



**Broken Heads and Bloated Tales:  
Quixotic Fictions of the USA,  
1792-1815**

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*'If I abuse you with my tongue, take my head for  
satisfaction'*  
Captain John Smith, Barbary captive, 1602

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## Abstract

Reading a number of post-Revolutionary works alongside a range of social, political, and cultural phenomena (such as Barbary conflicts, the Alien and Sedition Acts, yellow fever epidemics, and the cult of George Washington), this thesis contends that fiction of the early republic repeatedly deployed the contradictory figure of the quixote in order to test the conflicting ideals of the founders, to interrogate the political instabilities and social upheavals of the new republic, and to question both the possibility and the desirability of an isolationist United States and an independent 'American' literature.

Chapter 1 discusses changing perceptions of Don Quixote in eighteenth-century British literature, charting his assimilation into British culture and his transformation from deluded fool to romantic hero: it was this complex figure, as much as his Spanish original, who crossed the Atlantic in the influx of British literary imports into America both before and after independence. Chapter 2 presents a survey of quixotic figures from colonial and Revolutionary America, before suggesting some reasons why 'misreadable' quixotes might have proved particularly compelling for writers of the early republic.

Chapters 3 to 7 discuss works by Hugh Henry Brackenridge, Royall Tyler, Charles Brockden Brown, Tabitha Gilman Tenney and Washington Irving. In *Modern Chivalry* (1792-1815), Brackenridge shows readers how the discourses of republicanism and quixotism could be co-opted to resist change and naturalise existing power relations. Brown's *Arthur Mervyn* (1799-1800) recounts the rise and fall of a republican quixote, engaged in extending the limits of public service at the very moment in American history when the idea of 'virtue' was retreating

to the private sphere. Royall Tyler's *The Algerine Captive* (1797) tells the story of a literary quixote whose narrative reveals a subtle indictment of the US republic and an untimely attachment to North African ways. Tenney's *Female Quixotism* (1801) exploits the interpretative instability of the quixotic figure to produce a double-talking text, a romantic satire that ridicules the self-deluded spinster while critiquing the period's self-sacrificing ideals of republican wife and mother. Irving's *A History of New York* (1809) burlesques the idealising tendencies of American historiography, introducing a surplus of quixotic patriarchs in order to challenge the continuing presence of the founding fathers and confront the difficulties faced by the early republic's post-heroic generation.



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## Abbreviations

DQ Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *The Adventures of Don Quixote de la Mancha*, trans. by Tobias Smollett, with an introduction by Carlos Fuentes (London: Deutsch, 1986). I have chosen to use this particular modern edition of *Don Quixote* because it reproduces Tobias Smollett's translation of 1755, the translation used for the first American editions of *Don Quixote*.

AL *American Literature*

AQ *American Quarterly*

DLB *Dictionary of Literary Biography*

EAL *Early American Literature*

WMQ *William and Mary Quarterly*

## Introduction

I have seen more than one or two asses go to governments; and therefore it will be no new practice if I carry Dapple to mine.

Sancho Panza to the Duchess (DQ, 620)

Hero of a revolution, founder of a nation, and president of a new republic, George Washington was also revered as ‘the father of mule breeding in the United States’.<sup>1</sup> This may not be the most glamorous of encomiums, but it does provide us with an unusual example of cross-cultural exchange, offering an intriguing glimpse into New World perceptions of an ailing Old World power. In an article entitled ‘George Washington, Diego de Gardoqui, and *Don Quixote*’, A. G. Lo Ré discusses the General’s interest in donkey rearing and recounts the curious tale of the émigré ass. In 1784, realising that he needed to obtain ‘the finest breed of jackass’ in order to breed the best possible mules, Washington made use of his influential contacts and heroic status to procure such a creature from the king of Spain, whose nation was renowned for its quality of ass.<sup>2</sup> The royal quadruped duly arrived and was speedily put to work by Washington; its stubborn refusal to perform its progenitive duties, however, proved a seminal defect, and elicited a wry report from the disappointed stud farmer:

Particular attention shall be paid to the Mares which your Servant brought; and when my Jack is in the humour they shall derive all the benefits of his labours—for labour it appears to be. At present, tho’

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<sup>1</sup> A. G. Lo Ré, ‘George Washington, Diego de Gardoqui, and *Don Quixote*’, in *Essays on the Periphery of the ‘Quixote’* (Newark, DE: Juan de la Cuesta, 1982), pp. 81-95 (p. 82).

<sup>2</sup> Lo Ré, p. 82.

young, he follows what one may suppose to be the example of his late royal Master, who cannot, tho' past his grand climacterick, perform seldomer, or with more Majestic solemnity, than he does. However, I am not without hope, that when he becomes a little better acquainted with republican enjoyments, he will amend his manners, and fall into a better & more expeditious mode of doing business.<sup>3</sup>

The unlikely concept of a royal ass—an incongruous mixture of the regal and the bestial, of high pomp and low humour—seems an appropriate (if comical) symbol of cultural collaboration between the proud monarch of a European empire and the Cincinnatus of a post-colonial republic, where the common man is king and the people are, in the words of Crèvecoeur, a 'strange mixture of blood', a hybrid people not at all unlike the cross-bred mule.<sup>4</sup> This particular émigré, however, seems reluctant to integrate with his new compatriots, and in Washington's account, the mule's refusal to mate with American mares becomes the symbol of a wider cultural clash between worlds Old and New. The airs and graces of the Old World ass are risible in the new republic, and Washington opens up a comical breach between the jack's 'Majestic solemnity' and the more plebeian 'republican enjoyments' of America. Humouring such delusions of grandeur, and confident 'he will amend his manners', the stud farmer treats the creature with sustained mock-respect, deploying the kind of ironic gravity for which Spain's most famous literary export, Miguel de Cervantes, was renowned. Indeed, while Cervantes gives us *Don Quixote de la Mancha* (1605 and 1615) and Henry Fielding gives us *Don Quixote in England* (1734), George Washington gives us 'Donkey-Haughty in America', the tale of a right royal pain of an ass who will not do as he's told. While Washington hopes that his Spanish ass will soon 'fall into a better & more expeditious mode of doing business', his own mercantile vocabulary and materialistic attitude only serve to widen the ideological gulf between the two nations. The services of the recalcitrant ass were actually advertised in journals nationwide, at ten times the fee that Washington charged for his Arabian stallion,

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<sup>3</sup> Letter to William Fitzhugh (15 May, 1786), in George Washington, *Writings*, ed. by John Rhodehamel (New York: Library of America, 1997), pp. 598-99.

<sup>4</sup> J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters From an American Farmer*, ed. by Susan Manning (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 44.



so while the jack was a gift to the General, a magnanimous gesture on the part of Charles III, Washington is all too ready to cash in on this most recent—and strictly speaking, illegal—import.<sup>5</sup>

The ass was by no means the only Spanish export—or the last deluded Spaniard—that the General would encounter: English editions of *Don Quixote* were abundant in the new republic, and according to Stanley T. Williams, author of *The Spanish Background of American Literature*, ‘the great, the all-conquering Cervantes [...] was everywhere’, ‘known to all readers and writers from Thomas Jefferson and John Adams to our first civilized essayist, Joseph Dennie’.<sup>6</sup> He was certainly known to America’s first president, for Washington’s library contained two sets of Cervantes’ famous work: a copy of Tobias Smollett’s English translation, and an elegant Spanish edition, sponsored by the Royal Academy of Madrid. What’s more, Washington bought his first copy of *Don Quixote* on September 17, 1787, the very afternoon on which the US Constitution ‘received the Unanimous assent of 11 States’, and the signatures of their delegates at the Constitutional Convention. So, on the same day that the General played his part in what he termed ‘the momentous w[or]k’ of ratification, he found the time for another momentous work, another foundational text in the world of letters.<sup>7</sup> Stepping into a bookshop and picking out *Don Quixote*, Washington’s timely piece of retail-therapy embodied—ratified, in effect—the unexpected and provocative union that would emerge between Cervantes’ Knight of La Mancha and the newly formed American republic.

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It is not unusual to name a fictional genre for its protagonist: the picaresque narrative follows the picaro, spy novels track the spy, and detective fiction trails

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<sup>5</sup> Lo Ré, p. 83.

<sup>6</sup> *The Spanish Background of American Literature*, 2 vols (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1955), I, 44.

<sup>7</sup> *The Diaries of George Washington*, ed. by Donald Jackson and Dorothy Twohig, 6 vols (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1976-79), V, 185.

the detective. Quixotic fictions, then, for the purposes of this thesis, are quite simply fictional works with a quixote for their leading character, a protagonist whose perceptions of—and ideals for—the world they inhabit run counter to the reality they experience.<sup>8</sup> More specifically, my definition of the word ‘quixotic’ comes from Noah Webster’s *American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828), where its definition is ‘like Don Quixote; romantic to extravagance’.<sup>9</sup> This thesis makes two related claims. First, it argues that the fictional quixote was repeatedly deployed by authors in the early republic as a locus of contradiction, used to explore and articulate the complex double-consciousness that permeated both the literary and political landscape of the period. Secondly, it suggests that quixotic fiction can be read as a formative genre of the post-Revolutionary period, one which pushed against established fictional forms to interrogate both the possibility and the desirability of forging an autonomous American identity and a differentiated American art.

It would certainly be interesting to extend the notion of quixotic fiction as a founding type of American literature, to explore the place of the quixote in novels as disparate as Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) and John Dos Passos’s *Rosinante to the Road Again* (1922), Kathy Acker’s *Don Quixote, Which Was a Dream* (1986), and Paul Auster’s *Timbuktu* (1999), but the scope of such a project goes beyond the remit of this thesis. By imposing a limited time-frame of 1792 to 1815 (the years spanning the serial publication of Hugh Henry Brackenridge’s *Modern Chivalry*), I have chosen to focus upon a formative moment in social, political and cultural US history, a transitional era marked by a

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<sup>8</sup> Richard Hardack, looking specifically at the representation of female quixotes, has recently advocated the formulation of ‘a school of a Sadeian or Quixotic Woman’, ‘a distinct but intertextual genre’ that ‘would focus on a figure who is both victim and rebel, and one who destabilizes language and the definition of the human’ (‘Postscript’ to Linda S. Kauffman, ‘Not a Love Story: Retrospective and Prospective Epistolary Directions’, in *Epistolary Histories: Letters, Fiction, Culture*, ed. by Amanda Gilroy and W.M. Verhoeven [Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2000], pp. 216-221 [p. 221]).

<sup>9</sup> *American Dictionary*, 2 vols (New York: Converse, 1828); repr. as *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 3 vols (London: Black, Young and Young, 1832), III, pages unnumbered.

struggle to define and to realise appropriate ideals for the new republic. In order to assess the peculiar significance of quixotic characters for this particular generation of US authors, I will be reading fictional works alongside a range of social, political, and cultural phenomena that include the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798 and the Embargo Act of 1807, the ongoing US conflict with the so-called Barbary States and the French Revolution of 1789, the devastating yellow fever epidemic of 1793, and the cult of George Washington following his death in 1799.

In a monumental work of scholarship, *The Spanish Background of American Literature* (1955), Stanley T. Williams has acknowledged the early republic to be a seminal period in the flowering of Spanish preoccupations, but has nonetheless glanced over its fiction, referring only in passing to Hugh Henry Brackenridge, Tabitha Gilman Tenney and Royall Tyler. His chapter-length discussions of individual authors begin with Washington Irving, but even here he devotes little attention to the author's earlier, quixotic *History of New York* (1809), observing only that Irving 'had mastered *Don Quixote*' for his 'rollicking, burlesque *History of New York*'.<sup>10</sup>

In a doctoral thesis called '*Don Quixote* and American Fiction Through Mark Twain' (1967), Joseph Harry Harkey has discussed the early republic in far more detail, but is primarily concerned with ascertaining Cervantes' literary influence rather than exploring the ways in which US authors deployed the figure of the quixote to address anxieties that pertained to their own, deeply vexed situation. Harkey measures the texts he reads for the level of 'Cervantic influence' they display, and while he is unable to 'prove that the ironic satire of *Salmagundi* represents a direct Cervantic influence in Irving's style', he can declare *A History* to be 'the most highly-Cervantic' of the author's works'.<sup>11</sup> My own thesis aims to

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<sup>10</sup> Williams, II, 5.

<sup>11</sup> Harkey (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Tennessee, 1967), p. 134; p. 137. More recently, Ann Marie B. Cameron has discussed fictional reincarnations of Sancho Panza during the course of her dissertation, 'Sidekicks: A Study of Companions in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century American Novels' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Purdue University, 2000).

be both broader and narrower than Harkey's. It is broader because it reads the texts within their wider socio-political contexts, and narrower because it deals with a shorter time-span; it is broader because my working definition of a quixote—'like Don Quixote; romantic to extravagance'—is deliberately loose, encompassing figures that aren't necessarily self-conscious imitators of the knight, and narrower because, in common with much *Quixote* criticism, my thesis will focus in particular upon the figure of the quixote. Of course, the texts to be discussed frequently display a wider range of 'Cervantic influences'—a pseudonymous narrator in the mould of Cid Hamet Benengeli, an over-long narrative divided into two parts, a conversion to 'reason' at the end of the book, escapades in inns along the way, a Maritornes, a Sancho (often represented in the role of judge), and a de-stabilising, ironic narrative stance. Although this thesis does not set out to provide a comprehensive catalogue of intertextual examples, it will focus upon a number of suggestive Cervantic moments, treating them as a platform for examining a range of concerns in the narratives I discuss, issues that include (but are in no way limited by) the changing perceptions of women, the practice of benevolence, and of slavery, international and inter-generational relations, the place of fiction in the new republic, and the seismic transformation from 'classical republican thought' to 'the political economy of market capitalism'.<sup>12</sup>

As early as 1947, M. F. Heiser's excellent survey of 'Cervantes in the United States' recognised both the instability and the politicisation of Quixote in the early republic, using references from contemporary newspapers to suggest that 'Don Quixote in America breaks his lance for both political parties; for Freneau and the Jeffersonians, for the Wits and the Hamiltonians'. Working on the basis that 'satire is traditionally conservative', Heiser went on to conclude that Don Quixote was 'most effectively used by the enemies of change' in 'a period

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<sup>12</sup> Joyce Appleby, *Capitalism and a New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790s* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1984), p. 14; Bryce Traister, 'Libertinism and Authorship in America's Early Republic', *AL*, 72 (2000), 1-30 (p. 27).

marked by the ascendancy of Jeffersonian liberalism in America'.<sup>13</sup> However, by treating *Don Quixote* as a straightforward satire, Heiser overlooked the changing critical reception of *Don Quixote* in the eighteenth century and, as a result, underestimated the complexity of fictional quixotes in the new republic. For by the turn of the nineteenth century, Cervantes' knight was no longer perceived as a purely satirical butt; he was a valiant hero, too, a man of romantic ideals, persecuted by an uncomprehending and degenerate world.

