of the Tennessee Knobs is to be believed, the man who invented "new fangled doctrines fur the aid of the devil. In fact [New England] am his garden, whar he can grow what won't sprout any whar else.' But when he went into town, as Dorson also notes, comic picturings showed him to be 'a fool, an ignorant countryman, baffled by urban ways, befuddled by modern machinery, legitimate game for dupes and hoaxes . . . Inevitable the bewildered rustic found himself cozened by city sharpers." (159-60)

This duality of personality which developed as the Yankee was characterized by an increasing number of writers in pre-Civil War literature proves to be a fascinating subject to trace throughout the literature of early America. Two subtle influences shaped the colonial writers' perceptions of their fellow countrymen in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: self-consciousness and an inferiority complex spawned by the British perceptions of social and literary conditions in the colonies, and a growing dissatisfaction with education and book-learning with an increased reliance on common sense and practical experience. Combined with the dominant religion of the period (Puritanism), and

the political power of aristocratic landowners, the colonists' inferiority complex and anti-intellectual bent propelled the development of the Yankee comic character toward the simple New England rustic. Most of the colonial writers were well-educated, well-read and members of the aristocratic, landed segment of society, viewing the common man with contempt and disdain. "In short, the conservative faction seized upon the 'common man' as a rich vein of humor" (Rubin 79). This Yankee comic character was the equivalent of the rustic bumpkins who were first bewildered then terrified as they entered the limits of a modern city (Seelye "Root" 417). The aristocratic city-dweller who was writing during colonial days had plenty of opportunity to observe and satirize the country bumpkin who had traveled in for supplies. Numerous writers, such as William Byrd, II, and Ebenezer Cooke ventured out to the frontier, making observations about the uninhibited, semi-civilized crudeness of the frontier folks. As Blair and Hill observe, "Most humorists, whatever their political, geographical, and cultural allegiances, saw the ludicrous possibilities of, say, having an ignorant Yankee of the servant class invade an upper-crust drawingroom, . . . or of having a prissy stranger try to maintain his dignity while undressing before the members of a rural family whose single bedroom he has been forced to use for the night" (161). By the end of the eighteenth century, this simple New England rustic, who had been nicknamed "Brother Jonathan" at some vague point in his development, was poised on the brink of becoming a national phenomenon. With the election of President Jackson in the late 1820s, Brother Jonathan gained a popularity on stage and in newspaper, magazines and almanacs that would continue until the eve of the Civil War. He would serve as the pattern for a lasting American institution--a man

dressed in "a white bell-crowned hat, a coat with long tails that was usually blue, eccentric red and white trousers, and long boot straps. Brother Jonathan had in fact turned into Uncle Sam" (Rourke 17).

If the Yankee was characterized on one side as a simple rustic, naive and awkward, on the flip side he was a shrewd, practical, thrifty, industrious peddler. Henry David Thoreau wrote that "the Yankee, though undisciplined, had this advantage at least, that he is especially a man who, everywhere and under all circumstances, is fully resolved to better his condition" (Green 2). As the colonist felt more comfortable with his surroundings and began to value increasingly his common sense and practical knowledge, the image of the Yankee as naive and vulnerable to the street-wise city slicker began to change. Little by little, the Yankee began to develop a practical, shrewd element to his character, one vividly described by Constance Rourke:

> Toward evening of a midsummer day at the latter end of the eighteenth century a traveler was seen descending a steep red road into a fertile Carolina valley. He carried a staff and walked with a wide, fast, sprawling gait, his tall shadow cutting across the lengthening shadows of the trees. His head was crouched, his back long, a heavy pack lay across his shoulders.
>
> A close view of his figure brought consternation to the men and women lounging at the tavern or near the sheds that clustered around the planter's gate. "I'll be shot if it ain't a Yankee!" cried one. The yard was suddenly vacant. Doors banged and windows were shut. The peddler

> moved relentlessly nearer, reached a doorway, and laid his pack on the half hatch. With scarcely a halt the peddler made his way into their houses, and silver leapt into his pockets. When his pack was unrolled, calicoes, glittering knives, razors, scissors, clocks, cotton caps, shoes, and notions made a holiday at a fair . . . In the end he invaded every house. Every one bought. The Negroes came up from their cabins to watch his driving pantomime and hear his slow, high talk. Staying the night at a tavern, he traded the landlord out of bed and breakfast and left with most of the money in the settlement. (3-4)

In a few short paragraphs, Rourke graphically and eloquently captures the image of the Yankee peddler as a ferociously ambitious and greedy character who preyed on the vulnerability of settlers and frontiersmen who relied on the peddler's supplies. By the mid-1800s, his prowess was legendary.

This image of the greedy Yankee lives on in some respects, as we Americans are viewed at times by other nationalities as a materialistic people with a gift for ingenuity; mobile and impatient for action; and uninspired in our diplomacy (Lee xi). These Yankees had a wonderful strength of character about them, but they did nothing to improve their image as wily traders disguised under the mask of good will and practicality, waiting to take advantage of an unsuspecting customer. The habit of bragging fit right in with the boastful pride of the Yankee peddler, as the following anecdote demonstrates:

> One Englishman who knew the Yankee habit of bragging is reported in *The American Joe Miller* (1865) to have seen some huge watermelons at a fruit

> seller's stand in New York. Walking up to look at them, he said disappointedly, "What! don't you raise bigger apples than these in America?" The woman looked at him for a moment and then retorted, "Apples! anybody might know you was an Englishman. Thems huckleberries." Vulgar dialect, naturalistic motifs, and exaggeration show up even in the northern market place. (Sloane 2)

Of course, what better way to sell one's goods and notions than to boast and brag about them? In fact, Americans thought so much of the art of exaggeration that they developed a uniquely American genre--the tall tale. Some of the same elements characterize both the Yankee comic character and the "teller of tales," but they remain two distinct categories in American literature.

One must also remember that not every New Englander was either a New England rustic or a wily New England peddler out to trick the unwary. The development of the Yankee comic character can be traced from the colonial through the ante-bellum period.

Diverse elements contributed to the growth of the Yankee comic character as he traveled in time through the pen of early American writers. The Yankee character was at once both a simple, naive rustic with a unique dialect such as Jonathan in *The Contrast*, and a shrewd, practical manipulator full of ambition and greed such as Ichabod Crane in *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. This dichotomy of two apparent contradictions demonstrates many of the tensions present throughout two centuries of American history. As he changes and develops, the Yankee character incorporates conflict between traditional and practical religion, city and country, aristocrat and common man, and

education and common sense practicality. Emerging from the shadow of British influence and Old World folklore, a uniquely American character type embodied the complexities and incongruities of a democratic society struggling to fuse the ideal with the real, the language of culture with the common language of the ordinary man. The Yankee comic character allowed readers and writers alike to understand each other and begin to laugh at themselves.

CHAPTER II

COLONIAL WRITERS AND THE BEGINNINGS OF THE YANKEE COMIC CHARACTER IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

As the Yankee comic character matured through the writing of generations of American authors, authors began to incorporate more specific characteristics which allowed a wider audience to enjoy the more narrowly focused satire of the writer. In early colonial days, this was not the case. Instead, educated, aristocratic writers targeted a large portion of the colonists with their ridicule and disdain. Political and religious philosophies influenced this trend by creating a hierarchy of landowners and the Puritan elect. Outsiders, or non-elect and the poor, became the target for aristocratic disdain and religious piety. From these vestiges of prejudice and seclusion the Yankee comic character was born.

In 1639, Parson Thomas Hooker outlined in a notable sermon the type of government Connecticut should have. Shortly thereafter, Roger Ludlow wrote the first constitutional document in the New World. "Fundamental Order," as the document was called, expressed the ideas that the residents of the towns of Windsor, Hartford, and Weathersford would become one "Publicke State and Commonwelth and doe . . . enter into Combination and Confederation togather to mayntayne and preserve the liberty and purity of the gospell of our lord Jesus." In a similar document, the Plantation Covenant, New Haven Puritans pledged to "advance the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ," enjoy the freedoms of the gospel, and "conceive it our bounden duty, without delay, to enter

into present consolation among ourselves . . . That as in nation, and Religion, so in other respects, we be, and continue, one . . ." (Lee 23). With these early documents to tie church and state together, the two institutions became virtually inseparable. From the beginning, the church was the center of colonial life. Connecticut law made church attendance compulsory, and since the "established" church was Congregational, Puritan ministers virtually had complete control over both church and state. Desiring to establish a "community set on a hill," Puritans were determined to suppress heresy--meaning anything that differed from their views. "According to the fundamental tenets of Congregationalism, every individual, regardless of his station in life, was 'called to work,' and that call was a kind of investiture to join in the home-front struggle against sin, physical suffering, moral depravity, . . . " (Lee 41). Covenant Theology by its very nature applied pressure on Puritans to conform to the community because it required a "working out," a continual outward demonstration that one was part of the elect, called as a child of God. The constant pressure to prove by one's degree of faith and reaction to suffering that he or she was chosen constructed a dynamic of community interest in each individual. "Thus, Puritanism appears, from the social and economic point of view, to have been a philosophy of social stratification, placing the command in the hands of the properly qualified and demanding implicit obedience from the uneducated; from the religious point of view it was the dogged assertion of the unity of intellect and spirit in the face of a rising tide of democratic sentiment suspicious of the intellect and intoxicated with the spirit" (Miller 16). Their dedication to the unified purpose of the "calling" caused Puritans to believe that if art had to exist, it should be used for didactic purposes, not for

entertainment. "As a result of such attitudes, the government of the Bay Colony legislated against any public displays of humor which were ribald, satiric of the godly, or in any way profane" (Kenney 8-9). In 1712, the government aimed to stifle an apparent growth of secular humor through "An Act Against Intemperence, Immorality, and Profaneness, and for Reformation of Manners," which states in brief:

> And whereas evil communication, wicked, profane, filthy and obscene songs, composures, writings or prints, do corrupt the mind, and are incentives to all manner of imputies and debaucheries, more especially when digested, composed or uttered in imitation or mockery of devotion or religious exercises . . . whosoever shall be convicted of writing, printing, publishing of any filthy, obscene, or profane song, pamphlet, libel or mock sermon, in imitation or in mimicking of preaching, or any other part of divine worship . . . shall be punished by fine . . . not exceeding twenty pounds, or by standing on the pillory once or oftener, with an inscription of his crime in capital letters affixed over his head . . . (Kenney 8-9)

Obviously, Puritans knew how to laugh and ridicule the most sacred parts of their lives, or the legislature would not have felt it necessary to publish the strict punishment for this type of humor. They laughed, but in certain strictly stylized ways. Within the confines of their "calling" Puritans found time to secretly ridicule the follies of others as they worked out their reward. Given the strict consequences of laughing at subjects too close to home and the church, most Puritan satire was focused on outsiders, folks they met outside the Colony, the non-elect. Laughing at those outsiders helped the Puritans as well as the

aristocrat to order their world and protect their identities, and in protecting themselves, the Puritan satirist and the aristocratic colonist helped create the Yankee comic character. It is in the barest satirical sketch in early Puritan literature that we first discern the shadow of an undeveloped character type, the simple rustic. This satire, created by an author who could not help but be influenced by the powerful Puritan dogma of the elect versus the non-elect, the chosen versus the rejected, helped launch the Yankee comic character on his road to fame.