Likewise, while I agree with Heiser that 'the flowering of the creative influence of Cervantes in the United States came early, between 1790 and 1815', I believe that he is wrong to attribute such a flowering to a lack of 'romantic self-consciousness' in the period; I would argue instead that a sense of ideological double-consciousness was integral to both the period and its fiction.<sup>14</sup> Leslie A. Fiedler has argued that the early republic represented 'a brief age of transition', when 'the Enlightenment and Sentimentalism exist side by side', and Emory Elliott, observing the 'cultural schizophrenia' of the early republic, has declared that 'there was even a brief period in the 1780s when the Romantic age of literature as a new religion and the poet as priest might have dawned in America'.<sup>15</sup> My own thesis suggests that as a nascent romantic idealism emerged alongside the more pragmatic, eighteenth-century discourse of Enlightenment thought, the contradictory quixote—whose 'particular mania and general rationality' rendered him a 'double character' in the eyes of many—would

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<sup>13</sup> *The Hispanic Review*, 15 (1947), 409-435 (p. 419; p. 420).

<sup>14</sup> Heiser, p. 435. On a factual note, Heiser is also wrong to claim that the *Port Folio*'s 1802 biography of Cervantes 'is without doubt the first review of *Don Quixote* to appear in American periodicals' (p. 419), for in 1792, the *American Apollo* published a translation of Vicente de los Ríos's biography of Cervantes, which included a discussion of the publication and the merits of *Don Quixote* ('The Life of Cervantes', *The American Apollo*, 1, Part II [1792], 101-103; 116-119).

<sup>15</sup> Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (London: Cape, 1967), p. 34; Elliott, *Revolutionary Writers: Literature and Authority in the New Republic, 1725-1810* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 15; p. 11.

become the most apposite of figures for discussing ideals and ideology in America's new republic.<sup>16</sup>

\* \* \*

Writing in 1807, Charles Brockden Brown proposed an unusual definition of American literature, one that disregarded national boundaries and was based upon the ownership rather than authorship of books, turning English publications into the intellectual and material property of an American readership. According to Brown's formulation, 'the whole annual produce of the British press being regularly transported to our shores, and furnishing almost the whole employment of our readers, British literature may truly be considered, so far as books are the property of their readers as well as of their writers, as likewise American'.<sup>17</sup> Recognising *Don Quixote*'s popularity in eighteenth-century Britain, and the significance of British translations, fictions, and literary criticism in the early US republic, Chapter One presents an overview of the highly coloured and contradictory guises of the knight in eighteenth-century British letters. It focuses in turn upon the changing critical perceptions of Don Quixote, the proliferation and domestication of the quixote in fictional works, and Tobias Smollett's controversial translation of *Don Quixote* in 1755.

Chapter Two provides an introduction to the role of the quixote in American culture and literature, opening with a survey of quixotic figures from colonial and Revolutionary America. It goes on to explore the relationship between quixotism and republicanism,<sup>18</sup> and it examines the bibliographical

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<sup>16</sup> 'The Life of Cervantes', in Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *The Life and Exploits of the Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote de la Mancha*, trans. by Charles Jarvis, 4 vols (London: Miller, 1801), I, xi-ciii (p. lxxxii). This biography was one of several translations and adaptations of the well-respected biography by Vincente de los Ríos, first published in the opulent Ibarra edition of 1780.

<sup>17</sup> 'Review of Literature', *The American Register; or, General Repository of History, Politics, & Science*, 1 (1807), 151-186 (p. 154).

<sup>18</sup> My use of the word 'republican' needs to be clarified here. The two senses in which I use the term are distinguished by the use of upper case (when referring to Jefferson's Republican Party)

history, cultural prevalence, and literary criticism of *Don Quixote* in the post-Revolutionary years. Examining the significance of Cervantes, in particular, this chapter suggests that the mysterious author and his mis-readable Quixote would provide compelling models of authorship for the disenfranchised writers of the early republic.

Chapter Three discusses the fiction of Hugh Henry Brackenridge, the controversial Pennsylvanian judge who was described by one of his peers as ‘Don Quixote, in one of his wildest moods’, when he rode through a rain storm ‘with nothing on but his hat and boots’, determined to save his suit from a drenching.<sup>19</sup> Beginning with ‘The Cave of Vanhest’ (1779), this chapter challenges the critical consensus surrounding the tale, complicating the image of ‘Vanhest’ as a frontier romance, and suggesting instead that it is a deeply-politicised tale, designed to warn Revolutionary readers against the dereliction of duty and the ignominy of an ill-timed retreat. The chapter turns next to Brackenridge’s gargantuan *Modern Chivalry: Containing the Adventures of Captain John Farrago, and Teague O’Regan, his Servant* (1792-1815), a repeatedly-extended fiction that foregrounds both narrative and political instability, and stages a series of ideological debates, examining the social and political upheavals of Pennsylvania’s transappalachian frontier. I argue that *Modern Chivalry* shows its readers how the discourses of republicanism and quixotism can be co-opted by an educated elite in order to resist change and naturalise existing power-relations.<sup>20</sup>

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and lower case (when referring to the far broader ‘republican’ ethos that Americans regarded as the ideological cornerstone of their new nation). The complexities of the latter will be discussed at greater length in Chapter Two.

<sup>19</sup> David Paul Brown, *The Forum; or, Forty Years Full Practice at the Philadelphia Bar* (Philadelphia: Small, 1856), p. 405.

<sup>20</sup> Individual volumes of *Modern Chivalry* were published in 1792 (Part I, vol. 1), 1792 (Part I, vol. 2), 1793 (Part I, vol. 3), 1797 (Part I, vol. 4), 1804 (Part II, [vol. 1]), 1805 (Part II, vol. 2), 1815 (Part II, vol. 4). Published in Pittsburgh in 1793, Part I, vol. 3 was the first literary work to be published west of the Allegheny Mountains. The first collected edition of *Modern Chivalry* was published in Richmond and Philadelphia in 1815. The edition I use is *Modern Chivalry*, ed. by Claude M. Newlin (New York and London: Hafner, 1968). Future references to this edition are prefixed by MC and given in parentheses in the text.

Royall Tyler's *The Algerine Captive; or, The Life and Adventures of Doctor Updike Underhill* (1797), belongs to a rash of Barbary captivity narratives—historical and fictional—written in the wake of post-Revolutionary conflict between Algiers and the USA. Two American ships were seized in 1785, and eleven more in 1793, leaving over a hundred American sailors held hostage in Algiers, sold into slavery and waiting for their ransoms to be paid.<sup>21</sup> While critics have persistently praised the literary patriotism of Tyler's preface and the 'home-spun' American scenes of Volume One, Chapter Four contends that the architectonics of *The Algerine Captive* belie both the patriotism of its preface and the xenophobia of its final page. I read *The Algerine Captive* as the story of a disaffected American man of letters, a literary quixote whose American experience reveals his personal and ideological alienation from his countrymen, and whose Barbary captivity reveals an untimely attachment to North African ways.<sup>22</sup>

Charles Brockden Brown began writing *Arthur Mervyn; or, Memoirs of the Year 1793* (1799-1800) in 1798, the year of the Alien and Sedition Acts, and a time of near-hysterical xenophobia in the USA, particularly where French and Irish immigrants were concerned. Set in 1793, the novel deals with another national panic, this one triggered by the yellow fever epidemic that spread across the continent and killed around 2,500 Philadelphians alone. Delineating the horrors of yellow fever and the dire effects of commercial fraud and financial speculation, *Arthur Mervyn* is not a self-evident candidate for the title of quixotic

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<sup>21</sup> According to Robert J. Allison, there were 'seven hundred Americans held captive in the Muslim states between 1785 and 1815' (*The Crescent Obscured: The United States and the Muslim World, 1776-1815* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995], p. 107).

<sup>22</sup> The first American edition of *The Algerine Captive* was published in Walpole, New Hampshire. A second edition followed in 1816. In Britain, *The Algerine Captive* was first published in 1802, in London. In 1804, it was serialised in *The Lady's Magazine*. The edition I use is *The Algerine Captive; or, The Life and Adventures of Doctor Updike Underhill, Six Years a Prisoner Among the Algerines*, ed. by Jack B. Moore (London: Robinson, 1802; repr. Gainesville, FL: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1967). Future references to this edition are prefixed by AC and given in parentheses in the text.



fiction. Unlike *Modern Chivalry* or *Female Quixotism*, with titles that emphasise their Cervantic debt, and unlike Brown's own quixotic *Memoirs of Stephen Calvert* (1799-1800), *Arthur Mervyn* makes no reference to the Spaniard or his work. Nevertheless, Brown's yellow fever novel is notorious for its narrative instability and admired for its 'full, deliberate, and devastating' irony,<sup>23</sup> and *Arthur Mervyn* bears more than a passing resemblance to Don Quixote. Both protagonists are committed idealists regarded by many as madmen, peripatetic crusaders who leave behind their farms and set about putting the world to rights, self-styled vigilantes who become the heroes of a narrative that bears their name and relates their deeds.<sup>24</sup>

Some critics have identified the visionary bent of Brown's fiction with the radical writings of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft; others have placed his whimsical plots and his paranormal visions at the start of an American Gothic.<sup>25</sup> In Chapter Five, I read *Arthur Mervyn* as an unexpected example of quixotic fiction, one which tells the story of a republican quixote whose thorough-

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<sup>23</sup> Michael Davitt Bell, *The Development of American Romance: The Sacrifice of Relation* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 59.

<sup>24</sup> Part 1 of *Arthur Mervyn* was first published in 1799 by Maxwell in Philadelphia. Part 2 was published the following year by Hopkins in New York. In 1803, both parts were published in London by Minerva Press, and in 1827 they were republished as part of *The Novels of Charles Brockden Brown*, 7 vols (Boston: Goodrich, 1827). The edition referred to in this thesis can be found in Charles Brockden Brown, *Three Gothic Novels*, ed. by Sydney J. Krause (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1998), pp. 229-637. This volume reproduces the text of the 1980 Kent State University Press edition of *Arthur Mervyn*, which is based on Maxwell's 1799 edition of Part 1 and Hopkins' 1800 edition of Part 2. Future references to this volume are prefixed by AM and referred to in parentheses in the text.

<sup>25</sup> Amongst the former, Steven Watts's 'Bibliographic Essay' mentions David Lee Clark, *Charles Brockden Brown: Pioneer Voice of America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1952). Examples of the latter include Harry R. Warfel, *Charles Brockden Brown: American Gothic Novelist* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1949) and Bill Christophersen, *The Apparition in the Glass: Charles Brockden Brown's American Gothic* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1993). For a detailed survey of Brown criticism, see Watts, *The Romance of Real Life: Charles Brockden Brown and the Origins of American Culture* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), pp. 225-41.

going avocation of a waning ideology collides with the materialistic individualism of 1790s Philadelphia. I argue that *Arthur Mervyn* is not only the funniest of Brown's fictions; it also presents a serious debate upon the privatisation of virtue, the suspect nature of the domestic sphere, and the parlous condition of America's moral well-being. To my knowledge, this is the first time that *Arthur Mervyn* has been read through the lens of *Don Quixote*, though William Hedges has remarked that Mervyn can be seen as 'Quixote with a trace of the Panza in him', and Paul Witherington, in an essay on *Edgar Huntly*, has observed that, 'in his experimentation with the voices of hero and clown, Brown is working in the tradition of Cervantes, Fielding and Brackenridge'.<sup>26</sup> As Michael Warner has put it, 'the plot of *Arthur Mervyn* cannot be summarized intelligibly';<sup>27</sup> because of, or perhaps in spite of, its narrative complexity, I have included a detailed synopsis of Brown's notoriously complex plot in an appendix at the end of the thesis.

In his later years, Thomas Jefferson would hail his Presidential election as 'the revolution of 1800', brought about by 'the suffrage of the people';<sup>28</sup> like the Revolution of '76, though, the change of administration offered little prospect of either independence or of suffrage for the women of the new republic. Written by Tabitha Gilman Tenney and published in 1801, *Female Quixotism: Exhibited in the Romantic Opinions and Extravagant Adventures of Dorcasina Sheldon*, lays bare the paucity of life for American women at the turn of the new Jeffersonian century. In Chapter Six, I argue that Tenney exploits the interpretative instability of the quixotic figure in order to produce a text that ridicules the self-deluded

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<sup>26</sup> Hedges, 'Brown and the Culture of Contradictions', *EAL*, 9 (1974), 107-142 (p. 125); Witherington, "'Not My Tongue Only": Form and Language in Brown's *Edgar Huntly*', in *Critical Essays on Charles Brockden Brown*, ed. by Bernard Rosenthal (Boston, MA: Hall, 1981), pp. 164-183 (p. 169).

<sup>27</sup> Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 152.

<sup>28</sup> Letter to Judge Spencer Roane (6 September, 1819), in Jefferson, *Writings*, ed. by Merrill D. Peterson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 1425.

spinster even as it critiques the period's self-sacrificing ideals of republican wife and mother.<sup>29</sup>

Chapter Seven moves forward to 1809 and north to New York, a city still reeling from the disastrous consequences of Thomas Jefferson's 1807 Embargo. In this final chapter, I suggest that Washington Irving's *A History of New York, From the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty* (1809) throws down the gauntlet to a generation of superannuated political patriarchs. Burlesquing the didactic desiderata and romanticising propensities of post-Revolutionary historiography, Irving articulates a double-edged attitude towards the past and confronts the difficulties faced by the early republic's post-heroic generation.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Female Quixotism* was first published by Thomas & Andrews in Boston. Further editions were issued in 1825, 1829, and 1841. The edition I use is *Female Quixotism: Exhibited in the Romantic Opinions and Extravagant Adventures of Dorcasina Sheldon*, ed. by Jean Nienkamp and Andrea Collins, with a foreword by Cathy N. Davidson (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). Future references to this edition are prefixed by FQ and given in parentheses in the text.

<sup>30</sup> The first edition of *A History of New York* was published by Bradford and Inskeep in Philadelphia. Revised and updated editions were issued in 1812, 1819, 1824, 1829, and 1848. Based on the initial *History* of 1809, the edition I use is *A History of New York From the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty*, in *History, Tales and Sketches*, ed. by James W. Tuttleton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 363-720. Future references to this edition are prefixed by HNY and given in parentheses in the text.

## 1. An 'Inconsistent Discourse': Don Quixote in British Letters

This inchanter must have assisted thee in thy journey, tho' thou didst not perceive it; for, some there are of that class, who will take up a knight-errant while he is asleep in his bed, and without his knowing any thing of the matter, he shall awake next morning in some place more than a thousand leagues from the house where he took up his lodging the night before.

Don Quixote to Sancho Panza (DQ, 247)

The Don Quixote that General Washington encountered in his copy of Tobias Smollett's 1755 translation was himself no pure-blooded Spaniard. Literally speaking, this particular Manchegan had actually arrived from Great Britain, where he had been re-imagined by a Scottish writer and re-issued by a firm of London printers. Nor was he the only fictional quixote to make the arduous Atlantic crossing. Colonial America had always stocked its bookshops and loaded its pedlars with the products of British publishing houses, and during the 1790s the Anglophilia of many Americans led to an astonishing resurgence in the demand for British goods, including the literary wares of Richardson, Fielding, Smollett and Swift.<sup>31</sup> In his preface to *The Algerine Captive*, Royall Tyler

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<sup>31</sup> For a more detailed discussion of literary importation to the USA, see Stephen Botein, 'The Anglo-American Book Trade Before 1776: Personnel and Strategies', in *Printing and Society in Early America*, ed. by William L. Joyce and others (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1983), pp. 48-82; John Clive and Bernard Bailyn, 'England's Cultural Provinces: Scotland and America', *WMQ*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser., 11 (1954), 200-213; Giles Barber, 'Books from the Old World and for the New: The British International Trade in Books in the Eighteenth Century', *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 151 (1976), 185-224.

lamented that ‘while so many books are vended, they are not of our own manufacture’ (AC, x), and more recently, Cathy Davidson has pointed out that Hocquet Caritat, ‘with the 1804 catalogue for his New York library of fiction, could include only some forty American titles in a list of almost fifteen hundred works—despite what seems to have been his concerted effort to gather as many native novels as possible’.<sup>32</sup> In May, 1804, the *Monthly Anthology and Boston Review* reprinted an article from the *London Review* of 1799, a critical piece that observed ‘with exultation’ that ‘it has happened as [David Hume] foretold. From the port of London, from Glasgow, from Liverpool, there is a very large annual exportation of British books to NORTH AMERICA. In Philadelphia, at New-York, and in the other more considerable towns of the American States, a very great diversity of English publications continually issue from the press’.<sup>33</sup> With the United States reprinting as well as simply retailing English books, literary colonisation would seem to be complete. Indeed, perceiving the westward migration of English letters as a prophecy realised, a destiny fulfilled, the article concluded that ‘distance of place seems, here, to operate with somewhat of the same efficacy as remoteness of time; and contributes to make the Americans regard our best English authors, with a veneration greater than they have been able to command at home’.<sup>34</sup>

In September 1805, the *Monthly Anthology* once again addressed the issue of literary colonisation, but this time from an anxious American perspective. A column entitled ‘American Poetry’ bewailed the humiliating lack of a world class American poet and laid the blame on the unadventurous and imitative tendencies of native writers. Oblivious to the poetic materials latent in their own half-savage land, they were instead ‘contented with attempting to revive the lilies and roses of Europe’, willing to receive their ‘riches by inheritance’, and ‘import the style and

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<sup>32</sup> *Revolution and the Word* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 11.

<sup>33</sup> ‘London Review’, *The Monthly Anthology and Boston Review*, 1 (1804), 323-25 (p. 323; p. 324).

<sup>34</sup> ‘London Review’, p. 325.

imagery of the poets of England, as much as our merchants do its wares'.<sup>35</sup> Along with George Washington, whose well-thumbed Smollett translation shamed the opulent but unread Spanish edition he also possessed, the majority of Americans did not make Quixote's acquaintance in his native tongue, but in English. The Quixote they came to know was mediated through the eyes and minds of the English translators whose works were retailed in American bookshops, the English novelists whose narratives rolled off American presses, and the English critics whose articles were reprinted in American journals and magazines.<sup>36</sup> Royall Tyler may have used his preface to warn of the moral danger posed by reading English novels—'while the fancy is enchanted, the heart is corrupted', he writes (AC, x)—but when his own fictional quixote, Updike Underhill, '*mounteth his Nag*', spouteth his Greek, '*and setteth out full speed*', in quest of '*Practice, Fame, and Fortune*' (AC, I, 104), he is not only a descendant of the seventeenth-century Spanish knight; he is a cousin of the English quixotes, an extended family of eccentric Englishfolk with Parson Adams at its head and Launcelot Greaves ushering in a rising generation. Any study of America's fictional quixotes, then, must begin with a discussion of the Don's place in English culture, his representation in the prologues, illustrations, and translations of eighteenth-century editions of *Don Quixote*, and his numerous reincarnations in the plays and novels of writers such as Henry Fielding, Richard Graves, and Charlotte Lennox.

### ***Exporting Quixote: Changing Perceptions of Cervantes' Knight***

Admiring the uniqueness of *Don Quixote* in the prologue to his own translation of 1700, Peter Motteux would only get it half right: 'an Original without a Precedent', the text most probably was; 'a Pattern without a Copy' it certainly

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<sup>35</sup> 'American Poetry', *The Monthly Anthology and Boston Review*, 2 (1805), 460-61 (pp. 460-61).

<sup>36</sup> *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews*, for example, was published in Philadelphia in both 1791 and 1801. Sterne's *Works* were published as early as 1774 in Philadelphia, 1804-05 in Harrisburgh, PA, and 1813-14 in New York.

was not.<sup>37</sup> As though conveyed by enchantment, the figure and the text of Don Quixote travelled swiftly across seventeenth-century Europe, eliciting translations, theatrical adaptations and a stream of copy-cat quixotes. Despite suspicions of poor translation—the belief that ‘no book’ has ‘suffered so much by a translation as this has done’—and the perceived ‘Spanishness’ of the book, which was frequently read as a satire of Iberian ideology and manners, *Don Quixote* became a widely disseminated, virtually de-nationalised classic, one that moved effortlessly across national boundaries, flourishing in new soils and taking root in the popular imagination.<sup>38</sup> J. G. Lockhart, in his 1822 ‘Life of Cervantes’, commented upon the transnationality of Cervantes’ well-travelled text, declaring that while ‘*Don Quixote* is thus the peculiar property, as well as the peculiar pride of the Spaniards’, it is ‘in another, and in a yet larger point of view [...] the property and pride of the whole of the cultivated world’.<sup>39</sup> Washington Irving, meanwhile, who undertook some research for the Lockhart biography, and did himself consider translating Cervantes’ novels, remarked that ‘Cervantes is one of those characters that belong to the world & in whom all civilized Nations take an interest’.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> ‘The Translator’s Preface’, *The History of the Renown’d Don Quixote de la Mancha*, trans. by Peter Motteux, 4 vols (London: Buckley, 1700-1712), I, pages unnumbered. In fact, the first imitation of *Don Quixote* appeared as early as 1614, with the publication of Fernandez de Avellaneda’s fake sequel, entitled *The Second Volume of the Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha*. This is the plagiarism that inspired Cervantes to publish his own Part II and impelled Quixote to change his route and thus his story in order to contradict the Avellaneda text, and ‘demonstrate to the wide world, the falshood [*sic*] of this modern historian’ (DQ, 767).

<sup>38</sup> ‘Critical Remarks on Some Celebrated Authors’, *The Bee; or, Literary Weekly Intelligencer*, 15 (1793), 265-275 (p. 268).

<sup>39</sup> J. G. Lockhart, ‘Life of Cervantes’, in Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *The History of the Ingenious Gentleman, Don Quixote of la Mancha*, trans. by Peter Motteux, 5 vols (Edinburgh: Constable, 1822), pp. v-lxiv (p. lviii).

<sup>40</sup> Letter to John Murray II (16 October, 1828), in Irving, *Letters* (vol. I: 1802-1823; vol. II: 1823-1838), ed. by Ralph M. Aderman, Herbert L. Kleinfield and Jenifer S. Banks, in *The Complete Works of Washington Irving*, XXIII, vol. II, 344.

In his *Don Quixote in England: The Aesthetics of Laughter*, Ronald Paulson has catalogued the extent to which the English took a particular interest in the Spanish hidalgo, ‘producing the first complete translation into another language (Shelton’s in 1612), the first foreign reference to Quixote (George Wilkins, 1606), the first critical edition of the Spanish text (Lord Carteret’s, 1738), the first published commentary (John Bowle’s, 1781), and the first biography and “portrait” of Cervantes (in the Carteret edition)’.<sup>41</sup> During the eighteenth century, an astounding forty-five editions of *Don Quixote* were published in English (there were only thirty-three editions in Spanish over the same period), and the same century also saw numerous appropriations of the knight in British fiction, ranging from *The Spiritual Quixote* (1773) to *The City Quixote* (1785), *The Philosophical Quixote* (1782) to *The Political Quixote* (1797), *The Benevolent Quixote* (1791) to *The Infernal Quixote* (1801), and *The Modern Quixote* (1763) to *Angelica; or, Quixote in Petticoats. A Comedy in Two Acts* (1758).<sup>42</sup> The quixote may not have taken the titular role in *Joseph Andrews* (1742), but Fielding’s title page nonetheless declared itself a history ‘Written in Imitation of The *Manner* of CERVANTES, Author of *Don Quixote*’.<sup>43</sup> Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* (1759-67), meanwhile, contained nearly as many quixotes as there were characters in the book, and Smollett’s *Sir Launcelot Greaves* (1762) told the story of a handsome young knight who had ‘set up for a modern Don Quixote’, in order to wage ‘perpetual war’ against ‘the foes of virtue and decorum’.<sup>44</sup>

Lockhart’s ‘Life of Cervantes’ would insist in 1822 that Cervantes’ intent was not to satirise the romance genre *per se*, but to ‘extirpat[e] the race of slavish imitators, who, in his day, were deluging all Europe, and more particularly Spain,

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<sup>41</sup> *Aesthetics of Laughter* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. ix.

<sup>42</sup> My data comes from Albert F. Calvert’s tabulated ‘Synopsis of the Editions of *Don Quixote*’, in *The Life of Cervantes* (London and New York: Bodley Head, 1905), p. 139.

<sup>43</sup> *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews, and of his Friend, Mr. Abraham Adams*, 2 vols (London: Millar, 1742), title page (repr. in *Joseph Andrews*, 1999, p. 47).

<sup>44</sup> Smollett, *The Life and Adventures of Sir Launcelot Greaves*, ed. by David Evans (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 12; p. 13.



with eternal caricatures of the venerable old romance'.<sup>45</sup> Yet there was clearly something about Cervantes' text that seemed to liberate slavish imitators and license literary borrowing, to authenticate fakes and disdain originality. Cervantes, of course, had used his own preface to disclaim the narrative, describing himself as merely 'the step-father of Don Quixote', the editor of a work that had been written by Cid Hamete Benengeli and translated into Spanish by a Moorish scribe (DQ, 21). In 1758, the unknown writer of *Angelica; or, Quixote in Petticoats* prefaced the work with a bizarre dedication to the actor and theatre manager, David Garrick. In this dedication, the dramatist thanks Garrick for his courteous refusal to stage the play, a refusal which Garrick has attributed 'not to the want of any merit in the performance, but rather to the elegant manner in which Sir Richard Steele has handled the same subject in his comedy of *The Tender Husband, or Accomplished Fools*'.<sup>46</sup>

Gratified to discover that merely originality is lacking, the author goes on to acknowledge another literary debt, informing the public that 'the character of *Angelica* and the heroic part of *Careless*, is not only borrow'd, but entirely taken, from the female Quixote, of the ingenious Mrs. Lenox [*sic*]'.<sup>47</sup> But this is simply untrue: *Angelica*'s rakish *Careless* bears little resemblance to the sober Glanville of Lennox's tale, while *Angelica* herself, although 'run mad in romance', experiences no moment of self-realisation, no reconciliation with reality, and is, in this respect, most unlike her counterpart in *The Female Quixote*, who ultimately rejects romance and agrees to marry her common-sensical cousin.<sup>48</sup> Renouncing any claims to originality, the author of *Angelica* clearly exaggerates literary debts and downplays his or her own creative contribution, so eager is he or she to assert the derivative status of the play. For this dramatist at least, then, imitation is a virtue not a crime; for American authors, too, struggling to find their literary feet

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<sup>45</sup> *Don Quixote*, 1822, p. lxi.

<sup>46</sup> *Angelica; or, Quixote in Petticoats* (London: the Author, 1758), p. [iii].

<sup>47</sup> *Angelica*, p. [iv].

<sup>48</sup> *Angelica*, p. 10.

in the early republic, the concept of a positive literary borrowing would prove an extremely enabling aspect of the *Quixote* legacy.

Alongside this explosion of interest in all things quixotic, eighteenth-century Britain saw a remarkable shift in attitudes towards Cervantes' narrative and his knight. At the start of the century, most scholars saw Cervantes as an enlightened advocate for rational thought and *Don Quixote* as a successful satire of the romance genre; by the century's end, however, readers saw in Don Quixote the makings of a true Romantic, a tragic hero for the modern age. This shift has been explored at length by Stuart M. Tave, in *The Amiable Humorist: A Study in the Comic Theory and Criticism of the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries*. Tave has described how, 'once totally deluded, next odd but good and lovable, [Don Quixote] then became a man with an inner light that shone through his seemingly cracked head, an imagination that opened a more immediate glimpse of the possibilities of human greatness than a merely logical understanding could attain'.<sup>49</sup>

An exponent of the earlier critical stance, Charles Jarvis used his 'Translator's Preface' of 1742 to argue that *Don Quixote* 'was calculated to ridicule that false system of honour and gallantry, which prevailed even 'till our author's time'.<sup>50</sup> Gregorio Mayáns I Siscár's 'Vida de Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra', translated into English and reproduced in the same edition, likewise demanded of its readers: 'Cou'd there possibly be a stronger, or more judicious Satire against Writers of Knight-Errantry?' This was a rhetorical question, we assume, since the biography had already acclaimed *Quixote* as the 'powerful and most effectual Remedy' that had 'purg'd the Minds of all *Europe*, and cur'd them

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<sup>49</sup> *Amiable Humorist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp. 160-61. Anthony Close has also argued that 'there developed in eighteenth-century England, from approximately 1740 onwards, a movement of opinion anticipating the Romantic idealisation of *Don Quixote*' (*The Romantic Approach to 'Don Quixote': A Critical History of the Romantic Tradition in 'Quixote' Criticism* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978], p. 13).

<sup>50</sup> 'The Translator's Preface', in Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *The Life and Exploits of the Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote de la Mancha*, trans. by Charles Jarvis, 2 vols (London: Tonson and Dodsley, 1742), pp. iii-xxiii (p. vii).

of that inveterate radicated Fondness they had for those contagious Books'.<sup>51</sup> By the 1760s, though, Henry Brooke's *The Fool of Quality* (1766-70), a bestseller in its day, was devoting several pages to a panegyric on Don Quixote, applauding the Spaniard as 'the greatest hero among the moderns', the 'divinely superior' 'hero of the Mancha! who went about righting of wrongs, and redressing of injuries, lifting up the fallen, and pulling down those whom iniquity had exalted'.<sup>52</sup> And by the time that Byron was writing *Don Juan* (1819-24), the poet could declare *Quixote* to be 'the saddest' of 'all tales', soberly concluding that 'tis his virtue makes him mad'.<sup>53</sup>

In 1819, William Hazlitt used his lecture 'On the English Novelists' to express his 'greatest veneration and love for the knight':

The character of Don Quixote himself is one of the most perfect disinterestedness. He is an enthusiast of the most amiable kind; of a nature equally open, gentle, and generous; a lover of truth and justice; and one who had brooded over the fine dreams of chivalry and romance, till they had robbed him of himself, and cheated his brain into a belief of their reality. There cannot be a greater mistake than to consider Don Quixote as a merely satirical work, or as a vulgar attempt to explode 'the long-forgotten order of chivalry.' There could be no need to explode what no longer existed. Besides, Cervantes himself was a man of the most sanguine and enthusiastic temperament; and even through the crazed and battered figure of the knight, the spirit of chivalry shines out with undiminished lustre; as if the author had half-designed to revive the example of past ages, and once more 'witch the world with noble horsemanship'.<sup>54</sup>

According to Hazlitt, it is an '*instinct of the imagination*' that 'stamps the character of genius' on 'productions of art', and he sees in *Don Quixote* precisely such an instinct, with its yearning after ideal worlds, and its 'aspiration after

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<sup>51</sup> 'The Life of Michael de Cervantes Saavedra', trans. by Mr. Ozell, in *Don Quixote*, 1742, pp. 1-90 (p. 62; p. 48).