One of the earliest Puritan writers of satire, Nathaniel Ward was a preacher who settled in Massachusetts in 1634. Thirteen years later, Ward wrote and published *The Simple Cobler of Aggawam in America*. Ward, in reflections supposedly written by a humble shoemaker, uses a satiric mask to criticize men and women in his society who, he believed, were becoming too permissive and tolerant of divergent religious beliefs and current customs and fashions. This simple cobbler even has the courage to confront his king, using his wit to elude any threatening or audacious behavior that might anger the king. In as much as *The Simple Cobler* is a satiric commentary on early American customs, Ward accomplished two steps toward defining the Yankee character. First, he assumes the guise of a humble shoemaker, a common working man with enough gumption to address himself to no one less than a king. Ward gave the common man a voice, one that would grow louder and more insistent on being heard until, in 1776, the king could no longer ignore it. Second, Ward foreshadowed the Yankee types of Benjamin Franklin. The simple cobbler bears a resemblance to Silence Dogood, Poor Richard and Father Abraham in the way he comments on the manners and mores of the colonial Puritans.

Granted, Ward's Yankee character lacks many key ingredients, but the simple cobbler begins the maturing process to be carried on by other colonial writers.

Samuel Bailey's reply to John Richardson's 1670 treatment of the farmer as a ludicrous, unlearned bumpkin adds another satiric view of the country rustic. Bailey's reply is a poem entitled "The College Ferula, Being a Reply to 'The Country-Man's Apocrypha.'" Little more than a light-hearted satire, the piece contains language and imagery that reflect an educated, learned author who poses behind the comic mask of a yeoman farmer defending himself against attack. Another colonial author, George Alsop, satirized the characteristics of Marylanders, but no complex character development exists in *A Character of the Province of Maryland* to take it beyond the basic condescension of an aristocrat peering down from his lofty perch to caustically comment on the lowly frontiersman in the American colonies.

In 1708, Ebenezer Cooke wrote an engaging poem entitled *The Sot-Weed Factor*, which purports to be a narrative of an English trader's visit to Maryland. One glance at the sub-title of the poem suggests the content and emphasis: *A Voyage to Maryland. A Satire in Which Is Described the Laws, Government, Courts, and Constitutions of the Country and Also the Buildings, Feasts, Frolics, Entertainments, and Drunken Humors of the Inhabitants of That Part of America. In Burlesque Verse.* Cooke's poem presents another example of an aristocrat out of his element, satirizing the outsider in order to maintain control of his own personal world, to cover his lack of knowledge of how to exist in these foreign circumstances. Characterizing the sot-weed, or tobacco, farmer, Cooke writes:

These Sot weed Planters crowd the Shore,

In Hew as tawny as a Moor;

Figures, so strange, no GOD design'd

To be a Part of Human-kind:

But wanton Nature, void of Rest,

Moulded the brittle Clay in Jest. (58)

Calling them "a detested Race," Cooke continues to belittle the folks his European trader meets as he attempts to sell his goods:

A Female Voice pierc'd thro' my Ears,

Crying, You Rogue drive home the Steers:

I listen'd that attractive Sound,

And streight A Herd of Cattle found,

Drove by a Youth, and homeward bound. (59)

From female voices that attract herds of cattle to sluttish chamber maids to riotous lawyers and drunken brawlers, Cooke allows only one Maryland Quaker a positive image--positive in that the American Quaker gets the upper hand on the condescending English planter.

To this intent, with guide before,

I tripped it to the Eastern Shore.

Where riding near a sandy bay,

I met a Planter, in my Way,

A pious, conscientious Rogue,

As e'er wore Bonnet, Hat, or a Brogue;

Who neither swore, nor kept his Word,

But cheated in the Fear o' th' Lord;

And when his Debts he could not pay,

From trusting Fools he'd run away.

My Goods I trusted to the Cheat,

Whose Crop was then o' board the Fleet;

And going to receive my own,

I found the bird was newly flown. (72)

Perhaps more than any other author of the early eighteenth century, Cooke empowers the rustics by allowing them to triumph over the European in the end. In their triumph, these Maryland and Virginia colonists portray the same piety and practical sense that Madam Knight describes of the people she encounters on her journey to New Haven. As colonial writers developed the country yeoman, he would be seen again later in the eighteenth century with more power--the power to take advantage of a naive traveler, thereby becoming the Yankee peddler.

If any one colonial writer embodied the aristocratic, educated stance of the elite, William Byrd II, wealthy planter and member of the Royal Society, did. Educated in England, Byrd settled down on his plantation at Westover situated on the James River, and proceeded to become one of the most influential men in Virginia. Byrd was chosen to head the surveying party for Virginia when the colony decided to mark the disputed border between North Carolina and Virginia in the year 1728. Making observations on his

travels, Byrd wrote two chronicles of his journey, neither of which was published until the nineteenth century. As recorded in *The History of the Dividing Line*, Byrd employs humor to cope with "the many uncouth shapes and situations he encounters" (Micklus 145). In the Swamp country, Byrd encounters rustics who are "without culture, refinement, ambition, or wealth, and who moreover do not seem to feel the lack of such commodities very much" (Rubin 13). Through his adaptation of a strikingly inappropriate level of language to the insignificance of the situation and the sophistication of the settlers, Byrd pokes fun at the country people with an amused attitude of superiority. Byrd's satire earned few friends for the author. North Carolinians have complained about his characterization of shiftless residents on the North Carolina frontier:

> . . . The men for their parts, just like the Indians, impose all the work upon the poor women. They make their wives rise out of their beds early in the morning, at the same time that they lie and snore till the sun has risen one-third of his course and dispersed all the unwholesome damps. Then after stretching and yawning for half an hour, they light their pipes, and, under the protection of a cloud of smoke, venture out into the open air; though if it happens to be ever so little cold, they quickly return shivering to the chimney corner . . . Thus they loiter away their lives, like Solomon's sluggard, with their arms across, and at the winding up of the year scarcely have bread to eat. To speak the truth, 'tis a thorough aversion to labor that makes people file off to North Carolina, where plenty and a warm sun confirm them in their disposition of laziness for their who lives. (Rubin 27)

Practicing aristocratic satire at its best, William Byrd II was one of the most skilled and entertaining writers of the colonial period, contrasting elevated diction with character descriptions of the rustic North Carolinian to produce accomplished satire few other colonial writers could achieve. However, if left up to Byrd, and all of those satirists before him, the Yankee comic character would have remained a mere object of ridicule, simply another poor creature to pity. It would take the extraordinary insights of a Puritan woman traveling from Boston to New Haven to launch the Yankee comic character beyond just an object of scorn found in much Old World literature and beyond the simple stereotype portrayed by aristocratic writers such as Ward, Alsop, Cooke and Byrd.

Sarah Kemble Knight began her journey from Boston to New Haven and New York in the fall of 1704. By this time, the Boston-New Haven road (later, the Post Road) was already the route of the postal riders. For this reason, Sarah Kemble Knight had little trouble finding a guide to lead her to New Haven. Not published until 1825, Knight's *Journal* gained an audience immediately after publication because, as Sargent Bush, Jr., explains in his introduction to Knight's *Journal*,

> The travel journal of this remarkable colonial American woman surely possesses the flavor of a true native voice, predicting various strands that would grow and flower as the native qualities of America's literature continued to become more pronounced. The voice had spoken a century and more before the generation of Irving and Cooper, but it was presented to the American reader only in the 1820s. In this way Sarah Kemble Knight, all unawares, participated in two key moments in American cultural

history--that in which she wrote and that in which her writing received a wider audience through publication.[5]

At the time of its publication, Knight's *Journal* initially was recognized for its early account of historical sites, real towns, and an authentic rendition of colonial life because the nation craved original American literature with distinctly American features. Little recognition was given for its humorous view of Knight's journey. Harrison T. Meserole explains that "[w]e have so long equated the words New England and Seventeenth-Century with the label Puritan, and this equation in turn with the tones of solemnity heard in every major voice that speaks to us from the time of the earliest settlements on the North Atlantic coast, that we do not readily associate the terms wit and humor with these voices" (12). Yet, slowly, in the later half of twentieth century, *The Journal of Madam Knight* has begun to receive critical attention for its humor and wit. Whether the work is read as a mock-epic or picaresque narrative,[6] most scholars agree that Knight's voice makes her *Journal* distinctly humorous. William Spengemann claims there are two separate voices, that of the disengaged Bostonian and that of the emotionally involved traveler, while Fay Vowell indicates that the *Journal* incorporates four distinguishable voices: the frightened female traveler, the curious recorder of facts, the acute business-woman, and the superior, at times sarcastic, commentator.[7] Yet, these questions of whether Knight's Journal belongs in the picaresque or mock-epic genre, or to what extent Knight uses distinct voices in the *Journal* avoid addressing the predominant strength that distinguishes Madam Knight's *Journal* from other early colonial writings--its use of wit and its anticipation of the Yankee character type.

The Journal of Madam Knight adds a fresh perspective to the history of comic writing in America through Knight's showcasing of the comic Yankee character type. Her observation of a wide variety of uniquely American characteristics places the *Journal* not just in a position of foreshadowing or predicting[8] the direction of American humor but places it in the active, vital role of initiating development of the Yankee comic character usually associated with Franklin, Tyler, Irving and Twain, to name a few. Sarah Kemble Knight's *Journal* deserves more than just an acknowledgment that her character type resembles fully-developed nineteenth-century figures; *The Journal of Madam Knight* should be re-evaluated and recognized for its anticipation, and vital role in the establishment of a uniquely American tradition of humor.

Because Knight's *Journal* significantly contributes to the literary history of American humor, it deserves more attention than that given it by Walter Blair, a prominent scholar of American humor for well over fifty years. The tradition of American humor received a thorough analysis in 1937 when Blair published his well-researched and well-respected study of *Native American Humor*. Since that time, his work has basically been accepted as a foundation for any study of our national humor.[9] Blair defines his premise at the outset:

> Humour is national when it is impregnated with the convictions, customs, and associations of a nation. . . . National American humour must be all this transferred into shapes which produce laughter. The humour of a people is their institutions, laws, customs,

> manners, habits, characters, convictions,--their scenery whether of the sea, the city, or the hills,--expressed in the language of the ludicrous (3)

Blair outlines two developments that were necessary before the characteristic writing of the American humorist could appear: "the development of the comic possibilities of the American scene and of the American character, and the development of a fictional technique which would reveal them. Somehow, American authors had to become aware of native materials for humorous literature; somehow they had to learn to exploit them" (16).

Blair recognizes American humor as beginning with the appearance of the Down East humorists of the mid-1800s, ignoring the contributions of *The Journal of Madam Knight*. Knight's characterization of the people she encounters and of her reactions throughout the journey satisfy Blair's criteria for a "national humor," yet she appears only briefly in his lengthy study. Blair is not the only culprit in perpetuating this literary oversight. Unfortunately, the humor of women has virtually been ignored until the last twenty-five years.[10] Reginia Gagneir theorizes that "it seems that historically men have preferred women's tears to their more threatening laughter" (137). This assertion about women's threatening laughter certainly holds true with Sarah Kemble Knight.

Yet despite the fact that critics have overlooked Knight's contribution to the tradition of American humor with her laughter at her own naiveté and inability to cope with New England frontier, Sarah Kemble Knight develops the Yankee into a truly unique American character type by discerning the dual personality of the typical country bumpkin

(on one hand, his ambitious desire to better himself, on the other his simple innocence and crudeness) and by personalizing the country bumpkin through detailed physical description and use of authentic dialect. It is this gathering of characters and Knight's ability to perceptively combine them into one predictable type that makes *The Journal of Madam Knight* memorable and important.