<sup>52</sup> *The Fool of Quality; or, The History of Henry Earl of Moreland*, 5 vols (London: Johnston, 1766-1770; repr. New York and London: Garland, 1979), I, 152; I, 153.

<sup>53</sup> *Don Juan*, ed. by T. G. Steffan, E. Steffan and W. W. Pratt (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 445.

<sup>54</sup> *Lectures on the English Comic Writers* (London: Dent; New York: Dutton, 1963), p. 108.

imaginary good, that indescribable longing after something more than we possess'.<sup>55</sup> Suspended between the real and the ideal, struggling to reconcile a powerful imagination with an impoverished reality, Hazlitt's Quixote stands up for honour and justice; he is both enchanted by and enchanter in the bewitching world of an ideal text. It is not hard to see how Hazlitt's Romantic Quixote might have struck a chord with a generation of post-Revolutionary Americans, torn between the lofty ideals of Revolution and the more mundane reality of making ends meet, struggling to reconcile the self-sacrificing tenets of republicanism with the acquisitive practices of 'modern liberal capitalism'.<sup>56</sup>

Ronald Paulson has offered a more specific and politically focussed reading of the eighteenth-century shift in 'Quixote' criticism, with his assertion that a 'new Quixote emerges from the traumatic events of the Forty-Five'.<sup>57</sup> Paulson writes that 'after the Forty-Five—the last attempt of the Jacobites to recover power—the emphasis shifted toward nostalgia and reflection; inspiration and chivalry were being revived, pointing toward the years when Quixote would be no longer a nexus of theories of laughter but a symbol of sublimity'.<sup>58</sup> Paulson is right to politicise responses to Quixote: the knight was appropriated by opposing political factions in eighteenth-century England much as he would be in the hostile political climate of 1790s America. For the Tories, he functioned as 'a symbol of the unbridled imagination; for the Whigs a symbol of outmoded chivalric assumptions'. And read by Swift as 'a Tory-Ancient satire on reading

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<sup>55</sup> *English Comic Writers*, pp. 109-110.

<sup>56</sup> Steven Watts is one of several historians to persuasively argue that 'the decades from 1790 to 1820 encompassed a massive, multifaceted transformation away from republican traditions and toward modern liberal capitalism in America'. According to Watts, 'this sea change involved the consolidation of a market economy and society, a liberal political structure and ideology, and a bourgeois culture of self-controlled individualism' (*The Republic Reborn: War and the Making of Liberal America, 1790-1820* [Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987], p. xvii). Joyce Appleby has also outlined the shift from eighteenth century classical republicanism towards the Jeffersonian liberalism of the nineteenth century in *Capitalism and a New Social Order*.

<sup>57</sup> *Aesthetics of Laughter*, p. 185.

<sup>58</sup> *Aesthetics of Laughter*, p. xv.

the wrong books (that is, modern books with Whig values)', his story was 'transformed by Addison into a blueprint for Whig-Modern politics'.<sup>59</sup>

My only reservation concerning Paulson's theory is this: by pinpointing one specific year and one specific political event as the critical watershed in 'Quixote' criticism, he understates the remarkable fluidity and dissent that characterised the critical reception of the book throughout the eighteenth century. After all, Paulson's post-forty-five Quixote was augured as early as 1700, when Peter Motteux suggested that a satire of chivalric ideals 'was far from the Author's Design', an argument evidenced by the 'many noble Sentiments of Love and Honour through his Book'.<sup>60</sup> And as late as 1792, an 'Essay on Quixotism' in Richard Graves's *The Spiritual Quixote* takes it for granted that 'the profession of chivalry has been exhibited to us by Cervantes, as an object of ridicule'.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, in 1801, a translation of Vincente de los Ríos's 'Vida de Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, y Análisis del Quixote' (1780) continued to insist that Cervantes' 'object was to excite the laughter, and promote the diversion of his readers, by delineating a Knight-errant so wild and extravagant, that his very name, when repeated, might render Knight-errantry both ridiculous and despicable'.<sup>62</sup>

### ***Containing Quixote and 'The Import of the Frontispiece'***

A prevailing taste for scholarship meant that eighteenth-century editions of *Don Quixote* were invariably augmented by prefatory essays, biographies, manifestos and apologies, penned by translators, editors, critics and printers. The Tonson and Dodsley edition of 1742 even followed its frontispiece with a helpful essay by John Oldfield, entitled 'The Import of the Frontispiece'. Like many of the editorial additions, this one sought to rein in interpretations of Cervantes'

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<sup>59</sup> *Aesthetics of Laughter*, p. 41; p. 29.

<sup>60</sup> 'Translator's Preface', *Don Quixote*, 1700, I, pages unnumbered.

<sup>61</sup> *The Spiritual Quixote; or, The Summer's Ramble of Mr. Geoffry Wildgoose*, 2 vols (London: vol. 1, Tegg; vol. 2, Crosby, 1808), I, 34.

<sup>62</sup> 'The Life of Cervantes', in Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *The Life and Exploits of the Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote de la Mancha*, trans. by Charles Jarvis, 4 vols (London: Miller, 1801), pp. xi-ciii (pp. lxxvii-iii).

rambling narrative, reading John Vanderbank's illustration as an 'Allegorical Title Page' and a straightforward manifesto of Cervantes' satirical aims (fig. 1).<sup>63</sup> According to Oldfield, the besieged Mount Parnassus of the frontispiece, 'shewn in the possession of the monsters and chimeras of the books of chivalry, will sufficiently serve to intimate the preposterous and disorderly state of the poetical world at that time'.<sup>64</sup> Determined to impose a definitive reading upon the text as well as its frontispiece, Oldfield concludes that 'the main scope and endeavour of the author, in this performance, was, to banish from the writings of imagination and fancy the chimerical, unnatural, and absurd conceits, that prevailed so much in his time'. For this controlling critic, determined to brand the text a satire and contain it within generic parameters, disorderly interpretations are as undesirable as disorderly fictions, hence his determination to pre-empt unruly exegeses by submitting his own, tidy reading of the plate and text.

William Miller's 1801 edition of *Don Quixote* reveals a similar desire to rein in readings of the errant knight and his sprawling narrative. Perturbed by Cervantes' 'great want of exactness both as to time and geography', this edition works to redress the imprecision by mapping the geographical and chronological progress of Quixote as he travels through La Mancha.<sup>65</sup> The 'Chronological Plan of Don Quixote' culminates with a 'Plan and Duration of the Whole Fable', which calculates that the time-span of the narrative is precisely '5 months and 12 days'.<sup>66</sup> Disorientated readers can also turn to 'A Map of that part of Spain which contains the Travels of Don Quixote', where 'the Situations of his various Adventures' are 'pointed out' for the benefit of the reader, in a chart that fabricates locative certainties and encourages pointed fingers to plot his route and pin him down.<sup>67</sup> Quixote is clearly not the only figure that this 1801 edition is determined to

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<sup>63</sup> Oldfield, 'Advertisement Concerning the Prints', in *Don Quixote*, 1742, pp. xxv-xxxii (p. xxxii).

<sup>64</sup> *Don Quixote*, 1742, p. xxxi.

<sup>65</sup> *Don Quixote*, 1801, p. cii.

<sup>66</sup> *Don Quixote*, 1801, p. cxxii.

<sup>67</sup> *Don Quixote*, 1801, opp. p. cxxii.





Fig. 1 John Vanderbank, 'Frontispiece', *Don Quixote*, 1742

‘contain’: with its tables, keys, plans, and ‘Directions for Placing the Plates and Map’, this edition seems determined to frog-march readers through the interpretative route it has so painstakingly carved out.

English editions of *Don Quixote* were not the only texts desirous to contain the knight. Having wholeheartedly imported the Spanish hidalgo into English fiction, eighteenth-century novelists and playwrights were eager to strip him of his Spanish traits and shoehorn him into English culture, positioning quixotic figures within the English establishment in order to establish the quixotism of the English nation. Fielding’s *Don Quixote in England* (1734), the most literal of the literary imports, sees the ‘original’ Don arrived in England in search of the ‘plenteous stock of monsters’ that reputedly inhabit the island.<sup>68</sup> No sooner has the knight set up house in a provincial inn than he is invited to stand for parliament, to become a representative of the English people, while his squire declares himself ‘so fond of the English roast beef and strong beer, that I don’t intend ever to set my foot in Spain again’.<sup>69</sup> Written in a century that is fraught with Anglo-Spanish tensions, this play might be expected to satirise Spanish manners; instead, it looks much closer to home for the subjects of its satire. As the drama unfolds, it comes as little surprise that Don Quixote and Sancho Panza should be so seamlessly acculturated to their new surroundings; the transition proves a relatively painless one not in spite of, but rather because of, their status as ‘a couple of madmen’,<sup>70</sup> for in Fielding’s England, as in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, ‘All mankind are mad, ’tis plain’.<sup>71</sup> From materialistic Sir Loveland and avaricious innkeeper Guzzle, to pedantic lawyer Brief and bloody-minded Doctor Drench, Fielding constructs a community of quixotes ‘more mad than [the knight] himself’, each one riding his own hobby-horse, giving a free rein to his own

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<sup>68</sup> Henry Fielding, *Don Quixote in England*, in *Plays and Poems, IV*, in *The Complete Works of Henry Fielding*, 16 vols (London: Heinemann, 1903), XI, 5-71 (p. 67).

<sup>69</sup> *Quixote in England*, p. 25.

<sup>70</sup> *Quixote in England*, p. 31.

<sup>71</sup> *Quixote in England*, p. 70. Oliver Goldsmith’s man in black is likewise described as ‘an humourist in a nation of humourists’ (*Selected Writings*, ed. by John Lucas [Manchester: Carcanet, 1988], p. 112).



particular quirk, and oblivious to his blinkered vision. Laurence Sterne takes the concept of quixotic communities still further in *Tristram Shandy* (1760-67), where eccentricity is the norm and quixotism is a family trait. It is here that we find the most striking disparity between the English quixotes and their American counterparts: while English authors work to integrate quixotes into their fictive communities, happily depicting whole families of quixotic figures revelling in their collective quirkiness, American quixotes, as we shall see in the following chapters, more frequently stand alone and on the edge, without either family or profession to confer upon them a meaningful place in society.

Tristram Shandy may refuse to 'confine' himself 'to any man's rules' for writing, flouting conventions of plot, chronology, and language in the cock and bull tale he writes,<sup>72</sup> but Tobias Smollett congratulates Cervantes upon his ability 'to set proper bounds to the excursions of his imagination' (DQ, 2). And in Richard Graves's prefatory 'Apology' to *The Spiritual Quixote*, the author declares himself 'convinced that Don Quixote or Gil Blas, Clarissa or Sir Charles Grandison, will furnish more hints for correcting the follies and regulating the morals of young persons, and impress them more forcibly on their minds, than volumes of severe precepts seriously delivered and dogmatically enforced'.<sup>73</sup> *The Spiritual Quixote* might be a comic work, but Graves makes it sound more like a House of Correction, where the irregular morals of young, impressionable minds are 'forcibly' knocked back into shape. Like Tobias Smollett, Henry Fielding also preferred his quixotes confined within the 'proper bounds' of a realistic plot and a disciplined narrative structure. In his review of *The Female Quixote* (1752), Charlotte Lennox's novel about a young lady who mistakes herself for a romance heroine, Fielding not only applauds the novel as 'a regular story', one which 'comes much nearer to that Perfection than the loose unconnected Adventures in Don Quixote', he is also pleased to observe that 'the Incidents, or, if you please, the Adventures, are much less extravagant and incredible in the English than in

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<sup>72</sup> *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, ed. by Ian Campbell Ross (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 8.

<sup>73</sup> *Spiritual Quixote*, I, vi.

the Spanish Performance'.<sup>74</sup> And in spite of the Female Quixote's flights of fancy, her inscrutable signs, and her notoriously 'inconsistent Discourse',<sup>75</sup> the narrative ends conventionally enough, with the heroine relinquishing her romantic ideas and marrying her cousin. In the fiction of the early US republic, married quixotes are few and far between. Brackenridge's Farrago, Tyler's Underhill, Tenney's Dorcasina, and Irving's Dutchmen are all unmarried when their stories come to a close; only Arthur Mervyn teeters on the brink of marriage, but even here the narrative peters out before he makes it to the altar. This goes some way towards explaining the remarkable open-endedness of quixotic fiction in the USA; for Lennox and her British peers, it is invariably marriage that brings their questing protagonists to a halt and their rambling narratives to a final full stop.

### ***Fools of Quality, Hearts of Gold: Quixotic Characters in British Fiction***

Launcelot Greaves, eponymous hero of Smollett's own quixotic fiction, *The Life and Adventures of Sir Launcelot Greaves*, best embodies the tendency of English fiction to sentimentalise and domesticate the quixote, to transform him from a knight on the road to a knight on the road to marriage, an amiable, high-born and benevolent member of the English establishment.

Smollett's knight was immediately recognised as a descendant—though decidedly not a reincarnation—of Don Quixote, and according to James Beattie, in 1764:

Sir Launcelot Greaves is of Don Quixote's kindred, but a different character. Smollet's [*sic*] design was, not to expose him to ridicule; but rather to recommend him to our pity and admiration. He has therefore given him youth, strength, and beauty, as well as courage, and dignity of mind, has mounted him on a generous steed, and arrayed him in an elegant suit of armour. Yet, that the history might have a comic air, he

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<sup>74</sup> 'The Covent-Garden Journal' and 'A Plan of the Universal Register-Office', ed. by Bertrand A. Goldgar (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 160-61.

<sup>75</sup> *The Female Quixote*, ed. by Margaret Dalziel (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 367.

has been careful to contrast and connect Sir Launcelot with a squire and other associates of very dissimilar tempers and circumstances.<sup>76</sup>

Smollett has also been careful to endow his hero with a genuine title—in contrast with Alonzo Quixano's presumptuous assumption of the title 'Don'—and to fill his pockets with copious amounts of hard currency. Shying away from the gleeful social inversions of Cervantes' burlesque, Smollett's narrative rather strives to reinforce the value of an established social hierarchy, where one knows one's place and stays there. While Sir Launcelot goes about the business of putting the world to rights, it is his social inferiors—the clerk, the sailor, the squire—who provide the comic relief. The level-headed Launcelot, 'even in his maddest hours', 'never adopted those maxims of knight-errantry which related to challenges', and only dons his suit of armour in the first place when his childhood sweetheart, Aurelia Darnel, ostensibly orders him to renounce his love for her and relinquish his suit of marriage.<sup>77</sup> As soon as Aurelia is restored to the love-lorn knight, he speedily discards his chivalric schemes and relinquishes his armour in favour of more amorous pursuits. Other characters, though, are genuinely enamoured with the idea of knight-errantry. Former sea dog Captain Crowe sets himself up as a knight, is dubbed like Don Quixote by a landlord, and fits himself out in 'a very strange suit of armour', that includes a 'potlid' for a buckler and a 'hop-pole shod with iron' for a lance.<sup>78</sup> While Launcelot possesses the elevated ideals of Don Quixote, the lowly Crowe becomes a fall guy for the knight, a convenient body double who takes the beatings and fields the sneers, allowing the dignity and hide of the high-born Greaves to remain unscathed.