Knight begins to characterize the Yankee rustic by observing his desire to profit from a stranger's need for a guide, a service only he can provide. John, the first guide she encounters, ignores her initial plea for help, most likely one of those "tyed by the Lipps to a pewter engine . . ." (87). Found drinking in a tavern, John sells his services to Madame Knight, ignoring the more ambitious desires of his mother, the tavern hostess. Looking as old as his mother, "his shade on his Hors resembled a Globe on a Gate post. His habitt and furniture, its look and goings Incomparably answered the rest" (90). He is an over-weight, sloppy, middle-aged man who still allows his mother to find employment for him. Knight uses the comparison of a globe on a gate post to ridicule his physical size, completing the picture by allowing the reader to imagine what the rest must look like--a fat, round blob, sitting suspended on a comparatively thin, elevated object. Knight perceptively describes his character as boastful and bragging. Commenting on the numerous late rides he has taken and high adventures he has encountered in these very woods, John enjoys Madam Knight's company and her attention to his stories; the more comfortable he becomes, the more extravagant his tales become. As Knight describes his conversation in her *Journal*, she also details his demeanor, and the juxtaposition of the two elements paints a humorous portrait of a quaint country bumpkin. "Thus Jogging on

with an easy pace, my Guide telling mee it was dangeros to Ride hard in the Night, (wch his horse had the sence to avoid,) Hee entertained me with Adventurs he had passed by late Rideing, and eminent Dangers he had escaped, so that, Remembering the Hero's in Parismus and the Knight of the oracle, I didn't know but I had mett wth a Prince disguised" (90). Despite Knight's satirical tone, John fares well in her description, impressing the reader as a relaxed colonist at ease in the back country of New England, not too industrious but willing to work hard enough to get by. John's courage remains strong and his character consistent as they travel deeper into the Gothic-like swamp. Her guide's "Universal knowledge" and ready answers actually bring comfort to Madam Knight's terror-stricken heart as they plod along toward their destination.

Throughout this description of John, Knight presents him as believing that he is in the position of power because he is her guide and has experienced dangers, adventures and thousands of swampy rides. Knight allows this character a certain amount of control and power that most other colonial writers deny the rustic. John knows the territory and how to survive in it, leaving Madam Knight at his mercy. This knowledge equals power because Knight is helpless and reliant on the guidance of John. Most other colonial writers maintain the position of power by sarcastically showing their superior intellect compared to their ignorant, backwoods subjects. Yet, Knight, through her control of language and description, indicates her superior social position to this backwoods Yankee, one that enables her to mock her guide and his relaxed attitude, making him appear foolish yet likable.

Knight continues this portrayal of the "backwoods Yankee" in her characterization of the two "Town tope-ers" in the room next to hers who were debating the origin of their county's name, Narraganset, over a few drinks.

> One said it was named so by the Indians, because there grew a Brier there, of a prodigious Highth and bigness, the like hardly ever known, called by the Indians Narragansett; And quotes an Indian of so Barberous a name for his Author, that I could not write it. His Antagonist Replyd no--It was from a Spring it had its name, wch hee well knew where it was, which was extreem cold in summer, and as Hott as could be imagined in the winter, which was much resorted too by the natives, and by them Called Narrangansett, (Hott and Cold,) and that was the originall of their place name . . . (95)

Re-emphasizing the harmless but lazy, loafing attitude of the backwoodsman, she illustrates the same penchant for exaggeration she observed in John's tall-tales. Spending his money foolishly on drink and wasting time over a trivial subject such as the origins of a county name, the backwoods Yankee feels comfortable in his environment and at home with the countryside of New England.

The rustic Yankee's crudeness becomes painfully abusive to others as Jemima soon finds out from the behavior of her father, Polly. Riding on a short, lean horse, Jemima begins to feel the pain of thirty-mile journey with only a horse's bony back for a pillow.

> Wee made Good speed along, wch made poor Jemima make many a sow'r face, the mare being a very hard trotter, and after many a hearty and bitter Oh, she at length Low'd out: Lawful Heart father! this bare mare hurts mee Dingeely, I'me direfull sore I vow; with many words to that purpose; poor Child sais Gaffer--she us't to serve your mother so. I don't care how mother us't to do, quoth Jemima, in a pasionate tone. At which the old man Laught, and kik't his Jade o' the side, which made her Jolt ten times harder. (100)

Polly's reaction to his daughter's sincere complaint is in total opposition to what a sympathetic reader would expect. Added to this tense situation are the colloquial expressions Knight incorporates into the text. This allows the reader to assume an emotional distance from the character and her suffering because he cannot identify with her speech or her predicament. Allowing him to laugh more comfortably at her suffering, Knight ventures into new territory when she attempts to capture the slang and unfamiliar phrases of the country yeoman such as "Lawful Heart" and "hurts me Dingeely, I'me direfull sore I vow." It is this daring attempt to personalize and humanize the rustic Yankee that distinguishes Knight's observations from those of other colonial writers and sets the stage for later writers such as Royall Tyler, who capitalized on the Yankee's rustic vernacular. Polly and Jemima, in their unique dialect and their strained relationship, serve as an example of Knight's development of the Yankee character beyond the typical stereotype. Some rustic Yankees, such as John and the drunks, are jovial and social, but

those same traits, love of laughter and a good joke, can also become crude and harmful as manifest in this father and daughter case.

Knight portrays the second aspect of the Yankee comic character in the New England hostess. Frequenting roadside taverns, inns, and homes, Knight develops a clear portrait of the typical hostess--a fairly consistent, one-dimensional view of an ambitious, often meddlesome, Yankee out to make a profit. Knight's first hostess, mother to John the backwoods Yankee, appears shortly after Knight starts her journey. This hostess demonstrates her greed and stubbornness in trying to take advantage of Knight's vulnerable position. "Peices of eight, I told her no, I would not be accessary to such extortion" (87). Greedy, the woman will not bargain or compromise with Knight.

> Then John shan't go, sais shee. No, indeed, shan't hee;
> And held forth at that rate a long time, that I began to
> fear I was got among the Quaking tribe, believing not a
> Limbertong'd sister among them could out do Madm.
> Hostes. (87)

With a sharp, critical tone, Knight capitalizes on her reader's familiarity with the Quaker religion and assumption that a good Puritan would agree with ridicule of the Quaker religion. Knight criticizes the hostess for talking incessantly, comparing her unfavorably with a woman who felt the "divine call" to preach, and Knight also implies her greediness (extreme thriftiness) by referring to the Quaker tribe, who were known to be frugal and unfrivolous in every aspect of their daily lives including finances. A frugal person would attempt to gain the best bargain he or she could, as this hostess does. Added to this

greedy and stubborn attitude, the hostess at a Post down the road brings in left-overs to serve for dinner, demonstrating again the hostess' efforts to save money.

> Here, having called for something to eat, the woman bro't in a Twisted thing like a cable, but something whiter; and laying it on the bord, tugg'd for life to bring it into a capacity to spread; wch having wth great pains accomplished, shee serv'd in a dish of Pork and Cabage, I suppose the remains of Dinner. The sause was of a deep purple, wch I tho't was boil'd in her dye Kettle; the bread was Indian, and everything on the Table service Agreeable to these. I, being hungry, gott a little down; but my stomach was soon cloy'd, and what cabbage I swallowed serv'd me for a Cudd the whole day after. (91-92)

Encountering spoiled food becomes a reality as Knight meets landladies like the one who come in "with her hair about her ears, and hands at full pay scratching" and serve spoiled mutton, curdled milk and such as this to paying customers. Knight does encounter some friendly hostesses who talk pleasantly and intelligently, but a talkative, loud-mouth attitude such as that exhibited by the first hostess seems to accompany the dirty demeanor of many of the hostesses Knight meets. At one stop, the hostess proceeds to tell the whole company about her every ache and pain while assuming that only a doctor in the company can hear her. Knight's characterization of the "great Landly" grants the reader a fairly unpleasant but consistent picture of a lazy, sloppy, obnoxious hostess with little or no class. Dirty, loud, and so stingy with their food that they willingly serve it spoiled, these

hostesses demonstrate Knight's perception of the backwoods rustic as too selfish to treat her guests with respect and decency. This image of a greedy, obnoxious Yankee appears again in the portrait of the Yankee peddler.

Knight's portrayal of a younger version of the greedy hostess underscores the ambitiousness of the rustic Yankee. The most memorable encounter with a young woman on Knight's journey starts after her journey with John the Yankee guide. A young country innkeeper's daughter, this woman rambles on incessantly, not stopping long enough to let Madam Knight answer her questions.

> Law for mee--what in the world brings you here at
> this time a night? I never see a woman on the Road
> so Dreadfull late, in all the days of my versill life.
> Who are you? Where are you going? I'me scared
> out of my wits--(91)

From the colloquial expressions such as "Law for mee," and "versill life," Knight paints a picture of a woman who has her mouth open most of the time. The character-sketch continues after John enters and refuses to engage the girl in conversation. Undaunted, "Debb," as Madam Knight nicknames her, turns her attention back to the newcomer and "fell anew into her silly questions, without asking me to sit down" (91). Knight's use of colloquial language prefigures its use by later authors such as Franklin, Tyler, Irving, Cooper, and Stowe, who employ it as a method of characterization, as Knight does. The language makes the girl appear melodramatic, inconsiderate, and loud. To add insult (and humor for the reader), John, who has talked for the entire journey with Madam Knight,

refuses to engage in conversation with her, preferring to chew tobacco. This slight by a fellow Yankee certainly stings, so in the face of an embarrassing situation the girl handles it the only way she can--by flaunting her meager worldly possessions.

In one brief moment, Sarah Kemble Knight describes her own bewilderment and disgust when the girl runs upstairs and returns, flaunting two or three rings which she proceeds to display in the air as she talks to Madam Knight. Frustrated, Knight again draws on her sense of humor to alleviate the emotion. "But her Granan's new Rung sow, had it appeared, would [have] affected me as much" (91). Perplexed by her encounter with the very real but unique people of backwoods colonial America, Knight makes the reader laugh at her characterizations of the Yankee as ambitious and obnoxious, while her use of dialect and colloquial speech anticipates the stage Yankee of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

But Knight refuses to leave this Yankee character type until Bumpkin Simpers and wife Jone Tawdry make an appearance, and it is with this rendition of the backwoods Yankee that Knight's portrayal of the character type is complete.

> [A] tall country fellow, wth his alfogeos full of Tobacco;
>
> . . . he advanc't to the middle of the Room, makes an Awkward
>
> Nodd, and spitting a Large deal of Aromatick Tincture, he gave
>
> a scrape with his shovel like shoo, leaving a small shovel full
>
> of dirt on the floor, made a full stop, Hugging his own pretty
>
> Body with his hands under his arms, Stood staring rouwn'd him,
>
> like a Catt let our of a Baskett. . . in comes Jone Tawdry, drop-

> ping about 50 curtsees, and stands by him. . . They Generaly stand after they come in a great while speechless, and sometimes dont say a word till they are askt what they want. . . (106)

With this characterization, Knight captures the stance, the pace, the preoccupation, and the attitude of a typical country man and woman--Bumpkin Simper and Jone Tawdry. One famous character of the 1830s was Jack Downing, a backwoods Yankee traveling to Washington to seek a political position in the Jackson administration. Jack became a member of Old Hickory's Kitchen Cabinet and as such reported back home with wide-eyed innocence what he observed in the corridors of power. Jack Downing is just a transplanted Bumpkin Simper, gazing glassy-eyed at the wonders of Washington instead of the wonders of the general store back home. Knight's introduction of this backwoods Yankee fortifies her position as the originator of a unique element of American humor--caricature-- and a unique American type--the rustic Yankee.