Sir Launcelot's progress towards marriage is only one strand of the plot, however, for the knight's encounters with cases of injustice provide a second, more loosely woven, narrative thread. As with *Don Quixote in England*, the satirical target has shifted from the knight himself to the world he inhabits, with

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<sup>76</sup> James Beattie, 'An Essay on Laughter and Ludicrous Composition', in *Essays* (Edinburgh: Creech, 1776), pp. 581-705 (p. 605).

<sup>77</sup> *Launcelot Greaves*, p. 149.

<sup>78</sup> *Launcelot Greaves*, p. 136.

Greaves battling to right the wrongs of eighteenth-century Britain, to combat the iniquitous judicial system, the abuse of the underprivileged, and the life-long poverty endured by many. He states his case cogently when challenged by the sneering misanthropist, Ferret:

‘What! (said Ferret) you set up for a modern Don Quixote?—The scheme is rather too stale and extravagant.—What was an humorous romance, and well-timed satire in Spain, near two hundred years ago, will make but a sorry jest, and appear equally insipid and absurd, when really acted from affectation, at this time a-day, in a country like England.’

The Knight, eying this censor with a look of disdain, replied, in a solemn lofty tone: ‘He that from affectation imitates the extravagances recorded of Don Quixote, is an impostor equally wicked and contemptible [...] I am neither an affected imitator of Don Quixote, nor, as I trust in heaven, visited by that spirit of lunacy so admirably displayed in the fictitious character exhibited by the inimitable Cervantes. I have not yet encountered a windmill for a giant; nor mistaken this public house for a magnificent castle [...] I quarrel with none but the foes of virtue and decorum, against whom I have declared perpetual war, and them I will every where attack as the natural enemies of mankind’.<sup>79</sup>

Sir Launcelot is more than able to distinguish between fictitious characters—giants, castles, Don Quixote himself—and the ugly realities of the world he inhabits (though this world is itself Tobias Smollett’s fictional construct), and while Cervantes’ hero fights chimeras of his brain, Sir Launcelot Greaves wages war against the social atrocities of his day. His success rate is impressive, too, for uncooperative innkeepers and unsympathetic judges invariably repent of their mistakes when they learn who Sir Launcelot is. Time and again the young knight’s adventures are ‘crowned with every happy circumstance that could give pleasure to a generous mind’, and we cannot help but feel that quixotic impulses and connubial prospects fare infinitely better when the knight in question possesses high social standing and a purse full of ready money.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> *Launcelot Greaves*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>80</sup> *Launcelot Greaves*, p. 103.

The same can be said for William Thornborough, quixotic protagonist of Jane Purbeck's *William Thornborough, The Benevolent Quixote* (1791). Motivated by the murder of his elder brother and the inspiration of *Sir Charles Grandison*, the reclusive Thornborough decides to abandon his studies and instead, 'like Don Quixote [...] set out in armour to redress the grievances of mankind'.<sup>81</sup> Infused with the spirit of benevolence but unfamiliar with the ways of the world, Thornborough repeatedly misreads situations, makes matters worse by interfering, and falls foul of designing imposters, eager to relieve him of his personal fortune. Four volumes on, however, an older, wiser hero is finally married to the virtuous Sophia Barrymore, and 'remembers with equal joy and gratitude the hour in which he first quitted Thornborough Abbey, and set out on the romantic design of travelling through the world as a Benevolent Quixote'.<sup>82</sup> All's well that ends well, then, as a quest that has been far from an unequivocal success is recuperated nonetheless as a peripatetic rite of passage, a sentimental journey through worldly initiation to the bourgeois destination of domestic bliss. Married at last, Thornborough is now ready to settle down to the important business of producing an heir, and re-establishing the patrilineal continuity that was jeopardised at the very start of the text with the murder of the first-born son.

Geoffrey [*sic*] Wildgoose, well-meaning Methodist hero of *The Spiritual Quixote* (1773) is another well-born quixote, 'the only surviving heir' to the Wildgoose estate, which, 'next to that of the squire', is 'the most considerable in the parish'. A religious enthusiast, who 'sallies forth in order to revive the practice of, what he imagines to be, true christianity', Wildgoose is repeatedly criticised—both by the narrator of his tale and the characters he encounters—for his advocacy of reform.<sup>83</sup> In an 'Essay on Quixotism', inserted into the first volume of the story, the narrator Christopher Collop argues that 'the absurdity which we laugh at in the celebrated Don Quixote, is his attempting to revive that profession, when the more perfect regulations of civil society had rendered it not

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<sup>81</sup> *Benevolent Quixote*, 4 vols (London: Robinson, 1791), I, 57.

<sup>82</sup> *Benevolent Quixote*, IV, 218.

<sup>83</sup> *Spiritual Quixote*, I, 1; I, xi.

only unnecessary, but unlawful'.<sup>84</sup> Whereas the quixotism of laws and law-givers comes under scrutiny in the fictions of US authors such as Brackenridge and Irving, the lawlessness of quixotism is repeatedly criticised in *The Spiritual Quixote*, a narrative that objects to Thornborough's disrespect for the Church and disregard for established 'regulations'. In the eyes of the narrator, the original Don intended 'to redress grievances which no longer existed; or in which, under a regular government, he had no right to interfere'; Collop is particularly horrified that the knight should take it upon himself to 'set at liberty some prisoners who by legal authority had been condemned to the galleys'.<sup>85</sup> He contends that 'modern itinerant reformers' are guilty of the same unlawful behaviour, 'acting in defiance of human laws, without any apparent necessity, or any divine commission'.<sup>86</sup> Readers may not place so much store by what the 'comical cur, Christopher Collop!—commonly called—the comely Curate of Cotswold' has to say, but even the sensible Dr. Greville berates Wildgoose for abandoning his mother, for venturing to oppose 'so sacred an authority as that of parents over their children', and for going through with 'an undertaking directly opposite to the laws of the land'. Greville insists that 'no one has a right to break through the regulations of society, merely from the suggestions of his own fancy', and the law-loving cleric 'would not have even truth propagated in a seditious manner'.<sup>87</sup> But Wildgoose never really poses a serious threat to 'the regulations of society': he returns home to his mother after a mere two months on the road, losing the urge to reform when he finds himself a wealthy future wife.

Geoffrey Wildgoose, William Thornborough, Launcelot Greaves: unlike their earlier Spanish ancestor and most unlike their US counterparts, these fictional quixotes resist more radical or Romantic readings. They do not militate for social revolution or constitutional change; instead, they stand squarely within the confines of the English establishment. Sir Launcelot saves his greatest ire for

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<sup>84</sup> *Spiritual Quixote*, I, 34.

<sup>85</sup> *Spiritual Quixote*, I, 34.

<sup>86</sup> *Spiritual Quixote*, I, 35.

<sup>87</sup> *Spiritual Quixote*, I, ix; II, 226.

magistrate Gobble, the upstart son of a tailor who has risen to the position of Justice only to persecute the poor and pander to the vanity of his wife. According to the aristocratic Greaves, this ‘indeed, is generally the case of low fellows, who are thrust into the magistracy without sentiment, education, or capacity’.<sup>88</sup> And in *The Spiritual Quixote*, Greville argues that an ‘alteration’ in ‘the manners of the people’ can only be effected ‘by the influence of their superiors’.<sup>89</sup> England’s fictional quixotes do not want to see the nation run—or overrun—by a horde of Gobbles; they want to see those who are born to rule doing a better job, following the example of Sir Launcelot, whose tenants ‘thought the golden age was revived in Yorkshire’, such a ‘bounteous benefactor’ was their landlord.<sup>90</sup> Solutions to England’s social problems are perceived to lie in patronage and not suffrage, benevolence and not reform, for it is not the shortcomings of a hierarchical structure that are held accountable for social injustice, but the failings of avaricious and irresponsible individuals.

Stuart Tave has suggested that ‘an irrepressible urge to do good was bound to recommend itself to a century that prized benevolence’; the performance of good works and the possession of good nature are perhaps the most recurrent characteristics of the eighteenth-century British quixote.<sup>91</sup> Fielding’s *Rape Upon Rape* (1730) declares that ‘Good-nature is Quixotism’;<sup>92</sup> Oliver Goldsmith’s man in black soon realises that his remarkable ‘good nature’ is a licence to fleece him in the eyes of the world, and the *Spectator*’s Sir Roger de Coverley is introduced as a ‘good old Knight’, whose ‘Humanity and good Nature engages every Body to him’.<sup>93</sup> According to Corbyn Morris’s *Analysis of the Characters of an*

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<sup>88</sup> *Launcelot Greaves*, p. 98.

<sup>89</sup> *Spiritual Quixote*, II, 242.

<sup>90</sup> *Launcelot Greaves*, p. 24; p. 21.

<sup>91</sup> *Amiable Humorist*, p. 158.

<sup>92</sup> *Rape upon Rape; or, The Justice Caught in his own Trap* (London: Wats [sic], 1730), p. 31.

<sup>93</sup> Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, *Sir Roger de Coverley* (London: Hutchinson, 1906), p. 16. This text comprises twenty-seven essays from the *Spectator* that deal with the character of the baronet. It begins with issue 2 (2 March, 1711) and the introduction of Sir Roger, and concludes with issue 517 and the announcement of his death (23 October, 1712).

*Humourist*, ‘you cannot but love and esteem him, for his *Honour, Hospitality*, and universal *Benevolence*’, though Morris does point out that the ‘*Dignity, Age*, and *Rank*’ of de Coverley ‘are of constant Service in *upholding* his Character’, as the baronet’s elevated social status preserves him ‘from *Contempt* upon many Occasions’.<sup>94</sup> Turning to the early US republic (as we will in Chapter Two), we will see a distinct shift in emphasis. It’s not that these fictional quixotes are a bunch of ill-tempered misanthropists, but rather that good nature and good works are no longer the shared, generic traits that they are for their eighteenth-century British counterparts. Instead, American quixotes reveal their own set of distinguishing features—contradictory opinions, pariah status, and a hopelessly swollen ego, to name just three. And while English authors do their best to uphold the dignity and authority of their quixotes, American authors writing at the turn of the nineteenth-century reveal a catalogue of faltering heroes and glorious failures, outrageous and irreverent figures who kick against the self-conscious sobriety and austerity of the new republic.

In the Old World, the disruptive potential and growing popularity of Sancho Panza was becoming a contentious issue in eighteenth-century academic circles, as representations of Quixote’s side-kick began to reconfigure the balance of power between the squire and his master. In the prologue to his 1700 translation, Peter Motteux unequivocally declared that ‘any man with half the Squire’s Wit may read in this single Character the mean, slavish, and ungenerous Spirit of the Vulgar in all Countries and Ages’. According to this patrician reading, Sancho Panza’s ‘awkward Lying, sordid Avarice, sneeking [*sic*] Pity’ and ‘natural Inclination to Knavery’ render him an image of ‘the whole Multitude

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<sup>94</sup> Morris, *An Essay Towards Fixing the True Standards of Wit, Humour, Raillery, Satire, and Ridicule. To Which is Added an Analysis of the Characters of an Humourist, Sir John Falstaff, Sir Roger De Coverly [*sic*], and Don Quixote* (London: Roberts, 1744), p. 32. Another popular knight who enjoyed a re-evaluation over the same period was Sir John Falstaff, dramatically re-interpreted by eighteenth-century critics, redeemed by his wit, and represented as a humourist rather than a coward. In the words of Morris, ‘the *Figure* of his *Person* is the Picture of Jollity, Mirth, and Good-nature, and banishes at once all other Ideas from your Breast’ (p. 28).



in little'.<sup>95</sup> Yet in the century that followed, Sancho Panza would emerge as an ambiguous, potentially subversive, and extremely popular figure in quixotic fiction. Landlord Guzzle for one is puzzled by the Sancho-Quixote relationship in Fielding's *Don Quixote in England*: 'I don't know which is master nor which is man, not I', he comments. 'Sometimes I think one is master, and then again I think it is t'other'.<sup>96</sup> The ambiguity surrounding Sancho's status is further underlined by the comedy derived from the dual meaning of 'squire', a subservient attendant within chivalric discourse, but a powerful landowner within the context of eighteenth-century Britain.<sup>97</sup> By 1818, Coleridge could declare that together, the knight and squire 'form a perfect intellect; but they are separated and without cement; and hence each having a need of the other for its own completeness, each has at times a mastery over the other'.<sup>98</sup>

Not everybody was happy with the elevated status of the squire. The William Miller edition of 1801 saw nothing other than self-interest in the figure of Sancho Panza. A forerunner to Brackenridge's ambitious bog-trotter, Teague O'Regan, this particular Sancho is a self-seeking mercenary, a character who 'is almost always swayed by interest', whose 'principal aim is interest', and whose character 'is neither that of simplicity nor of acuteness, of courage nor of cowardice, but of interest'.<sup>99</sup> In May, 1793, an article in James Anderson's Edinburgh journal, the *Bee*, expressed its indignation and anxiety at socially-levelling representations of Sancho Panza. According to this review, English

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<sup>95</sup> *Don Quixote*, 1700, I, pages unnumbered.

<sup>96</sup> *Quixote in England*, p. 36.

<sup>97</sup> *The Spiritual Quixote* offers a brief history of 'the race of squires', men who, 'in heroic ages performed those inferior offices of life'. Graves draws attention to the duality of the term 'squire', observing that 'every squire, in the modern sense of the word, has a squire in the ancient sense, who attends him on all occasions, in the shape of an hunting parson, a nominal captain, or a pacific lawyer' (I, 56-7).

<sup>98</sup> *Lectures, 1808-19: On Literature, II*, ed. by R. A. Foakes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 16 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971-2001), V, 162.

<sup>99</sup> *Don Quixote*, 1801, p. lxxxii; p. lxxxiii.

translations of the text had persistently misrepresented and displaced the ‘Sancho of Cervantes’; they had raised his status and embroidered his role by allowing him a wit and a humour that Cervantes’ Sancho simply did not possess. The article put the squire’s insightful wit down to inept translation, and insisted that ‘to laugh at his master would have been the last idea that could ever have entered into his mind’.<sup>100</sup> It also stressed the condescension of Quixote toward his servant, describing him as ‘a kind, humane, and beneficent master’, one who ‘loves his simple attendant with the tenderest affection’.<sup>101</sup> Having forcefully re-inscribed the social disparity between the master and his servant, the critic went on to observe, with evident approval, that Cervantes himself ‘has been able on all occasions to avoid that appearance of mean familiarity in the master, and pert equality in the squire’.<sup>102</sup>

While Corbyn Morris, writing in 1764, could not sufficiently admire the contrast ‘between the *excellent fine Sense* of the ONE, and the *dangerous common Sense* of the OTHER’, attributing ‘sense’ to the ‘common’ Sancho is a ‘dangerous’ critical act in the eyes of the *Bee* article, an act that validates the socially inferior ‘OTHER’ and threatens to unhinge established social hierarchies.<sup>103</sup> Sancho’s career in the early republic would be particularly fraught with anxiety: after all, this was the land where Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense* had helped to start a Revolution, and where the common men who had helped to win that Revolution were now dismantling social hierarchies by demanding the right to govern their country.