Throughout the *Journal*, Knight observes specific character traits of an emerging American type, the Yankee. In her character sketches, the Yankee appears self-assured in his own environment yet anxious to impress the sophisticated traveler, boastful, crude and cruel, and finally, as a naive and simple creature who cannot comprehend and absorb the wide variety of features and options that the "city" offers. These observations could easily be interpreted as an aristocrat's satiric musings, if Sarah Kemble Knight had not had the insight and strength to laugh at herself. Micklus argues that "only Sarah Kemble Knight found much to laugh at herself. Although she sometimes resorts to a humorous scapegoat when she finds herself in an awkward predicament, Knight often manages to poke fun at

her own naiveté" (144). Because she makes a conscious effort to shine a spotlight on her own actions, Knight impresses the reader as a common, everyday person relating her experiences to a common human being.

Although her efforts are not altogether successful, Knight almost accomplishes what Franklin does in his *Autobiography*, to write to her audience of middle-class Bostonians, from the perspective of a person dealing with situations that are unfamiliar and out of her realm of experience. In a broad sense, Knight parallels her experience with that of the rustic Yankee overcome by the aspects of city life, while at the same time, she, a middle-class city dweller, embodies characteristics of the Yankee portrayed later by Franklin in the characters of Silence Dogood and Poor Richard--thrift, industriousness, and practicality. Martha Bruere and Mary Beard remark that "under stress especially it is important to remember laughter, for it is more than a defense mechanism, a means of adjusting to circumstances, a safety valve against tyranny--it is an agency in creative enterprise" (v). Knight uses her fears, anxieties, and phobias to her advantage by making the most of her guides when she can get them, knowing her dependence on their ability to lead her from one point to another. Knight demonstrates her thriftiness in using the guides when they come along despite what fears she might have about road conditions or weather. Staying in one place unnecessarily long will waste money. She has to bargain for her first guide John and after this initial introduction to the world of travel, Knight spends her money wisely and conservatively.

As author and traveler, Knight is confident enough to admit the fear of traveling through a foggy swamp at night and allows the reader a chuckle at her expense.

However, this persistence on her part to continue despite her fears demonstrates her industrious nature. Her next adventure requires crossing the river by canoe, which petrifies her.

> The canoo was very small and shallow, so
> that when we were in she seem'd ready to take
> in water, which greatly terrified mee, and caused
> me to be very circumspect, sitting with my hands
> fast on each side, my eyes stedy, not daring so much
> as to lodg my tongue a hair's bredth more on one side
> then tother, nor so much as think on Lott's wife, for a
> wry thouth would have oversett our wherey. (94)

Knight laughs at her own fears and reactions by using the same techniques she employed on others. She exaggerates to make a fearful situation seem humorous while showing her reaction to the situation in detail as if even casting a glance to one side would upset the boat. Using the religious image of Lot's wife and her punishment for disobeying a direct command of God, Knight applies this image of God's wrath enacted on a disobedient woman in order to make light of her own situation. By depicting her dilemma, emotions, and behavior in a comic way, Knight shows her confidence and self-assurance at being able to laugh at herself, but at the same time, she shares her fears and misgivings about the dangers of the adventure she has undertaken. Her light tone allows the reader to understand her emotion while at the same time to enjoy her version of it without becoming over-burdened with serious lessons to apply to his life.

Knight ends the episode on a light note and "was soon put out of this pain, by feeling the Cannoo on shore, wch I as soon almost saluted with my feet" (92). Knight imagines herself looking, at best "like a holy Sister Just come out of a Spiritual Bath in dripping Garments" if she falls out of her canoe into the water (92). The image of a soaking Madam Knight with a water-drenched dress clinging to her ankles, dripping hair and watery eyes, none the worse for the wear and tear, laughing at her own misfortune and wryly continuing toward her destination with a smile reinforces the character type of the literary Yankee, a responsible, conscientious, educated character who meets with humorous situations because he or she is out of familiar territory.

Knight calls on her imagination to allay some of her emotions and to pass the time when the ride seems more like thirty than the actual twenty-two miles. Inspired by the "Kind Conductress of the night," Knight composes an ode to the moon, Fair Cynthia.

> Fair Cynthia, all Homage that I may
> Unto a Creature, unto thee I pay;
> In Lonesome woods to meet so kind a guide,
> To Mee's more worth than all the world beside.
> Some Joy I felt just now, when safe got ore
> Yon Surly River to this Rugged shore,
> Deeming Rough welcomes from these clownish Trees,
> Better than Lodgings wth Nereidees.
> Yet swelling fears surprise; all dark appears--
> Nothing but Light can disipate those fears.

My fainting vitals can't lend strength to say,

But softly whisper, O I wish 'twere day.

The murmer hardly warn'd the Ambient air;

E're thy Bright Aspect rescues from despair:

Makes the old Hagg her sable mantle loose,

And a Bright Joy do's through my Soul diffuse.

The Boistero's Trees now Lend a Passage Free,

And pleasent prospects thou givs't light to see. (94)

The poem expresses sentiments similar to those that Ichabod Crane must have felt on that fateful night the Headless Horseman stalked him. Elements of superstition and exaggeration in this poem indicate that Knight was educated and familiar with classical allusions. But in unfamiliar surroundings, she puts even such respected literature as the classics to humorous employment to help dissipate the fear and anxiety a woman of the seventeenth-century must have felt in the face of unknown, dark, unfriendly surroundings in the backwoods between Boston and New Haven. Knight continues to characterize herself as Madam Knight, commenting on accommodations as she compares them with her ability to adapt to each new situation. It seems that when the narrative has become too sober in tone, Knight jokes about a personal action or feature to draw the reader's attention away from the realities of the discomforts and back to the purpose for reading the *Journal*--for entertainment.

Knight's primary contributions to the tradition of American humor include her varied perceptions of Yankee comic characters, her use of dialect, and her attempt to

place herself in her own narrative as a type of Yankee. Some critics, such as Robert Arner, argue that Knight's influence spreads much wider.

> Knight's *Journal* represents in some ways the culmination of nearly all the comic themes and character types we have been considering: courtship, cultural deprivation, the American Indian, the talkative taciturn Yankee, the shrewd Yankee trickster, the bumpkin; nearly all the stylistic techniques: mock epic language, surprising and unusual metaphor, . . . comic colloquialism, and an important new dimension the interplay among sophisticated Bostonian dialect, backwoods speech, and the pidgin English of the Indian. There is folklore . . . and withal the special poignancy of the lost American, wandering through the tangled wilderness, for the symbols and splendors of civilization and culture. (283)

While some of Arner's assertions seem to claim for the twenty-nine page *Journal of Madam Knight* more influence on American literature in general than it has probably had, Knight provided nineteenth-century writers with the Yankee character type from which to work. Her early development of this character deserves to be recognized for its use of rustic dialect and for specific descriptions of the rustic Yankee as naive, ambitious and thrifty. As Arner so aptly phrased it, "Madam Knight's *Journal* [remains] a vastly underrated contribution to American comic tradition" ("Wit, Humor" 284).

The year after Madam Knight journeyed from Boston to New Haven, Benjamin Franklin was born. Contemporary figures of the eighteenth century, both Franklin and

Knight made significant contributions to the development of the Yankee comic character. However, only one has received the recognition he deserves for his literary accomplishments. Benjamin Franklin has been called the Father of all Yankees (Rubin 33). Though this assertion assigns too much credit to him while ignoring other contributors and influences, Franklin certainly played a major part in developing the Yankee comic character into a "homespun, unlittered, but shrewd man of common sense" (Blair and Hill 54). Silence Dogood, Poor Richard and Father Abraham all attest to the fact that through his ingenious reworking of literary maxims into sayings that a common man would surmise from his experience, Franklin popularized a comic character with which most Americans could identify. Yet, there exists between the pages of his *Autobiography* characteristics that can be credited with helping to shape another aspect of the Yankee character -- the peddler. If in fact the anti-intellectual movement in Franklin's day and rumbles among colonists of discontent with British rule helped to increase the popularity of the homey but witty Yankee, then improved traveling conditions coupled with greater opportunities for economic gain opening in the frontier influenced the development of the shrewd Yankee peddler. Although he is not entirely responsible for the characterization of the Yankee peddler, Franklin's literary characters exhibit some of the traits employed by later authors to embellish the character of the sly Yankee peddler.

Franklin's career as a printer/writer began at the very early age of twelve when he was apprenticed to his brother James. Always striving to improve himself, Franklin wrote and re-wrote essays in an effort to refine his sentence structure and vocabulary. Having had little formal education, Franklin spent his lifetime educating himself on every

conceivable subject, thus accounting for many of his accomplishments in politics, science and literature. A self-made man so successful in business that he retired from his print shop at the age of 42, Franklin created characters that the common man could read about and understand, and he printed gems of wisdom and common sense maxims in two of the most popular media of the time--the almanac and the newspaper. Fourteen essays commenting on the manners of Boston were printed in the *Courant* under the name of Silence Dogood. Silence Dogood's distinguishing features consisted of her place in society as a "New England countrywoman who spoke in native accent of local idiosyncrasies. Her name alone -- impishly suggestive of Cotton Mather's well-meaning essays -- and her position in life were amusing . . . Her given name of Silence was grotesquely inappropriate, for she loved to talk, especially about her neighbors" (Rubin 35). Blair and Hill comment that she was "a countrywoman, poor, frugal, hard-working, friendly with farm folk and leather-apron men, 'fond of useful and desirable knowledge,' but contemptuous of flossy writings 'in the learned languages'" (64). She was at times colloquial, slangy and even earthy in her expressions. Franklin used the same character traits to enliven Poor Richard and Father Abraham, and the public loved it. "The Way to Wealth," a collection of witty sayings in essay form, has been named "an American classic" that bears "the mark of our national spirit." *Poor Richard's Almanac*, first published in 1732, carried on for twenty-five years, reaching one in a hundred people. The characteristics embodied by Franklin's fictitious commentators clearly rang true to most Americans, and because of this, Franklin deserves the credit for developing the Yankee character into a respectable but simple, plain American, " . . . wise, sly and forthright at

the same time, . . .sturdy, likable, and dependable, . . .grave but seldom serious, a good man to have around in almost any emergency, just as Franklin was, who invented him" (Rubin 47). As Rubin suggests, Franklin appears to embody many of the characteristics he celebrates in the simple Yankee. A glance at his *Autobiography*, however, shines additional light on this gigantic figure of a Neo-classical man who looms in American history, and shows him to be part Yankee peddler as well as the witty, homespun character portrayed in his other works.

Raised in a home that valued frugality and practicality, Franklin esteemed these virtues for a lifetime. In addition, Franklin's acumen for business appeared early, as he recounts:

> Pleased with the Pilgrim's Progress, my first collection was of John Bunyan's works in separate little volumes. I afterward sold them to enable me to buy P. Burton's Historical Collections; they were small chapmen's books, and cheap, 40 to 50 in all. (61)

At an early age he showed an affinity for bargaining, trading, and dealing, all qualities essential for success in business, especially peddling. His thriftiness was demonstrated when he proposed to his brother to give him half the money James was paid to board him and offered to board himself. "He instantly agreed to it, and I presently found that I could save half what he paid me" (65). Thrifty and shrewd, Franklin also reveals in the *Autobiography* three traits that would characterize the peddler in years to come -- slyness, eloquence, and dishonesty.

Studying the rhetorical techniques of Socrates, Franklin practiced the guise of the humble inquirer and doubter. "I took a delight in it, practiced it continually, and grew very artful and expert in drawing people, even of superior knowledge, into concessions, the consequences of which they did not foresee, entangling them in difficulties out of which they could not extricate themselves . . ." (66). Franklin became an eloquent speaker, a "sweet-talker" in the language of the simple Yankee, something that had a great effect on his career as a politician and diplomat. No doubt the most successful peddlers also employed this technique in order to sell more goods and make bigger profits. As described in Constance Rourke's earlier dramatization of the success of the Yankee peddler, this characteristic of the traveling salesman was one that frontiersmen dreaded most. Coupled with his ability to successfully state his point, Franklin demonstrated early on a tendency to be sly and sneaky by secretly writing essays for the *Courant* then slipping them under the door of the printing house, knowing that his brother would publish them as long as he thought they were not Franklin's.

With virtually no government restraints on his business and little or no accountability to the buyer, the peddler quickly developed a reputation for being sly and, at times, dishonest. This aspect of the Yankee comic character was rarely displayed by Franklin himself, but in dealing with his brother James, Franklin demonstrates the very characteristic for which peddlers acquired an unscrupulous reputation. James was imprisoned, and upon release, was ordered to quit printing his newspaper. After much deliberation, it was agreed that James would sign over Benjamin's indenture papers so that the paper could be printed in Benjamin's name. However, Benjamin agreed to abide by

new, private apprenticeship terms, although according to public record, he had been fully discharged and possessed all the rights and freedoms of any man. "At length, a fresh difference arising between my brother and me, I took upon me to assert my freedom, presuming that he would not venture to produce the new indentures" (69). Young Benjamin swindled and took advantage of his own flesh and blood, demonstrating that ambitious Yankee flare for pressing the advantage when possible. Granted, Franklin later came to regard this incident as one of the great mistakes of his life, but it illustrates a Yankee characteristic that clashes with the image of the simple, honest, hard-working Yankee laborer. The same Yankee usually associated with Franklin and characterized by frugalness, thriftiness, and practicality also at times tended toward ambition, shrewdness, slyness, and, at times, dishonesty.

J. R. Dolan, in his extensive commentary on Yankee peddlers, *The Yankee Peddlers of Early American (1964)*, explains the economic reasons for society's need for the Yankee peddler, one being that the restrictive trade policies of England and the confused currency situation in the New World created a difficult situation for a young man to get started in business (27). Besides the sea, peddling was the only business that offered possibilities for adventure. So as the eighteenth century drew to a close, thousands of peddlers were strapping on a pack stuffed with needles, pins, buttons, combs, spools of thread, and spoons and knives forging into new territories, as new towns appeared and travel became more accessible. "In the fifteen years between the close of the war and the opening of the nineteenth century the number of peddlers on the roads doubled and tripled" (Dolan 40). One authority says that by 1850 there were 10,669, and

he follows this up with a figure of 16,595 in 1860 (231). Eventually, transportation improvements such as the railroad, canals, and steamships forced the Yankee peddler to settle down in a country store somewhere on the frontier, but by then the Yankee comic character had developed a different attitude. Spawned by the image of a frugal, shrewd New England businessman, a legendary reputation quickly grew up around the profession of the Yankee peddler. "In the eighteenth century he was considered a rascal, in the nineteenth he was thought to be a cheat: he was sharp, crafty, mean, and always on the lookout for a chance to make a shady deal. In the South he was the original reason 'Damnyankee' became one word" (Dolan 229).

Curiously enough, Americans developed a strange attitude about the Yankee peddler. "When a peddler is detected in having sold you, from the store of his spice box, wooden nutmegs instead of the true and genuine East Indian article, instead of any particular odium attaching to him for having cheated you, you get heartily laughed at for having suffered yourself to be imposed upon, while he escapes with the fruits of imposition and the general remark, "'I guess it was only a regular Yankee trick'" (Blair and Hill 43-44). This was a typical response in the eighteenth century.

Literary examples of the Yankee peddler abound, capitalizing on this legendary silver-tongued, sly tradesman. Irving's Mrs. Rip Van Winkle left this world after she "broke a blood-vessel in a fit of passion at a New England peddler" who had outclevered her. Always nagging her husband Rip Van Winkle about something and keeping him in line, Mrs. Van Winkle probably detested the slick and sly demeanor of the local peddler and his ability to maintain control in each situation. Her desire to out-wit the Yankee

peddler eventually killed her. The feats of the Yankee peddler and his legendary reputation grew in popularity so that by 1821 Alphonso Wetmore could throw together a play, *The Pedlar*, in forty-eight hours that typified the Yankee comic character as the peddler. This play was performed "with great applause" by amateurs in 1821, 1825 and 1835 (43).

The Yankee peddler lived as much in the imagination and oral tradition of the frontiersmen as he did in literature, but his character helped develop the home-spun Yankee of Benjamin Franklin fame beyond one-line maxims of common sense to include elements of shrewdness and ambition. Influenced by Puritans, aristocrats, the anti-intellectual movement, economics, one colonial businesswoman, and one American forefather, the Yankee comic character blossomed during the mid-to-late-eighteenth century, setting the stage for the explosion of Jonathans in the years to come.

CHAPTER III

THE YANKEE: USED AS POLITICAL PROPAGANDA AND EMBROILED IN REGIONAL CONFLICT

Moving toward the last quarter of the eighteenth century, American colonists grew increasingly dissatisfied with British rule. Excessive taxation and the denial of their desire as individuals to live peaceable and quiet lives in the New World represented just a few of the grievances which drove prominent colonial leaders to sign the Declaration of Independence in the summer of 1776. Shortly thereafter the thirteen colonies of the New World took action against one of the world's most powerful nations and launched a desperate fight for the fundamental rights of democracy--individual liberty and freedom.

The colonists were at an extreme disadvantage from the very beginning. There existed no national militia, experienced and well-trained. Instead, the common citizen left his farm, his homestead and his tiny village to lend a hand. To add to the complications of a untrained militia, the colonies lacked money because England strictly controlled the flow of currency into and out of the colonies. Therefore, difficulties arose in supplying the needs of an army. In addition, a mixture of languages and cultures confounded communication, thus increasing the difficult circumstances which the colonies had to overcome before they even contemplated tackling the opposition.

Britain had all the advantages the American were lacking. It boasted a well-trained and disciplined military with a notorious navy, wealth enough to support its troops overseas, and plenty of ammunition. Yet, despite the American's lack of sophistication,

they defeated the British and began a new struggle to form a united democratic government.

Thus, for a handful of great statesmen, the monumental task of building the framework on which the pre-Revolutionary dream of freedom and liberty for all Americans would rest began. Many of these statesmen were from the traditional, aristocratic segment of European society, while other statesmen came from more ordinary, common circumstances, such as Benjamin Franklin. Forced together, these people from very different backgrounds disagreed over political philosophies and the basic issue of how much power should be given to the average man to make his own political decisions. Noblemen and the wealthy educated men feared "rule by the mob" and yearned for a government controlled by the aristocrats speaking for the common man, while another group represented the common man and his ability to make proper and correct choices for his own benefit despite his educational level or his bank account balance. These revolutionary thinkers and leaders of the colonies had fought for freedom for "all," but how should "all" be interpreted--all the educated, landed aristocrats--or all men, wealthy or poor, well-educated or ignorant?

During the last quarter of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century this political argument co-existed with several other issues and caused clashes between groups of people in this new nation of the United States of America. An uneasy friction remained between the victorious colonists who, with all of their energy and might, put their lives on the line to defend their belief in individual rights, and the loyal Tories who, whether openly or secretly, fought for their belief in British rule and supported the mother country in her

unsuccessful bid to crush the audacious, insolent settlers and their growing insistence on freedom for all. These political tensions proved fertile ground for American humor, helping to develop the Yankee comic character into a national comic character used as a vehicle for a variety of political propaganda.

Royall Tyler, a lawyer by profession, wrote his most admired drama, *The Contrast*, in three weeks time. Produced on the New York stage in 1787, Tyler's play introduced a Yankee comic character named Jonathan who was the first in a long line of popular stage Yankees. Yet Tyler's basic characterization of Jonathan as a simple and naive rustic country bumpkin on a visit to the city and the adventures he experiences were nothing new to American literature. Almost a century earlier, Madam Sarah Kemble Knight introduced her readers to Bumpkin Simpers and the Yankee comic character continued to develop during the eighteenth century. Tyler, however, exaggerates the character of the rustic "Yankee Doodle" from the farmlands of America, broadening his appeal, so that it is not just the aristocrat laughing at him, but the common man as well, finding his rustic qualities different enough from his own that he can laugh. Through exaggeration of specific elements, Tyler infuses sufficient distance between the average man and this "Jonathan" character that it enables the average man to join in making fun of this uniquely American character type, Jonathan the Yankee. As if accomplishing this were not enough, Tyler captures the naive faith, the simplicity and sincerity of the common American's pride in his new nation and the freedom for which he fought and defeated the British. Tyler champions the "Son of Liberty," and in so doing moves the Yankee character type past merely serving to entertain or as the vehicle for a quick laugh. Moving beyond the catchy

maxims of practical philosophy as developed in Franklin's writings, he becomes instead a comic symbol of the national pride of the average American provincial in his/her victory over tyranny and the British.

One of the unique features of the Yankee character which Tyler exaggerates for comic effect is dialect. Jonathan's character is created through his word choice, including malapropisms, rural terms, lusty hyperbole and boundless exaggeration. In the opening scene, Jonathan emphatically denies being Colonel Manley's servant but accepts the title of Colonel Manley's waiter. Clearly, the job descriptions are the same, but the connotation of servanthood is negative to the rustic Yankee. Such minute distinctions create a comic effect in a character who uses such slang terms as "what the dogs," "lingo," "by the living jingo" and "swamp it." Jonathan's use of such expletives as "gor," "tarnation," "tarnal," "tarnal curse and damn," adds to the humor, especially when he relates his meeting with a sailor at the playhouse. This sailor swears in his conversation with Jonathan and offends the rustic Yankee, prompting Jonathan to reprimand him and ask him to refrain from using those words again. Jonathan repeats the very expletives he condemns in his repetition of the story, thus creating the irony and humor in the scene. By infusing Jonathan's speech with numerous slang terms and expletives, Tyler is exaggerating the speech of the average rustic Yankee for comic effect, allowing aristocrats and provincials alike to laugh at the rustic's enthusiastic vocabulary.

Intertwined with these slang expressions are descriptive, vivid word pictures which Jonathan uses as he relates various experiences he has in the city. Descriptive and simple,

Jonathan's dialect seems authentic to the common man as Jonathan uses images from his father's farm and the meeting house back home.

> . . I went to a place they call Holy Ground. Now I counted this was a place where folks go to meeting; so I put my hymn-book in my pocket, and walked softly and grave as a minister; and when I came there, the dogs a bit of a meeting-house could I see. At last I spied a young gentlewoman standing by one of the seats, which they have here at the doors--I took her to be the deacon's daughter, and she looked so kind and so obliging, that I thought I would go and ask her the way to lecture. . . (765)

Re-telling his adventure in the whore district, Jonathan uses simple, straight-forward speech dominated by clear sentences and ordinary words. Later in the action, Jonathan again wanders into a playhouse, never guessing he is participating in "the devil's drawing room" (770). Using such phrases as "just like father's corncribs," "just like a meeting-house gallery," "hissing - hiss - like so many mad cats," "just like our Peleg threshing wheat," and "as thick as mustard," Tyler allows Jonathan to identify with the country yeoman who may not swear and speak slang like this Yankee but who understands his metaphors from farm life. This simple yet descriptive speech of the Yankee contrasts sharply with the stilted phrases of Jessamy, the servant to the European-influenced Dimple. Jessamy interlaces his speech with foreign phrases like "sans ceremonie" and ridicules himself for almost using "a vile proverb" (764, 766). The contrast between the two vernaculars of speech is stark and emphasizes the differences between the British and

Americans. Early in the play, Tyler clearly show his support of the simple, sometimes crude, American when Jonathan questions Jessamy's aristocratic language.