### ***A Comedy in Two Minds: Smollett’s Don Quixote and Hayman’s Frontispiece***

Despite the universal consensus that Don Quixote was ‘a Man of all Times’, ‘adaptable to all Times and Places’, translations of the text into English were invariably found wanting; too irreverent (Stevens), too stiff (Smollett), too Italian

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<sup>100</sup> *The Bee*, p. 271.

<sup>101</sup> *The Bee*, p. 271.

<sup>102</sup> *The Bee*, p. 273.

<sup>103</sup> *An Essay Towards Fixing the True Standards of Wit*, p. 40.

(Shelton) or too French (Motteux).<sup>104</sup> In 1793, a critic for the *Bee* was especially unimpressed with Tobias Smollett's 1755 translation of the text: 'I know no book that has suffered so much by a translation as this has done', he complains, and 'of all the translations we have of this work, I think Smollett's is the worst'.<sup>105</sup> While the *Bee* condemned the 'stiffness' of Smollett's characters, others charged the translator with plagiarism, accusing him of possessing little knowledge of Spanish but a thorough familiarity with the Jarvis translation of 1742. In 1791, a critical study of the Smollett translation described it as 'little else than an improved edition of the former' Jarvis *Quixote*, and more recently, Carmine Linsalata has produced an impressive body of textual evidence in order to prove the translation an accomplished hoax, 'a gem in the realm of fraudulent acts', as she puts it.<sup>106</sup> A fake it might have been, but Smollett's version was nonetheless the definitive *Quixote* for many Americans. Sold in bookshops across the colonies, it became the first edition to roll off American presses in 1803, was reprinted in 1811-12, and then again in 1814-15. Significantly for this thesis, its appeal was peculiar to the years of the early republic; from 1815 onwards, US editions of *Don Quixote* dropped the Smollett translation in favour of Charles Jarvis and the self-proclaimed 'solemnity' of his 1742 translation.<sup>107</sup> I want to suggest that Smollett's edition not only acknowledged the contested status of Cervantes' narrative, it sought to encourage polemical readings of the text, and that as a result, it proved especially appealing to a deeply contested republic that was itself producing incompatible readings of the constitution, conflicting interpretations of republicanism, and a polarised political system.

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<sup>104</sup> *Don Quixote*, 1742, p. 60. See *Don Quixote*, 1742, pp. iii-v, for Jarvis's disparaging remarks about earlier translations.

<sup>105</sup> *The Bee*, p. 268; p. 269.

<sup>106</sup> Alexander F. Tytler, quoted in Carmine Rocco Linsalata, *Smollett's Hoax: Don Quixote in English* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1956), p. 9; p. vii.

<sup>107</sup> *Don Quixote*, 1742, p. iv. Discounting 'a revised translation based on those of Motteux, Jarvis, and Smollett' (New-York: Appleton, 1855), Huntington's edition of 1814-15 would be the last Smollett translation to be published in the United States during the nineteenth century.

Despite his protestations to the contrary, Smollett's translation goes a long way towards re-injecting the burlesque back into *Quixote*. The prefatory 'Translator's Aim' exudes an air of scholarly gravity as it pledges to restore the 'satire and propriety of many allusions' through the insertion of 'explanatory notes', assembled with the 'care and circumspection' one would expect from a serious scholar (DQ, 19). But instead of being the *aim* of the translator, punctilious scholarship turns out to be the target of his satire and the vehicle for deconstructing both the solemnity and the stability of Cervantes' narrative. The opening page of Book One is a catalogue of the down-at-heel Quixote's culinary staples, a menu that ranges from 'a dish of hodge-podge' and 'a plate of salmagundy', to 'gripes and grumblings on Saturdays' (DQ, 27). An explanatory note at the foot of the page discourses at great length, and with hilarious fastidiousness, upon the precise meaning of '*Duelos y Quebrantos*', a philological quest that culminates with the following:

Having considered this momentous affair with all the deliberation it deserves, we in our turn present the reader, with cucumbers, greens and pease-porridge, as the fruit of our industrious researches; being thereunto determined, by the literal signification of the text, which is not "grumblings and groanings," as the last mentioned ingenious annotator seems to think; but rather pains and breakings; and evidently points at such eatables as generate and expel wind. (DQ, 27-28)

So all this to ascertain that Don Quixote suffers from wind on Saturdays. The explanatory footnote may seem to explain very little in the end, but it does go a long way towards elucidating Smollett's vision of the text, not only suggesting a comic disjunction between the cerebral ideals and the visceral reality of the knight, but exposing a similar disparity between the high-minded, intellectual rhetoric of the 'Translator's aim' and the bottom-humour reality of the text that he actually writes. Ballooning footnotes, rising from the bottom of the page, squeeze against the body of the text, displacing the story and engaging in a playful and destabilising dialogue. Interjecting at apparently random moments, they undermine the lofty tone with their bawdy insinuations, they point out 'oversights' and errors in the narrative, and they indulge in spurious analogies and lengthy digressions.

The dialogic edition that emerges would surely have struck a chord with America's Founding Fathers, men who read the same American Constitution in very different ways, and who recognised their founding document to be 'dim and doubtful', 'obscure and equivocal', a series of 'vague and incorrect definitions', though decidedly not a burlesque.<sup>108</sup>

Not unlike America's Constitution, *Don Quixote* was a magnet for polemical readings. Should it be read as Enlightenment satire or Romantic tragedy? Was its protagonist a ridiculous fool or a romantic hero? Francis Hayman's series of illustrations, commissioned for the first edition of the Smollett translation, and executed in close collaboration with the translator, opened with an all-action frontispiece that re-played the debate but refused to take sides. At a glance, Hayman's opening image is a straightforward allegorical frontispiece, a representation of Truth and Comedy successfully battling it out with the ill-favoured figures of Romance and the 'ill-founded edifice that is constituted by those books of chivalry'.<sup>109</sup> As such, it appears very similar to the frontispiece in Alexander Hogg's 1794 edition of *Don Quixote*, another edition with Tobias Smollett as its chosen translator (fig. 2). Signed by 'Riley', the title to this particular frontispiece declares itself to be an '*Emblematical Representation of TRUTH, with her MIRROR, dispelling the Visions of GOTHIC SUPERSTITION and KNIGHT ERRANTRY, while the Enchanted Castle and its Giant Master, the Dragon, the Distressed Damsel Ghost in the background &c. describe the wild creations of a distempered brain*'.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> *The Federalist; or, The New Constitution*, ed. by Max Beloff (New York and Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), pp. 179-180. In *American Literature in Context, I: 1620-1830* (London and New York: Methuen, 1983), Stephen Fender has suggested that another founding document, the Declaration of Independence, does indeed deploy 'the conventions of eighteenth-century satire', representing George III as 'an emperor of dullness fit to stand in the ranks of Alexander Pope's great goddess of anarchy in *The Dunciad*' (p. 105; p. 102).

<sup>109</sup> See *Don Quixote*, 1742, and *Don Quixote*, 1780, for earlier examples of allegorical frontispieces.

<sup>110</sup> Riley, 'Frontispiece to *Don Quixote*', in *The History and Adventures of the Renowned Don Quixote de la Mancha*, trans. by Dr. Smollett (London: Hogg, 1794), opp. title page.



Fig. 2 Riley, 'Frontispece to Don Quixote', *Don Quixote*, 1794





Fig. 3 Francis Hayman, Untitled Frontispiece, *Don Quixote*, 1755

Francis Hayman draws upon the same cast of fantastical figures, who strike the same distinctive poses, and are engaged in the same dramatic conflict, yet his frontispiece exudes a very different spirit (fig. 3). There is no long-winded title here; there is no title at all, in fact, for Hayman's ambiguous image stands alone, providing no interpretative signposts, and leaving readers to draw their own conclusions.

The scene on the left of the plate depicts a personified Truth using her mirrored shield to vanquish the grotesque band of romance figures, while the figure of Comedy stands to the right of the illustration, towering over a shrinking dragon, defiantly eyeing an Arabic shield, and demolishing a Moorish edifice. Standing firm upon the steps of the Roman portico, with masculine features and invisible hands, this classical, Western Truth evokes the handless Cervantes, whose own hand was famously severed during the Battle of Lepanto in 1571. Battling with a many-handed Moor, and throwing out the rays of enlightenment towards the benighted East, Truth would seem to be the undisputed victor, as the hunchback dwarf retreats across the quagmire, the man with many hands appears aghast, and the shadowy knight and his mistress are already going up in smoke. The instantaneous success of the shining shield mirrors the claim of Charles Jarvis that, in Cervantes' text, 'we see our author undertake to combat this *giant of false honour*, and all these *monsters of false wit*. No sooner did his work appear, but both were cut down at once, and for ever. The illusion of ages was dissipated, the magic dissolved, and all the enchantment vanished like smoke'.<sup>111</sup>

However, just as the rays of light only stretch so far, disappearing behind a precariously leaning turret before they can enlighten the whole of the picture, so too is an allegorical reading of the frontispiece only partially enlightening, and can only go so far before collapsing under the pressure of alternative meanings latent in the plate. Chaos lies in the picture's prominent lack of horizontals and verticals, its fraught concatenation of jutting corners and impossible angles. For Rachel Schmidt, in *Critical Images: The Canonization of 'Don Quixote' through Illustrated Editions of the Eighteenth Century*, the 'broken perspectives and

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<sup>111</sup> *Don Quixote*, 1742, p. xxiii.



optical distortion' undermine the allegorical purpose of the frontispiece, suggesting 'the instability of allegory as its forms begin to crumble within a new intellectual and social context'.<sup>112</sup> The image simultaneously evokes the instability of the comic genre, for the allegorical framework comes closest to toppling when we turn to the figure of Comedy, positioned in the forefront of the frame, and very much the heroine of the piece. Significantly, the illustration is cleft in two, with no interaction between the pair of allegorical figures. Turning her back on Truth, Comedy pays no heed to the progress of her ally, and Truth's tale becomes less than half the story, less still than a subplot; it merely becomes the backdrop to Comedy's unfolding drama, setting the stage for a piece that could be titled 'Quixote in Petticoats: A Comedy in Two Minds'. For while Truth holds the moral, intellectual and literal high ground, standing firm upon the portico steps, Comedy walks the plank, suspended between the rational, enlightened world of Truth and the shadowy, mysterious world of romance. Although an allegorical reading assumes that she stands in an attitude of defiance, demolishing the demonic edifice before her, both Comedy's outstretched arm and her troubled facial expression—an inversion of the official face of Comedy, that eyeless, smiling mask around her waist—transmit conflicting signs. Is her look one of indignation, as she gives the detested garrison one last push, or is she actually curious about what goes on within? She is the picture of indecision: one hand valiantly grips the sword, while the other reaches tentatively forward as though preparing to open the door; one face looks intently at the writing on the romance shield, while the other grins on, blind to her dilemma.<sup>113</sup>

Visual repetition strengthens Comedy's identification with the world of romance: the uplifted sword of the romance warrior echoes Comedy's own poised sword, while the dislocated head of the dwarf reflects the mask upon her belt. The

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<sup>112</sup> *Critical Images* (Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), p. 112.

<sup>113</sup> I am grateful to the staff of the British Library, and in particular to Dr. Vrej Nersessian (Curator of the Christian Orient, including Coptic, Ethiopic, Georgian, Armenian, and Syriac), Dr. Colin Baker (Curator of Arabic), Ilana Tahan (Curator of Hebrew), and Tim Thomas, for their assistance in examining the script upon the Moorish sign. It would appear to be a fictional scrawl, Hayman's own ingenious imitation of an Eastern script.

implications are clear: this is an errant Comedy who has no desire to fight alongside the stern and stony-faced Truth; instead she stands upon the brink of ruin, seduced by the marvels of the romance genre. Seen in this light, the dragon that wraps itself around the legs of Comedy is no longer a subdued adversary but an insinuating serpent—complete with arching neck, forked tongue, and glassy eyes—tempting her to enter in and taste the fruits of romance, while the wanton ringlets flowing down her back align her with the promiscuous or seducible female, eminently susceptible to corruption by designing fictions.<sup>114</sup> For the patriarchs of the newly founded United States, self-consciously imitating the paradigms of a classical Roman republic, self-righteously striving to regenerate a dissipated Europe, Hayman's unsettling and inconclusive illustration could only bring home the disruptive potential of unsuitable books and the uncertain outcome of their own ideological quest.

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Don Quixote in America would not be the Everyman that he was in England, but as we shall see in the next chapter there was certainly something in the knight that could appeal to every man—or every woman—in the new republic. Goldsmith's man in black was one for the classical republicans, committed to civic service but susceptible to the pitfalls of practising benevolence in a shifting and uncertain milieu. The Don Quixote described in Samuel Johnson's *Rambler*, 'always breaking away from the present moment, and losing [him]self in schemes of future felicity', was one for the speculators, operating in the burgeoning marketplace of urban America.<sup>115</sup> Coleridge's slacker, who sells his land to buy

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<sup>114</sup> Henry Fielding had contended in the previous year that *The Female Quixote* was superior to its Spanish prototype in its choice of a female protagonist, for 'as we are to grant in both Performances, that the Head of a very sensible Person is entirely subverted by reading Romances, this Concession seems to me more easy to be granted in the Case of a young Lady than of an old Gentleman' (*Covent-Garden Journal*, p. 160).

<sup>115</sup> *Essays From the 'Rambler', 'Adventurer', and 'Idler'*, ed. by W. J. Bate (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 3.

more books and is imbued with 'a wild and objectless spirit of adventure', was one for the Rip Van Winkles of the new republic, those who were happier in the hills than in their home, always looking to escape from the responsibilities that citizenship entailed.<sup>116</sup> And Lennox's *Female Quixote*, transforming the romance heroine into an empowering role model, was one for American women, eagerly looking for new ways to define themselves and their role within a distinctly patriarchal nation. If writers in the new republic did indeed receive their 'riches by inheritance',<sup>117</sup> the quixote they inherited from eighteenth-century British letters proved a polysemic legacy, a salmagundi of conflicting critical insights and ideological appropriations from which they could pick and choose. Which is precisely what they would do.

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<sup>116</sup> *Lectures*, p. 164.

<sup>117</sup> 'American Poetry', p. 461.

## 2. Transatlantic Cervanticks: Don Quixote in the New Republic

Never was there a more singular and mysterious state of parties. The plot of an old Spanish play is not more complicated with underplot. I scarcely trust myself with the attempt to unfold it.

Fisher Ames to Rufus King, 15 July, 1800

A collaboration between Hugh Henry Brackenridge and Philip Freneau during their undergraduate years at the New Jersey College, *Father Bombo's Pilgrimage to Mecca* (1770) was the first of several quixotic fictions to be produced by Brackenridge.<sup>118</sup> *Father Bombo* tells the fantastical tale of an American scholar who stands accused of plagiarising Lucian's *Dialogues*. Reproached somewhat unaccountably by the ghost of Mahomet, he is ordered to convert to Islam and undertake a pilgrimage to Mecca in atonement for his literary theft. En-route to his destination, Father Bombo travels through East Coast America and across the Atlantic Ocean, around the British Isles and on to Arabia, falling into the hands of pirates, pulling off a one-man mutiny, and barely avoiding the gallows on his way. Like Don Quixote before him, Father Bombo encounters his own adventures in print, reading 'the history of [his] life' 'fifty times in different places' before he has even left the country (FB, 32). With its cautionary hope that no future authors will 'raise up the bones of Father Bombo and carry him in romance to distant

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<sup>118</sup> According to Michael Davitt Bell, in his introduction to the text, *Bombo* is also 'quite plausibly the "first American novel"', though it was unpublished in the lifetime of its authors, and not published in its entirety until 1975 (*Father Bombo's Pilgrimage to Mecca*, ed. by Michael Davitt Bell [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975], p. xxxi. Further references to this edition are prefixed by FB and given in parentheses in the text).

countries', and its injunction that no person should 'be so bold as to write any second or third parts to this history' (FB, 97), *Bombo* predicts that even beyond the grave its hero will continue to follow in the footsteps of Quixote, whose 1605 adventures were translated abroad as early as 1612, and plagiarised still earlier, by one 'Avellaneda' in 1606.