> JONATHAN: "Well, and I vow too, I am pretty considerably glad to see you--but what the dogs need of all this outlandish lingo? Who may you be, Sir, if I may be so bold?"
>
> JESSAMY: "I have the honour to be Mr. Dimple's servant, or, if you please, waiter. We lodge under the same roof, and should be glad of the honour of your acquaintance."
>
> JONATHAN: "You a waiter! By the living jingo, you look so topping, I took you for one of the agents to Congress."
>
> JESSAMY: "The brute has discernment notwithstanding his appearance--Give me leave to say I wonder then at your familiarity."
>
> JONATHAN: "Why as to the matter of that, Mr. ---- pray, what's your name?"
>
> JESSAMY: "Jessamy, at your service."
>
> JONATHAN: "Why, I swear we don't make any great matter of distinction in our state, between quality and other folks." [emphasis mine] (764)

In this example, Tyler emphasizes the democratic ideal on which America is founded, essentially squaring off with the British aristocracy through his Yankee character Jonathan.

Jonathan proves time and again throughout the play that his naiveté and simplistic trust border on stupidity. Jessamy blatantly uses him as the fool in order to make himself look better. Tyler exaggerates a familiar Yankee characteristic for the purpose of

broadening the comedy to include the laughter of the common man. Jonathan's interactions with Jenny clearly show that everything Jessamy suggests to try in fact backfires. He bows six times, then kisses her and, in return, receives a slap in the face. Surprised by her reaction, he tries to rectify the situation by talking to her of marriage and "cherubim consequences" only to enrage her the more (774). Even the most dim-witted country yokel would know that a man must court a woman properly before he kisses her and proposes marriage. This exaggeration of familiar characteristics of naiveté and innocence in the Yankee character acts as another distancing factor for the common man; for in watching Jonathan, he can see actions directly opposed to his own way of thinking.

Tyler enriches the exaggerated character of the Yankee with an underlying practicality and honesty, a lack of pretension, that is admirable. Tyler combines these character traits with Jessamy's aristocratic superficiality and willingness to take advantage of Jonathan the innocent, thereby emphasizing the American's loyalty to his country and his rustic heritage and showing the shallowness of the Europeans. In the second scene of Act Two, where Jonathan is introduced, he makes it clear that he has chosen to serve Colonel Manly in order to better himself, to expose himself to the adventures of the world. ". . . [B]ut I am a true blue son of liberty, for all that. Father said I should come as Colonel Manley's waiter to see the world, and all that; but no man shall master me: my father has as good a farm as the colonel" (764). His proud proclamation that he was not born into a servant class of society but possesses the freedoms and rights of any American asserts an honesty and directness about his character. In his pursuit of Jenny, Jonathan almost forsakes his country heritage by breaking his promise to Tabitha, his hometown

sweetheart. His ambition to make a better deal with the marriage of a city girl than the dowry of "twenty acres of land--somewhat rocky though--a bible, and a cow" nearly compromises his characteristic honesty. In the end, Jonathan yearns for the simplicity of his hometown. "Gor! she's gone off in a swinging passion, before I had time to think of consequences. If this is the way with your city ladies, give me the twenty acres of rocks, the bible, the cow, and Tabitha, and a little peaceable bundling" (774). Several more times throughout the drama, Tyler emphasizes the fact that Jonathan is a true born Yankee American son of liberty, launching into the battle hymn of the American troops, "Yankee Doodle." Overcome with enthusiasm and pride, he sings three stanzas, then stops to explain:

> No, no, that won't do. Now, if I was with Tabitha Wymen and Jemima Cawley, down at father Chase's, I shouldn't mind singing this all out before them--you would be affronted if I was to sing that, though that's a lucky thought; if you should be affronted, I have something dang'd cute, which Jessamy told me to say to you. (773)

Bragging that Tabitha can sing all the song's verses, exceeding a hundred and ninety, Jonathan exclaims that singing his hometown song has brightened his mood. What more loyal and expressive way can he demonstrate his pride and dedication to his country and his simple heritage? Again, Tyler contrasts the "son of liberty," the Yankee comic character, with the superficial, insincere Jessamy and shows the American in more favorable, albeit comic, light.

In addition to exaggerating the country man's dialect and simple, naive character, Tyler shows him to have an eagerness, an agreeableness and cooperativeness of nature that stems from the rustic's naiveté. After his disastrous attempt to seduce Jenny, Jonathan should have done what any man, rustic or not, would have done--rejected any additional advice or criticism from Jessamy. Yet, the country man's eagerness to please is exaggerated in Jonathan, and Tyler uses this quality to reinforce the differences between British and American character. One key scene involves Jessamy and Jonathan evaluating what transpired with Jenny and considering how much blame Jonathan should accept for the miscommunication. "May be it is because you have not the Graces, Mr. Jonathan" (783). Mistaking his meaning, Jonathan is insulted until Jessamy explains that he means graces of person, not godly graces. The Yankee wants to please Jessamy, and follows his instructions on the method of laughing by rule. As he proceeds with the rules, Jessamy appears more and more ridiculous because the system is complicated, superficial and cruel.

> But, Mr. Jonathan, you must not laugh so. Why, you ought to have tittered *piano*, and you laughed *fortissimo*. Look here; you see these marks, A. B. C. and so on; these are the references to the other part of the book. Let us turn to it, and you will see the directions how to manage the muscles. This [turns over] was note D you blundered at-- "You must purse the mouth into a smile, then titter, discovering the lower part of the three front upper teeth." (784)

Asked to laugh at inappropriate places in contrived manners, Jonathan has difficulty understanding or implementing the system, but he tries, asking Jessamy to give him

numerous chances to perfect his laugh. Finally, Jessamy hears his master's call and leaves with a parting admonition to Jonathan. "'And she asked her husband' -- [Bell rings] My master's bell! he's returned, I fear -- Here, Mr. Jonathan, take this gamut; and, I make no doubt but with a few years' close application, you may be able to smile gracefully" (784). Tyler reinforces with this final exchange between Jessamy and Jonathan the vast differences in character between the British and the Americans. The colonists, like Jonathan, attempted to reason with England regarding issues they found troublesome, but the British stubbornly stayed with their stringent and ridiculous requirements, eventually forcing the colonists to rebel. The final line uttered by Jessamy as he leaves indicates the view common among the British that it would take Americans years to develop any level of sophistication that could compete with European nations. With no history, myths, or legends on which to build, Americans might accomplish one small act worth recognizing after decades of hard work. Tyler uses the Jessamy/Jonathan encounter with Chesterfield's rules to show the foolishness, futility, and superficiality of many British traditions. To laugh should be a natural reaction to a comic action, not a carefully controlled, monitored exercise. The laughing lessons have little affect on Jonathan because he fails to understand their importance, although he is willing to try. Tyler seems to emphasize the notion that Americans had already tried to please the British, but it failed. Instead, the new nation should capitalize on the strengths of its own culture and society, developing an identity of its own. Success and respect from other nations will come eventually if America concentrates on the worth and goodness in its own people--the Yankees who fought for liberty.

Challenging Tyler's blatant nationalistic stance and his portrayal of the Yankee comic character as a more desirable man than the man influenced and controlled by European traditions, the Federalists used the Yankee comic character in the mock pastoral to criticize Jeffersonian Republicanism and the democratization of American culture. Instead of portraying Jonathan in a basically positive light, "the Yankee poems juxtapose idealized rural life and the ostensibly 'real' peculiarities of rustic character, manners, and language" (Nickels 141). In these mock pastorals, the Yankee typically expresses the sentiments of love for a country maiden in colloquial, rustic terms with earthy comparisons that illustrate his experience, but prove comically inappropriate to the higher sentiments usually associated with love. Fessenden, whose *Original Poems* (1806) contains mock pastorals previously published in newspapers and various forms, was the most prolific Federalist writer of poems satirizing the Yankee. Two of the most popular poems written by Fessenden include "The Country Lovers," published as early as 1795 in broadsides and reprinted in almanacs, newspapers and *Original Poems*, and "Peter Periwinkle, to Tabitha Towzer," printed in the *Farmer's Weekly Museum* on August 20, 1798 (Nickels 141).

In "The Country Lovers," Jonathan Jolthead is characterized as a thickheaded, incompetent lover who attempts various forms of courtship, but muddles them up, confusing his lover by his inept attempts to gain her approval. A few stanzas from "Peter Periwinkle, to Tabitha Towzer" illustrates the Federalist poets attempts to characterize the Yankee rustic as incompetent and ignorant.

My Tabitha Towzer is fair,

No guinea pig ever was neater,

Like a hackmatak slender and spare,

And sweet as a musk rat, or sweeter!

". . . [N]ot only does the rustic fail to see the contradiction in the comparison of 'sweet' and 'musk,' but in his ignorance and passionate enthusiasm he compounds the travesty with the comparative 'sweeter' as well. In the course of the poem these rude, ludicrous metaphors ultimately dehumanize the loved one, portraying her to the reader, at least, as grotesque and unworthy of the romantic effusion" (Nickels 143). The rustic's sincerity and transparency endear the reader to him, but the underlying sarcasm is unmistakable. In the end, the reader laughs at the sentiments of the rustic, no matter how sincerely transcribed, because the language fails to represent the dignity of the expressed emotions.

The mock pastoral poems used by Federalists contrast with Tyler's use of the Yankee, yet each one exaggerates the traits of the average country rustic to illustrate his particular bias. Tyler stresses the innocence, loyalty and trustful nature of the Yankee, contrasting him with the conniving, superficial nature of the British-influenced American in order to champion the new nation and instill pride in the colonists for their courageous fight for liberty. On the other hand, the Federalist poets exploit the same comic characteristics of the Yankee figure to emphasize the crudity and ignorance of the common man, showing their disdain and disgust for the democratic movement in American politics.

After the War of 1812, the Yankee comic character became one of the most popular figures in American humor. With the election of Andrew Jackson as President in 1828, Federalists poured all of their energy into satirizing this symbol of the western

frontier, a man of humble origin, a frightening specter of the people's power. "The traditionalists viewed Jackson's rise into power as the first symptoms of runaway anarchism, as an explosion in the sewer which brought forth the unleavened mass of humanity recruited from urban mobs and country-bred know-nothings" (Rubin 79). The Yankee, who had been slowly developing over the past two centuries in American literature emerged as a vehicle for political propaganda for numerous schools of thought from Tyler's nationalism to the blatant criticism of democracy by the Federalists. The Yankee comic character had truly emerged as an all-American figure.

These political conflicts exercised a tremendous influence on the development of the Yankee comic character in early American literature, with Federalists and traditionalists showing "Brother Jonathan" to be a naive rustic bumpkin ill at ease in the city, who spoke in a dialect riddled with expletives, slang, and countrified descriptions. This portrait of the Yankee would live a long life in the forefront of American humor, but he did not claim that place alone. Another image was emerging from the mid-eighteenth century writings of Franklin, stimulated by the economic growth of the country. By the 1820s, this shrewd, ambitious and greedy character was primed for comic exposure, and it was provocation of regional conflict between New York and Connecticut that motivated several prominent American authors to develop this aspect of the Yankee comic character.