Although such heavy-handed clues draw attention to the scholar's kinship with Don Quixote, Bombo could never be described as 'romantic to extravagance'; on the contrary, he is a thoroughly pragmatic character, who is more picaro than quixote, with neither morals nor ideals to hinder him on his travels. With his lack of conscience, his excess of confidence, and his disrespect for propriety and authority, Bombo is, as his name suggests, an incendiary figure, one who turns brothels, inns, ships and households upside down at will: in this respect, his story is a prototype for *Modern Chivalry*, Brackenridge's more extensive interrogation of law and order in the new republic. As a Christian renegade who readily adopts both the dress and the faith of 'a zealous musselman' (FB, 7), a mutinous pilgrim who puts another man's ship on course for Mecca in order to save himself 'the trouble of walking or burning [his] feet on the hot sands of Africa' (FB, 58), Bombo anticipates the religious pilgrimage and ideological *volte-face* of Royall Tyler's Updike Underhill, another American scholar who explores the imaginative possibilities of heresy, in *The Algerine Captive*. With his puerile humor and his schoolboy pranks, Father Bombo is the perpetual adolescent who has managed to by-pass the demands of adulthood and evade the anxieties of impending Revolution. It is precisely this tension between prolonging filial dependence and deposing patriarchal authority, coupled with related anxieties concerning literary authenticity and narrative authority, that will underpin Washington Irving's *A History of New York*. This is to jump ahead, though; *Father Bombo* may have been America's first quixotic fiction, but it was far from being the quixote's first appearance in American letters.

### *Colonial Quixotes and a Genealogy of Dissent*

While eighteenth-century British authors were quick to naturalise Don Quixote, to acculturate him to a British milieu and make him over as a part of the establishment, quixotic references in early America were divided on this point. Thomas Morton's *New English Canaan* (1637) may have aligned quixotic paranoia with William Bradford's Puritan regime but, conversely, Cotton Mather's *History of New-England* (1702) associated quixotism with Bradford's detractors, with the marginal voices of political subversion and religious dissent. Morton was a fur trader from Bradford's Plymouth plantation, accused in 1628 of licentious behaviour and of gun-trading with Indian tribes. Neither crime could be tolerated by the God-fearing, native-fearing colony, and Morton was duly captured and banished from the continent. In *New English Canaan*, Morton's own account of colonial events, his capture is re-figured as farce, recounted in a chapter ironically titled 'Of a Great Monster Supposed to be at Ma-re Mount; and the Preparation Made to Destroy It':

The nine worthies comming before the Denne of this supposed Monster, (this seaven headed hydra, as they termed him,) and began like Don Quixote against the Windmill to beate a party [*sic*], and to offer quarter (if mine Host would yeald) for they resolved to send him for England, and bad him lay by his armes.<sup>119</sup>

Casting his opponents as quixotes, and himself as their imaginary enemy, harmless as the inoffensive windmills of La Mancha, Morton suggests that his antagonists' behaviour is over-zealous and unnecessary. He downplays the danger that his own disruptive presence poses to the colony even as he cuts the pompous pilgrims down to size, burlesquing and belittling their high-minded, millennial aim of constructing a 'New English Canaan'.<sup>120</sup>

1636 saw Roger Williams banished from the same colony, on similar

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<sup>119</sup> *New English Canaan; or, New Canaan* (Amsterdam: Stam, 1637; repr. New York: Da Capo, 1969), p. 142.

<sup>120</sup> Morton is scathing in his description of the Plymouth colonists, who evinced in his eyes, 'a great shew of Religion, but no humanity' (p. 144).

charges of civil disorder and unorthodox dealings with natives. This time, however, it was the Puritan establishment that would use the knight of La Mancha as a weapon in the propaganda war, with Cotton Mather's *History of New-England* condemning the separatist urges of Williams as dangerous and 'disturbant' 'quixotism'.<sup>121</sup> Not surprisingly, Morton and Mather interpret the concept of quixotism in very different ways. For Thomas Morton, the quixote as Puritan connotes a bungling ineffectuality, and the presence of the quixote turns the capture into farce, the chapter into satire. Morton's invocation of Cervantes is a stroke of rhetorical ingenuity, signalling the political innocence of Morton as colonist even as it points to the literary sophistication of Morton as author. For Cotton Mather, meanwhile, working within a religious framework that frowned on the imagination and preached against the reading of fiction (though typological narratives and sensational stories of Divine Providence were themselves a mainstay of Puritan discourse), quixotism was a threatening and disruptive tendency, a form of insurrection to be subdued and stamped out. However, as William Bradford struggled to rein in dissent and remove dissenters, to retain the unity, purity, and hierarchy of his Promised Land, Roger Williams—like Thomas Morton before him—worked against such binding authority and pressed outward against the boundaries of civilised New England. Indeed, both historical accounts see quixotic characters banished to the edge by accusers who work to strengthen their own precarious positions by re-centring themselves and their literary works. Morton, then, returns to the Old World to publish his book, a move which brings home the geographical and political marginality of the New World quixotes he has left behind even as it works to secure a literary reputation for himself in European circles. And while Mather works to put colonial history (and historiography) on the map, to interpret and validate the history of the Puritans in terms of Protestant millennialism, Roger Williams is forced to leave the Plymouth plantation and journey still further toward the margins of charted territory,

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<sup>121</sup> *Magnalia Christi Americana; or, The Ecclesiastical History of New-England*, 2 vols (Hartford: Andrus, 1853), II, 497.

purchasing a tract of land from the Narragansett Indians and founding Rhode Island, a radical new colony that would brook dissent and provide a sanctuary for religious and political exiles.

There is certainly a sense in which the fictional quixotes of America's early republic will continue to inhabit the geographical and ideological margins of society, adopting the same counter-cultural stance as their historical ancestors. In *Modern Chivalry*, Brackenridge places Captain Farrago along the Western frontier, a region described by the author's son as 'the boundary of civilization',<sup>122</sup> in *A History of New York*, the quixotic governor, Peter Stuyvesant, is abandoned by the pusillanimous townsfolk he governs, and retreats to the rural solitude of his Bowery; in *Female Quixotism*, Dorcasina Sheldon ends up unmarried and 'alone, as it were, on the earth', 'in the midst of the wide world, solitary, neglected, and despised' (FQ, 322; 324). And not one of these quixotic characters is married, a sure sign of deviant behaviour in a nation where 'the setting an example of matrimony for the sake of peopleing [*sic*] a new country' is routinely described as 'an obligation upon every good citizen' (MC, 795).

In the eighteenth century, the struggle for political independence saw the resurgence of millennial aspirations in the North American colonies, with Protestant millennialism and classical republicanism joining forces to justify American action and point to the coming of a new historical age.<sup>123</sup> According to Andrew Burnaby, an English clergyman who had travelled through the middle colonies in 1759-60, 'an idea, strange as it is visionary, has entered into the minds of the generality of mankind, that empire is travelling westward; and every one is looking forward with eager and impatient expectation to that destined moment,

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<sup>122</sup> H. M. Brackenridge, 'Extract from the MS Memoir of the Native of the Ohio', in *Hazard's Register of Pennsylvania, Devoted to the Preservation of Facts and Documents, and Every Other Kind of Useful Information Respecting the State of Pennsylvania*, ed. by Samuel Hazard, 16 vols (Philadelphia: Geddes, 1828-1835), IX (1832), pp. 255-56 (p. 255).

<sup>123</sup> For an excellent discussion of 'Revolutionary Rhetorical Hybridity' see Christopher Looby, *Voicing America: Language, Literary Form, and the Origins of the United States* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 224-29.



when America is to give law to the rest of the world'.<sup>124</sup> The vision appeared to be on the brink of realisation in 1772, as Hugh Henry Brackenridge and Philip Freneau declaimed 'The Rising Glory of America', and a generation of colonists dared to hope that a new American Canaan was within their reach. In his essay on 'the Mode of Education Proper in a Republic', Benjamin Rush sententiously declared that he could 'form no ideas of the golden age, so much celebrated by the poets, more delightful, than the contemplation of that happiness which is now in the power of the legislature of Pennsylvania to confer upon her citizens, by establishing proper modes and places of education in every part of the state'.<sup>125</sup> Emerging alongside the Enlightenment Utopia projected by Benjamin Rush was the Christian paradise predicted by one Celadon, pseudonymous author of a pamphlet called *The Golden Age; or, Future Glory of North-America Discovered By An Angel to Celadon, in Several Entertaining Visions* (1785). Appearing in a dream to reveal the future glory of the USA, Celadon's seraphic oracle predicts that the Indians will become a 'polite, wealthy, and pious nation', inhabiting a fertile region called 'Savagenia', while the Negroes will 'form a State of their own', in a 'well wooded' valley called 'Nigrania'. United and harmonious, Celadon's American states will usher in 'the illustrious morning dawn, the true golden age' of a global conversion to Christianity, for it is here that 'God has determined to begin his last and greatest wonders among mankind'.<sup>126</sup> The breadth of the millennial vision was nowhere clearer than in Brackenridge's *Six Political Discourses Founded on the Scripture* (1778), a series of sermons delivered during his stint as an army chaplain. 'Days, happy days are yet before us', he assured

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<sup>124</sup> Burnaby, *Travels through the Middle Settlements in North-America*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Payne, 1775; repr. Ithaca, NY: Great Seal, 1960), p. 110. Burnaby remained sceptical of America's prophecies of imperial glory: 'if ever an idea was illusory and fallacious, I will venture to predict, that this will be so', he wrote (p. 110).

<sup>125</sup> *Essays, Literary, Moral, and Philosophical* (Philadelphia: Bradford, 1798), pp. 6-20 (p. 20).

<sup>126</sup> Celadon [pseud.] ([n.p]: [n. pub.], 1785), pp. 9-14.

American troops, predicting regeneration in the fields of agriculture, commerce, science, literature, knowledge, and religion.<sup>127</sup>

Thomas Paine shared the optimism of his adopted compatriots. 'The birthday of a new world is at hand', he exulted in *Common Sense* (1776). 'We have it in our power to begin the world over again.'<sup>128</sup> *Rights of Man* (1791-92), meanwhile, saw him savage the Old World nostalgia of Edmund Burke:

When we see a man dramatically lamenting in a publication intended to be believed, that '*The age of chivalry is gone!*' that '*The glory of Europe is extinguished for ever!*' that '*The unbought grace of life*' (if any one knows what it is), '*the cheap defence of nations, the nurse of manly sentiment and heroic enterprise, is gone!*' and all this because the Quixote age of chivalry nonsense is gone, what opinion can we form of his judgement, or what regard can we pay to his facts? In the rhapsody of his imagination he has discovered a world of windmills, and his sorrows are, that there are no Quixotes to attack them. But if the age of aristocracy, like that of chivalry, should fall, (and they had originally some connexion), Mr Burke, the trumpeter of the Order, may continue his parody to the end, and finish with exclaiming, '*Othello's occupation's gone!*'<sup>129</sup>

Seen through the revolutionary eyes of Thomas Paine, Burke's elegy for the waning age of chivalry exposes an irrational mind, a flawed judgement, and an extravagant imagination, all leaving him vulnerable to charges of quixotism. In the eyes of Americans and American sympathisers, Britain's aristocratic attitude

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<sup>127</sup> Hugh Montgomery Brackenridge, *Six Political Discourses Founded on the Scripture* (Lancaster: Bailey, 1778), p. 88. Brackenridge would change his middle name to Henry in 1781.

<sup>128</sup> *Rights of Man* and *Common Sense*, with an introduction by Michael Foot (London: Everyman, 1994), p. 299.

<sup>129</sup> *Rights of Man*, p. 20. Horrified by the violent Jacobinism of the French Revolution, and in particular by the treatment of Marie Antoinette, Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) had conflated the practice of chivalry with the institution of monarchy, lamenting that 'the age of chivalry is gone. That of sophisters, economists, and calculators, has succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished for ever. Never, never more shall we behold that generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart, which kept alive, even in servitude itself, the spirit of an exalted freedom' (*Reflections on the French Revolution*, with an introduction by A. J. Grieve [London: Dent, 1953], p. 73).

towards its Transatlantic outposts had been deluded, antiquated and inappropriate in its blind insistence upon maintaining the political hierarchies of metropolis and colony. Adopting the sly tone of a Thomas Morton, Paine succeeds in belittling the essayist and denouncing Burke's nostalgia as a conservative means of trumpeting 'the Order', a ploy to resist political change.

Yet Paine renounces one kind of quixotism only to re-inscribe another in its place. Instead of the backward-looking quixotism of Burke, with its extravagant nostalgia and idealisation of an aristocratic, Old World past, Paine's is a forward-looking quixotism, an idealistic utopianism that projects an equally extravagant image of a New World republican future.<sup>130</sup> While Burke sees the chivalric ideal sinking in the East, Paine envisages a democratic ideal rising in the West; while Burke wistfully reflects upon the past, Paine militates for the rights of Man, embraces revolution, and looks forward to the regeneration of a new republican age. Addressed to 'GEORGE WASHINGTON, President of the United States of America', the Dedication to his tract expresses a fervent prayer that 'the Rights of Man may become as universal as your Benevolence can wish, and that you may enjoy the Happiness of seeing the New World regenerate the Old'.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> While there was no definition for 'quixotic' in Webster's *Compendious Dictionary* of 1806, 'utopian' was defined as 'chimerical, imaginary, fancied' (*A Compendious Dictionary of the English Language* [Hartford: Hudson & Goodwin, 1806], p. 339).

<sup>131</sup> *Rights of Man*, p. [3]. A century on, in 1889, Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee* provides another example of an American revolutionary who dreams of re-modelling Old World society along republican lines. Transported back in time from nineteenth-century New England to sixth-century Camelot, Mark Twain's Connecticut Yankee is appalled by the social injustices of feudal England and devises a number of 'surreptitious schemes for extinguishing knighthood by making it grotesque and absurd' (*A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, ed. by M. Thomas Inge [Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998], p. 155). Yet Hank Morgan is not just an 'heroic version[] of Sancho Panza', as Joseph Harkey has argued in 'Don Quixote and American Fiction Through Mark Twain' (p. 155); he can also be read as a republican quixote, thirteen centuries before his time, an extravagant idealist determined to engineer 'an event which should be the first of its kind in the history of the world—a rounded and complete governmental revolution without bloodshed. The result to be a Republic' (*Connecticut Yankee*, p. 316), with himself as

Paine was not the only writer to charge the British with quixotism during the turbulent years of revolution; Don Quixote turned out to be a useful piece of ammunition in the war of words between the Old World power and its New World colony. Used as shorthand to signify a self-deluded fool, an ineffectual figure of fun, the knight became an easy means of sending up a pompous and incompetent enemy. In his unfinished drama, *The Spy*, for example, Philip Freneau cast a 'British officer' as 'The English Quixote of 1778', a soldier carried to 'idolatrous extravagance' by his inappropriate love for an ungrateful country.<sup>132</sup> Likewise, a poem entitled 'Lord Dunmore's Petition to the Legislature of Virginia' (1782) figured the hapless royal governor foolishly returning to his former colony, wrongly supposing that the rebels had been 'conquered and slain'. Upon arrival in Virginia, he curses his own stupidity, confessing that he, '(the don Quixote) and each of the crew, / Like Sancho, had islands and empires in view'.<sup>133</sup> Instead, and much to his dismay, the deluded Lord Dunmore, English Quixote of 1783, finds himself out of luck and out of place, a royal governor stranded in a republican state.