By the early nineteenth century when Irving and Cooper utilized the rich tradition between New York and Connecticut in their writing, centuries of conflict over borders between the two states had forged a deep resentment among their inhabitants. In 1602, only two years after the English charter, the United East India Company secured a trading

monopoly from Cape of Good Hope to Cape Horn. With seven times the capital of the English, the Dutch had the potential for expansive development of the New World. However, political and social dynamics in The Netherlands were dramatically different from those that existed for the English dissenters, thus causing contrasting visions for their charters in the new world. There were no large groups or companies of Dutch that flocked to the colonies. In fact, most Dutchmen were content with their lives in Europe. The national government of the Netherlands also saw little need of encouraging Dutchmen to emigrate to the new colony because they had no vision of the potential benefits this new land afforded. This lackadaisical attitude began to change. Threatened by aggressive and mobile Englishmen, in 1623 the Company decided it should send over six families to establish a permanent reminder to the English that the land along the Hudson belonged to the Dutch. Shortly thereafter, acknowledging the potential profit in a larger colony, the government set out to encourage town settlement and continued to do so well into the late seventeenth century.

Simultaneous with the Dutch settlement of New York was the invasion of the New World by the English. Fox aptly discusses the motivation for English immigration:

> Those who settled New England came, for the most part, because they strongly wanted to. They were not sent or persuaded by authority; they came on their own motion, and came, as we shall see, in large numbers . . . Men, and especially women, do not usually undertake an ocean voyage months long in little boats in order to make their homes in a wilderness unless they want to escape from something. (29)

New Englanders, strongly motivated by their own desires, pushed their way into the colonies. Scarcely a month passed without the Dutch settlements on the frontiers being alarmed by the sudden appearance of an invading army from Connecticut (Fox 57). Confusion over Connecticut's boundaries stemmed from a 1662 grant by Charles II that ceded to Connecticut virtually all of Rhode Island, large sections of New York, Long Island, a part of Massachusetts and the whole colony of New Haven (Lee 32-33). Fox vividly describes how this invasion must have looked to the Dutch settler:

> This would advance resolutely through the country like a puissant caravan of the serts, the women and children mounted in carts loaded with pots and kettles, as though they were meant to boil the Dutchmen alive, and devour them like so many lobsters. At the tails of these carts would stalk a crew of long-limbed, land-sided varlets, with axes on their shoulders and packs on their backs, resolutely bent on improving the country in spite of its proprietors. These, settling themselves down would in a short time completely dislodge the unfortunate Nederlanders; elbowing them out of those rich bottoms and fertile valleys . . . For it is notorious, that wherever these shrewd men of the east get a footing, the honest Dutchmen do gradually disappear, retiring slowly like the Indians before the whites; being totally discomfited by the talking, chattering, swapping, bargaining dispositions of their new neighbors. (57)

New Yorkers tried for many years to hold back the tide of New Englanders, with the boundary dispute between New York and Connecticut lasting actively from the 1620s to

1790, counterclaims being not entirely settled until the 1870s and issues before the Supreme Court of the United States as late as 1932. New Yorkers and New Englanders alike were Americans, but they came from different countries valuing different cultures, politics, and social structures. However, since New Englanders were "more numerous and aggressive, since they coveted New York lands, and since they sincerely felt that they had a sort of divine right to anything they could take, the bitterness developed chiefly on the New York side" (Fox forward).

This bitterness, as Fox labels it, or resentment against Yankees from Connecticut clearly projects itself in literature written by New Yorkers such as Irving and Cooper, who both portray Yankees in unfavorable light. Two New York societies were formed by the old families, the St. Nicholas and Knickerbocker Societies, to feed their pride and to offset the New England Societies. Washington Irving was member of the Knickerbocker Society and began his writing career under the name Jonathan Oldstyle, Gent., bringing to mind the Jonathan of country bumpkin fame. In 1809, Irving used Diedrich Knickerbocker as his guise and published the first American book to receive favorable acclaim in Europe and England, *History of New York*, making comic observations about the Dutch of New York and other stereotypes including the Yankee from New England. Ten years later, Irving published another collection of stories entitled *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* (1819-1820), out of which grew two American legends--"Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow." In "Rip Van Winkle," the swindling Yankee clock-peddler is mentioned briefly as the cause of Dame Van Winkle's death --"she broke a blood vessel in a fit of passion at a New England pedlar" (Irving 39). Irving's other

legendary short story, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," depicts the Yankee detested by Yorkers in the character of Ichabod Crane. "In the stories of the usually gracious Washington Irving there is only one character on which he pours a really contemptuous satire, the Yankee schoolmaster Ichabod Crane" (Fox 205). The influence of this regional conflict on Irving's characterization of the Yankee comic character propels this national figure in a different direction from that previously seen in American literature, thereby adding to the complexity of the Yankee comic character.

In Tyler's *The Contrast* and Federalists' mock pastorals, the developmental thrust of the Yankee character had been towards a naive, honest, innocent rustic out of his element in the city or some place of relative civilization such as the general store in Madam Knight's *Journal*. Washington Irving employs the resentment of New Yorkers to depict the Yankee comic character as an ambitious, greedy, Connecticut "intellectual" whose sole aim is to invade the peaceful Dutch community by shrewd and calculating means. In physical description and level of superstition, Irving's character echoes the Yankee of previous description, but the circumstances in Irving's story in which the Yankee thrives are different from anything created before in American literature. Instead of developing the rustic Yankee, Irving's treatment infuses the Yankee character with the traits seen in later depictions of the shrewd and ambitious Yankee peddler.

Beginning with an idyllic description of the picturesque New York countryside, Irving slowly but deliberately sets the scene as a peaceful nook of extraordinary natural beauty--a retreat from the incessant changes taking place in other parts of this restless country. The Dutch inhabitants of this dream land are depicted as good, indulgent farmers

who live with all abundance and tranquillity, never bothering to worry about situations outside their own farms. Employing words that evoke images of fertility and happiness such as "blooming," "fresh," "ripe," "plump," "melting," "contented," "snug," "bursting forth," "treasures," "swelling," "cooing," Irving consistently allows the Dutch and their cove of Sleepy Hollow to appear in a dreamy, pastoral state almost too good for anyone to imagine.

Into this tranquil countryside drops a Yankee schoolmaster named Ichabod Crane. And so begins the characterization of the Connecticut intruder. Described as a traditional Yankee comic character, in physical appearance Ichabod resembles his namesake, a crane:

> He was tall, but exceedingly lank, with narrow sholders, long arms and legs, hands that dangled a mile out of his sleaves, feet that might have served for shovels, and his whole frame most loosely hung together. His head was small, and flat at top, with huge ears, large green glassy eyes, and a long snipe neck, to tell which way the wind blew. To see him striding along the profile of a hill on a windy day, with his clothes bagging and fluttering about him, one might have mistaken him for the genius of famine descending upon the earth, or some scarecrow eloped from a cowfield. (274)

Compared to a crane and a scarecrow when he first appears in Sleepy Hollow, Crane clearly appears foolish in outward characteristics, similar to the rustic Yankee out of place in more sophisticated circumstances. Irving uses Crane's awkward, almost painful

physical appearance to demonstrate immediately that the schoolmaster has invaded an otherwise perfect community where he is the only character that does not fit.

Coupled with his ridiculous physical appearance, Ichabod Crane carries with him into this Dutch community his Puritan superstitions. As Blair and Hill explain "Ichabod, a son of Puritan New England, believes in a supernatural world that is decidedly theological . . . Stuped in his Cotton Mather's 'direful tales,' Ichabod sees such spooky events as the 'devel and his works,' and has himself 'been more than once beset by Satan in divers shapes.' He really believes in and fears things that go bump in the night . . ." (167). Irving inflates this trait of the traditional Yankee character in order to have it serve a major function in the story, but superstitious Yankees have been seen before this in American literature. Jonathan in *The Contract* suspects the working of the devil, with his cloven hoof in his pocket, at the play he inadvertently attends. "Why, I vow, now I come to think on 't, the candles seemed to burn blue, and I am sure where I sat it smelt tarnally of brimstone" (Tyler 772). Ichabod and Jonathan share the influence of Puritan superstitions, but Irving lifts Ichabod out of the simple satire of Tyler's drama into a ridicule that more subtly yet ferociously bites in its disdain of Ichabod's educated facade. Education clearly fails to rid Crane of his superstitions. Irving uses gentle descriptions and pastoral, peaceful phrases with an undertone of disdain and scorn for this interloping Yankee from Connecticut.

Beyond a ridiculous physical appearance and superstitiousness imbedded in Puritanism, Ichabod Crane bears little resemblance to the characterization of the rustic Yankee. Ichabod Crane maintains a respected position in society as the schoolmaster,

never truly integrating into the Dutch society. Ruling his literary domain, he carries the enormous responsibility of infusing his students with knowledge. "The schoolmaster is generally a man of some importance in the female circle of a rural neighborhood, being considered a kind of idle gentleman like personage, of vastly superior taste and accomplishments to the rough country swains, and indeed inferior in learning only to the parson" (Irving 276). Although favored with special meals occasionally, Crane is characterized as an outsider or invader in this peaceful community. Perhaps more formally educated than most of the inhabitants of Sleepy Hollow, he still does not become an integral segment of the community. It was the custom in Sleepy Hollow to board the schoolmaster at various farmhouses in the community, so Ichabod Crane moves to a different location each week. Irving uses this transience, this movement from house to house week after week, to underline the fact that Ichabod is indeed a Yankee--he has no roots and no material possessions to tie him into the community. Irving also shows numerous times that Ichabod has no friends his own age, and no male friend at all; instead, he wiles away long evenings with Dutch farm wives exchanging ghost stories in front of the fire. Brom Bones, native of the area and rugged frontiersman, has a whole bevy of admiring companions and admiring country folk who indulgently smile at his incorrigible behavior. In sharp contrast, Ichabod exists in a world of his own, always striving to impress various members of the community of Sleepy Hollow in order to gain something for himself, whether that is a sumptuous meal or a well-endowed farmer's daughter. The circumstances of Ichabod Crane's demise and flight from Sleepy Hollow are the final rejection of this Yankee by the Dutch New Yorkers. Crane's own superior knowledge of

witchcraft and superstitions is used against him to frighten him away. Especially vulnerable to ghosts and goblins, Ichabod reacts differently than an "insider" of the Hollow, who would have laughed indulgently at the specter he sees. Crane, with his Puritan perception of specters as tools of the devil, hits the high road out of town, never to be seen again in Sleepy Hollow.

Irving characterizes Ichabod Crane as ambitious and greedy as well as being an invader of New York territory. Described as "exceedingly lank," Crane possesses an insatiable appetite. ". . . [F]or he was a huge feeder, and though lank, had the dilating powers of an Anaconda" (275). Images of food abound in this short story, in which Crane's appetite symbolizes his ambition and greed. His desire to court and marry Katrina Van Tassel, "so tempting a morsel," rests solely on the assumption that he would inherit her father's prosperous acres and turn them into cash. He has no desire to farm in the area, only to use the Van Tassel resources to invest money in tracts of land out west. "Nay, his busy fancy already realized his hopes, and presented him the blooming Katrina, with a whole family of children, mounted on the top of a waggon loaded with household trumpery, with pots and kettles dangled beneath; and he beheld himself bestriding a pacing mare, with a colt at her heals, setting out for Kentucky, Tennessee, or the Lord knows where!" (280). Irving supplies vivid detail and description to accomplish a dual purpose: to illustrate the abundance and wealth of the Dutch farmers and to emphasize Ichabod's numerous designs on the Van Tassel fortune.

Irving's satiric characterization of Ichabod's greedy ambition would appear mildly indulgent if the Yankee schoolmaster had been more transparent about this desire for

wealth and riches. But Irving shows no mercy in his characterization of the schoolmaster as shrewd and calculating. Interlaced throughout the story are images of Ichabod Crane pretending to be something he is not in order to work his way into the heart of a local girl who is heir to a prosperous farm and fortune. The conniving schoolmaster walks home from school with small children "who happened to have pretty sisters, or good housewives for mothers" in the hopes of a chance to devour a homebaked goody or the older sister's heart. "He laid aside, too, all the dominant dignity and absolute sway, with which he lorded it in his little empire, the school, and became wonderfully gentle and ingratiating. He found favor in the eyes of the mothers, by petting the children, particularly the youngest, and like the lion bold, which whilome so magnanimously the lamb did hold, he would sit with a child on one knee, and rock a cradle with his foot, for whole hours together" (275-76). Irving's choice of the lion and lamb metaphor reinforces the imagery of Ichabod as a calculating impostor-- a wolf in sheep's clothing. At church, he would gather grapes for the country damsels, recite poetry and, in general, attempt to please their fancy. Irving blatantly calls him "an odd mixture of small shrewdness and simple credulity" (277). Desiring to obtain Katrina's hand in marriage, Ichabod persistently pursues her affections. But was it love at first sight? For Ichabod it was love of her father's ample wealth and the visions he has of their potential to buy tracts of land out west, not love for the Dutch damsel, Katrina. "From the moment Ichabod laid his eyes upon these regions of delight, the peace of his mind was at an end, and his only study was how to gain the affections of the peerless daughter of Van Tassel" (280).

Irving's ironic twist in incorporating the game Katrina plays with Ichabod lends comedy to what could easily have become a dark characterization of a shrewd and calculating Yankee. Ichabod blindly believes that Katrina is slowly caving in to his romantic overtures, while she only endures his amorous advances in order to coyly play with Brom's affections. Ignorant of this game until the last moment, Ichabod continues to plan and devise more opportunities to win Katrina over. "Ichabod, therefore, made his advances in a quiet and gently insinuating manner" (282). Using his instruction in psalmody as cover, he visits Katrina several times. On Ichabod's final visit to the farmhouse, Irving describes his careful attention to his toilet and appearance but implies that no amount of brushing and combing will make a difference in the over-all impression he makes. Crane's appearance on his horse, Gunsmoke, is a comic picture, with Quixotic overtones, of a ridiculously thin man with knees and elbows protruding into the air, alternately described as a grasshopper and some sort of distorted bird. Ichabod's confidence is running high as he journeys to the Van Tassels' farm, confident in the success that his shrewd, calculating behavior has won Katrina's heart and, more importantly, her fortune. By describing Crane's painstaking preparations in equally excruciating detail, Irving emphasizes the Yankee's dedication to his purpose of invading this idyllic community and the futility of his efforts while setting the stage for Ichabod's demise.

In his description of the final scene of "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," Irving ushers out the Connecticut invader of this pastoral New York Dutch society, with his ambitious greed and sly plans, by preying upon his own ridiculous superstitions. Nursing

his wounded pride after Katrina rejects his romantic overtures and dreading awkward explanations of his encounter with the "Headless Horseman," Ichabod heads west and succeeds without a wealthy wife, but far removed from the fertile valleys of the Hudson.

The qualities of greed and ambition that Irving emphasizes in the character of Ichabod Crane appear in other American stories and legends embodied by the Yankee peddler, himself an invader of a community, ambitious to make a profit, and willing to do just about anything to get it. James K. Paulding also characterizes the Yankee schoolmaster in "Yankee Pedagogues and Dutch Damsels" as shrewd and calculating. Another New York writer, James Fenimore Cooper, uses the Yankee for comic relief in his fiction, contrasting the idyllic nature of the New York forests with invaders from the east such as David Gamut in *The Last of the Mohicans,* whose habit of singing psalms acts as both a sharp comment on the Yankee's naiveté and on his inappropriate, and thus comic, response to tense and difficult situations amid the chaos of war and death in the forests of New York.[11] Many additional characterizations of the shrewd, ambitious Yankee interloper would appear, such as Halliburton's Sam Slick and Twain's Hank Morgan, but Washington Irving's vivid portrayal of Ichabod Crane ushered in the final phase of the characterization of the comic Yankee character. John Seelye argues for Irving's contribution in his article "Root and Branch: Washington Irving and American Humor:"

> First of all, by identifying the conflict of "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," not with the division between City and Country but with the tension between the inhabitants of the Hudson valley (with their Dutch

> antecedents) and the invaders from the Connecticut Valley (descendants of the Puritans). Irving not only looks far back into American history to the struggles between the Dutch of New Netherlands and the Pilgrims of New Plymouth, but to the more recent border wars between New England and New York, and on into the future, as it were, anticipating the much more typical struggle soon to characterize the emerging nativist tradition in American humor, the conflict between the swindling Yankee peddler and much of America lying to the south and west. (421)

Incorporating the physical awkwardness and superstition of the Yankee rustic with the voracious greed, ambition and shrewdness of the Yankee peddler, Irving creates a Yankee character destined to live on in American legend, the voice of Ichabod Crane echoing in the volumes of American literary humor.

CHAPTER IV

DECLINE AND DEMISE OF THE YANKEE COMIC CHARACTER

By 1830, American humor had exploded into comic characters and was on its way to become a national phenomenon. Blair and Hill catalogue the wide range of characters and authors who would appear over the next several decades: Mike Fink (1821), Davy Crockett (1830), Jack Downing (1830), Hosea Biglow, Birdofredum Sawin, Major Joseph Jones, Mrs. Partington, Widow Bedott, and Sut Lovingood (1840s). Leading authors who produced humor frequently and consistently during these years included Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, Johnson J. Hooper, Sol Smith, Thomas Bangs Thorpe, William Tappan Thompson, George Washington Harris, John S. Robb, Seba Smith, James Russell Lowell, Charles A. Davis, Thomas Chandler Haliburton and Benjamin Shillaber. These authors and more published humorous sketches in newspapers, then collected them in best-selling books. Comic periodicals cropped up for short periods, and the publishing company of Dick & Fitzgerald focused on the field of humor almost exclusively.

Famous stage Yankees such as Hill, Matthews, Hackett and Neal reenacted the role of Jonathan to full houses in both America and Britain. John Neal in 1835 calculated that British playgoers had paid half a million dollars to hear the story of Jonathan W. Doubikin, who tells an amusing tale about a hunting trip with Uncle Ben. After shooting a squirrel in a tree, the squirrel does not fall down and Uncle Ben promises Jonathan a quarter if he will climb up to get. The rest of the story focuses on Jonathan's repeated attempts to get that quarter from Uncle Ben, who comes up with excuses not to pay time

and time again. Theater audiences seemed to find the repetition of the gag of Jonathan's requests and Uncle Ben's excuses hysterical. Only one of many Yankee stage actors, Josh Silsbee (1813-1855) reenacted numerous roles first played by other actors, but his death signals the close of the era of Yankee theater.

Due to several changes in American society by the end of the Civil War, the era of the Yankee comic character had ended. Puritanism ministers had lost much of their control over social and political institutions. An 1860 census in United States shows that there were as many as 360,000 New England Yankees in the Old South. Yankees were mobile by nature, always moving toward that vast tract of land on which they could make their fortune. Even by 1828, John Neal, editor of the *Yankee* periodical, wrote that "the word Yankee is no longer a term of reproach. It is getting to be a title of distinction, [and] our hope is to make it yet more respectable" (Green 1). As more Americans gained exposure to real-life Yankees, their image began to change, so that after the Civil War, the figure of the "rustic Yankee purveying good sense form his stronghold in the provinces became almost anachronistic. The center of political gravity had shifted to the cities and the day of the independent yeoman farmer was over" (Rubin 83).

In American literature, the Yankee comic character made his first appearances in brief descriptions by condescending aristocratic Puritan writers who described the country yokels they saw in their travels. Sarah Kemble Knight developed this country yokel into a character with a specific physical presence naming him Bumpkin Simpers, interlacing her journal with glimpses of other rustic characters who embody Yankee characteristics that will appear in later writings. Knight's final contribution allows her reader to laugh with

her at her own reactions and fears, humanizing the otherwise condescending tone of her characterizations.

Benjamin Franklin utilized the anti-intellectual trend in society to develop the Yankee character as a common man who spouts maxims of homespun wisdom he has surmised from practical experience and common sense. Influenced by the economic opportunity, Franklin, in his *Autobiography*, also introduced the Yankee characteristics of ambition and shrewdness that would eventually figure in the depiction of the Yankee peddler.

By the late-1700s, political divisions existed in the new nation of the United States. Little did he know it at the time, but Royall Tyler's characterization of the rustic Yankee figure he called Jonathan would serve as both a positive and negative image of the common man. The rustic Jonathan lived past the popularity of Tyler's play to reappear in numerous stage versions of the country bumpkin, making him one of the first national comic character types that can truly be called uniquely American.

Having found popularity on the stage as country yokel, Jonathan underwent another change through the skilled pen of Washington Irving. Ichabod Crane is satirized as a shrewd, calculating, ambitious and greedy schoolmaster who invades a Dutch community only to be driven out by the local backwoods hero. Irving clearly disdains this Connecticut Yankee intruder as most New Yorkers did in the early 1800s.

Venturing into the city as a country bumpkin with his own crude dialect, or into the country as a sly and tricky peddler, the Yankee comic character developed over almost three centuries of American history. This Yankee figure, in all his various forms, stands as

a symbol of numerous social influences present in American society and proves as never before that in spite of and possibly as a result of the conflicts in philosophy, politics and religion, Americans learned to laugh, not only at other cultures and people, but at themselves and their own unique qualities and characteristics.

Notes

1. Dixon Ryan Fox details the ongoing border disputes between New York and Connecticut. Connecticut received a charter from England delineating its state border. Problems arose when the designated land happened to be settled and claimed by the Dutch. With no one to act as the final authority, each side took it upon themselves to maintain its rightful border. This resulted in bloodshed and bitterness for both states. Existing for more than two centuries, the border dispute influenced the perception of each state's view of the other and the literature of the early nineteenth century.
2. For a complete overview of the influence of Connecticut people on American history, see W. Storrs Lee.
3. See Fletcher M. Green for theories on the origins of the Yankee character, such as the view that "John Cheese" was a pejorative term used by the Dutch to describe the people of Connecticut, or the view that the Dutch called New Englanders "Jankin," which eventually became "Yankee ".
4. Consult Arner's essay, "Sarah Kemble Knight," for a biographical and critical overview; see also Stanford for general biographical details.
5. See Magolie for a thorough study of the publication of the *Journal.*
6. See Stephens, pp. 247-55, who argues that "[a] reading of the journal in this light shows that she saw numerous parallels between her wanderings and those of Homer's Odysseus and that she chose to treat those similarities in a mock epic manner" (248). Derounian-Stodola (122-31) structures an excellent argument for placing the *Journal* in the picaresque tradition; see also Thorpe, pp. 114-21; and Seelye, pp. 303-04.
7. See Spengemann, p. 42; and Vowell, pp. 44-52.

8. See Blair's assertion, p. 9, that Knight's "vividly pictured Jonathon and Joan, the backgrounds of their lives, their peculiarities of gesture, of manner, and particularly of speech, fore-shadowed what was to be the stuff of America's favorite comedy a century after they were created. . . Such passages look forward to the myriad picturings in detail of the Jonathans and the Lubbers of their country which were to be a leading source of humour in the coming century" (9). See Bush's comment (80) that Knight's humor predicts what would grow and flower into American humor.
9. Pogel and Somers (1-34) quote consistently from Blair in their recent study of literary American humor.
10. See Dresner (137-61) for more extensive details about the status of women's humor. Martha Bensley Bruere and Mary Ritter Beard wrote a critical book on the state of women's humor in 1934.
11. Consult Fox (200-05) for a discussion of Cooper's disdain for Connecticut Yankees and how this attitude affects his writing.

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