American charges of quixotism were particularly effective because they carried with them the assumption that British defeat was inevitable, its military quest the final and ineffectual flailing of a bygone world, destined to be outmanoeuvred by a new republican reality, doomed to be as unsuccessful as Don Quixote's attempts to revive the fortunes of chivalric practice. An 'Address to the Inhabitants of America', then, published in Brackenridge's *United States Magazine* (1779), saw John Jay condemn the 'inflamed fancies' and 'visionary schemes' of George III in much the same way that James Beattie would condemn the romance genre in 1783. For American rebels, the British king was the ultimate quixote: just as Beattie could declare that the influence of one book, *Don Quixote*,

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inaugural president, of course, since selflessness never would be a defining characteristic of the North American quixote.

<sup>132</sup> *Poems of Philip Freneau*, ed. by Fred Lewis Pattee, 3 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Library, 1902), II, 54-56.

<sup>133</sup> *Poems of Philip Freneau*, II, 114; II, 115.

saw to it that 'chivalry vanished, as snow melts before the sun', so could Jay proclaim that 'the conduct of one monarch' has 'turned the scale so much against' the British 'that their visionary schemes vanish as the unwholesome vapours of the night before the healthful influences of the sun'.<sup>134</sup>

### ***Riding Rosinante and Post-Revolutionary Politics***

With independence secured, however, all eyes turned inward and watched with dismay as the fledgling nation lurched from one crisis to the next, struggling to unite a geographically disparate and culturally diasporous population. Plagued by faction and dissent, by conflicting interpretations of republicanism and of the Constitution, the Union was repeatedly threatened with secession, by groups as disparate as the Pennsylvanian farmers of the 1794 Whiskey Rebellion, disgruntled High Federalists from the northern states, and the Aaron Burr conspirators of 1806-07. The anticipated golden age had somehow failed to materialise, and Gordon S. Wood has argued that 'everywhere in the war years and after, the revolutionary leaders were reluctantly forced to retreat from the republican idealism of 1775-76. Looking around at price-gouging farmers, engrossing merchants, and factious legislators, many could only conclude that private interest ruled most social relationships [...] To expect most people to sacrifice their private interests for the sake of the public good was utopian'.<sup>135</sup>

In an 1807 letter to Benjamin Rush, John Adams conceded that the republic they had 'been employed in building' was not after all composed of the 'good, sound white oak' they had assumed; instead, 'the heat of the climate in summer has proved it to have been ice'. In the eyes of the ousted Federalist president, 'it is all melted to water', a noble but ephemeral vision, powerless in

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<sup>134</sup> 'On Fable and Romance', in *Dissertations Moral and Critical* (London: Strahan, 1783), pp. 503-74 (p. 563); *The United States Magazine*, 1 (1779), 247-253 (pp. 250-51). Further references to the *United States Magazine* (which folded at the end of Volume One) are prefixed by USM and given in parentheses in the text.

<sup>135</sup> Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1993), pp. 252-53.

the face of a stark, Jeffersonian reality.<sup>136</sup> Writing to Rush again in the following year, Adams proclaimed the demise of the republic in more strident terms, declaring that ‘when public virtue is gone, when the national spirit is fled, when a party is substituted for the nation and faction for a party, when venality lurks and skulks in secret, and, much more, when it impudently braves the public censure, whether it be sent in the form of emissaries from foreign powers, or is employed by ambitious and intriguing domestic citizens, the republic is lost in essence, though it may still exist in form’.<sup>137</sup>

John Adams’s jeremiads on the state of American virtue were nothing new, however. In the pristine year of 1776—just months before Congress voted for independence—he complained to Mercy Otis Warren that ‘there is so much Rascallity, so much Venality and Corruption, so much Avarice and Ambition such a Rage for Profit and Commerce among all Ranks and Degrees of Men even in America, that I sometimes doubt whether there is public Virtue enough to Support a Republic’.<sup>138</sup> Moreover, precisely what constituted the ‘essence’ of republicanism was the subject of fierce political and philosophical debate; here was a term and an ideology malleable enough to be appropriated by Thomas Jefferson as well as Alexander Hamilton, by Thomas Paine as well as Fisher

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<sup>136</sup> Letter to Benjamin Rush (1 May, 1807), in *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*, ed. by Charles Francis Adams, 10 vols (Boston: Little, Brown, 1851-56), IX, 593-94. Rush had likened the republic to a ‘palace of ice’ in an earlier letter of 22 April (*The Spur of Fame: Dialogues of John Adams and Benjamin Rush, 1805-1813*, ed. by John A. Schutz, and Douglass Adair [San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1966], p. 81).

<sup>137</sup> Letter to Rush (27 September, 1808), in Adams, *Works*, IX, 603. There had been dissent from the outset, of course, but as Robert A. Ferguson has demonstrated, it had been negotiated and surmounted through silence and omission, as Revolutionary writers sought ‘to extract consensus at all costs’. Ferguson points out that ‘many Americans, to take the clearest example, object to the notion of a national federal republic in 1787, so the Constitution, in creating one, never mentions the words “national,” “federal,” or “republic”’ (*The American Enlightenment, 1750-1820* [London and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997], p. 6; p. 17).

<sup>138</sup> Letter to Mercy Otis Warren (8 January, 1776), in ‘Warren-Adams Letters’, *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 72-73 (1917; 1925), I, 202.

Ames. In *The Republic Reborn: War and the Making of Liberal America, 1790-1820*, Steven Watts has described ‘a whole series of interlocking ideological principles’ that ‘gave concrete substance to the republican world-view: “virtue,” or the subordination of private interests to the general good of the commonwealth; an “organic” vision of society cohering by mutual obligations and deference; a singular understanding of “independence” as the self-reliance and economic capacity flowing from property ownership; and finally, a cyclical view of history as recurring development and decay to which fragile republics seemed particularly susceptible’. Watts is also one of several historians to conclude that, ‘by the late 1700s, American republican ideology was wracked by division. Divergent tendencies within a common creed—should one emphasize individual independence or corporate welfare, achievement or hierarchy, political rights or deference?—generated internal pressures’.<sup>139</sup> When it came to republicanism, there was no firm semiotic ground: all political players claimed to be patriots and republicans and all denounced their opponents as dangerous traitors and the enemies of liberty. Even John Adams acknowledged that ‘there is not a more unintelligible word in the English language than republicanism’.<sup>140</sup>

In November, 1806, the *Monthly Anthology* added its voice to the growing throng of political jeremiads, lamenting the absence of ‘chivalrous, generous policy in national councils’, and condemning ‘the jarring of sects, and the noisy trampling of christian combatants’. Disenchanted with the debased realms of politics and religion, the writer turns in desperation to scholarship: ‘in literature are there no hopes?’ he asks. ‘Surely the descendants of Englishmen in America

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<sup>139</sup> Watts, *Republic Reborn*, p. 11.

<sup>140</sup> Letter to Mercy Otis Warren (8 August, 1807), ‘Correspondence between John Adams and Mercy Warren relating to her *History of the American Revolution*, July-August, 1807’, *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 5<sup>th</sup> ser., 4 (1878) 315-511 (p. 432). As well as the work of Steven Watts, books and articles which have influenced my thinking on the concept of republicanism in the period include Linda Kerber, ‘The Republican Ideology of the Revolutionary Generation’, *Essays*, pp. 131-56; Robert E. Shalhope, *The Roots of Democracy: American Thought and Culture, 1760-1800* (Boston: Twayne, 1990); Joyce Appleby, *Capitalism and a New Social Order*, and Appleby, ‘Republicanism in Old and New Contexts’, *WMQ*, 43 (1986), 20-34.

are not absolutely degenerate'. Giving the matter some thought, however, he reluctantly concludes that 'we boast of no epick, tragedy, comedy, elegies, poems, pastoral or amatory...but this field is all desert [*sic*], a wide African sand garden, showing brambles, and rushes and reeds'.<sup>141</sup> The literary aspirations of the 1770s, then, had come to nothing, Brackenridge's vision of a 'peerless' American 'bard' had been exposed for the mirage it was,<sup>142</sup> and the glory days of American literature would still appear to be some way off. In *The Comic Imagination in American Literature*, Louis D. Rubin Jr. has argued that it is precisely this 'incongruity between the ideal and the real' that 'lies at the heart of American experience'.<sup>143</sup> For Rubin, as for Emerson before him, it is 'the gap between the cultural ideal and the everyday fact', the disparity between 'the language of culture and the language of sweat, the democratic ideal and the mulishness of fallen human nature' that constitutes 'the Great American Joke'.<sup>144</sup> Working within this paradigm, the years of the early republic, expressing the highest of ideals and experiencing the hardest of falls, would provide a fertile context for devising the greatest of American jokes. And who better to deliver the punchline than Don Quixote, the *über*-idealist who would re-invent himself as a hard-hitting critic of 'American experience'?

As the United States struggled to reconcile incompatible versions of republicanism, political divisions widened, personal enmities intensified, and Don

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<sup>141</sup> 'Our Country', *The Monthly Anthology and Boston Review*, 3 (1806), 579 (p. 579).

<sup>142</sup> *The Death of General Montgomery in Storming the City of Quebec* (Norwich: Trumbull, 1777), p. 37.

<sup>143</sup> Rubin, 'Introduction: "The Great American Joke"', in *The Comic Imagination in American Literature*, ed. by Louis D. Rubin Jr (Washington, DC: United States Information Agency, 1977), pp. 3-15 (p. 5).

<sup>144</sup> Rubin, p. 12; p. 15. Ralph Waldo Emerson had observed the same scope for comedy in 'The Comic', where he claims that 'there is no joke so true and deep in actual life, as when some pure idealist goes up and down among the institutions of society, attended by a man who knows the world [...] His perception of disparity, his eye wandering perpetually from the rule to the crooked, lying, thieving fact, makes the eyes run over with laughter' ('The Comic', in *The Complete Prose Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* [Glasgow: Grand Colosseum Warehouse, (1895)], pp. 609-14 [p. 610]).



Quixote was once again called to the field. As a standard-bearer for political extremism, he was most frequently deployed by conservative wits to satirise the democratic fervour of more radical republicans. Conflating the Spanish Quixote with the French radical, and grafting the vocabulary of the French Revolution onto the US political landscape, a columnist in the conservative *Echo* satirised a ‘Jacobin’ contributor to the *American Mercury*, scornfully recounting how this ‘Don Quixote, knight of woeful face, / Led on the Revolution race’.<sup>145</sup> And in 1809, Irving’s *History of New York* would caricature Republican president, Thomas Jefferson, as the ineffectual, experimental William the Testy, a fiery little quixote of a governor with a fetish for windmills and a soft-spot for squires with big trumpets.

But to be quixotic was no longer to be a mere blockhead, and Jefferson was not ashamed to associate himself with the much-maligned idealist of La Mancha. In a letter of 1795, the former secretary of state likened his political career to the travels of Quixote, declining an invitation to a political function with the explanation that ‘I have laid up my Rosinante in his stall, before his unfitness for the road shall expose him faltering to the world’.<sup>146</sup> As it turns out, Jefferson’s retirement from the combative field of politics was little more than an interlude; he soon set off on another sally, this time to dislodge the Federalist administration and unseat Adams from the presidency. Though Jefferson wryly confessed that he was not ‘provided with the enchanted arms of the knight, nor even with his helmet of Mambrino’, he did have the newly-formed Republican Party behind him, and he romped home to victory in the presidential campaign of 1800.<sup>147</sup> For Thomas Jefferson, the change of administration signalled the triumph

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<sup>145</sup> Quoted in Heiser, *Hispanic Review*, p. 419.

<sup>146</sup> Letter to Mann Page (30 August, 1795), in *Writings*, pp. 1029-30. Jefferson was harangued by his political opponents for riding his ‘Rosinante’ to official engagements; in 1889, his unconventional mode of transport would be trumped by the sixth-century knights of *A Connecticut Yankee*, who ride their bicycles to the rescue of King Arthur and ‘The Boss’ (p. 302).

<sup>147</sup> ‘Diary of Arnold’s Invasion and Notes on Subsequent Events in 1781’, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. by Julian P. Boyd, 19 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1950-74), IV, 256-268 (p. 265). For Joyce Appleby, ‘the tension between idealism and

of the democratic ideal; it was quite simply ‘the revolution of 1800’, effected not ‘by the sword’, but ‘by the rational and peaceable instrument of reform, the suffrage of the people’.<sup>148</sup>

While Jefferson never lost faith in either the democratic process or the fundamental integrity of American people—an idealistic stance that earned him much derision from sceptical Federalists—even he believed that any attempt to amend Old World manners would prove a hopeless quest. In an 1811 letter to William Wirt, written as America stood on the brink of war with Great Britain, the former President insisted that, ‘for us to attempt, by war, to reform all Europe, and bring them back to principles of morality, and a respect for the equal rights of nations, would show us to be only maniacs of another character. We should, indeed, have the merit of the good intentions as well as the folly of the hero of La Mancha’.<sup>149</sup> Jefferson may well have seen ‘merit’ as well as ‘folly’ in the ‘hero of La Mancha’, but his Federalist adversaries chose only to see folly in the hero of Monticello, with Jefferson’s philosophical quests bearing the brunt of the satirical blows. Acerbic arch-Federalist, Alexander Hamilton, for example, observed that ‘as in schools, applications to the breach are said to have a wonderful effect on the head, by driving up learning, so there appears to be such a wonderful connexion between the seat and the head of this great politician, and the motions of the one have such a powerful effect on the operations of the other’.<sup>150</sup> Anticipating ‘the

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pragmatism has remained taut throughout the history of the United States, and Jefferson has made it bearable’ (*Without Resolution: The Jeffersonian Tensions in American Nationalism* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992], p. 25).

<sup>148</sup> Letter to Judge Spencer Roane (6 September, 1819), in Jefferson, *Writings*, p. 1425.

<sup>149</sup> Letter to William Wirt (3 May, 1811), in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. by Andrew A. Lipscomb and Albert E. Bergh, 20 vols (Washington, DC: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1904-05), XIII, 56. Critical discussions of Thomas Jefferson have been just as contradictory as those surrounding Don Quixote. Discussing his ‘utility to both sides of every argument’, Joyce Appleby has observed that ‘anti-slavery activists and slavery defenders alike count him as one of their own’, and he even ‘has the unique distinction of being claimed as the founder of both major American political parties’ (*Without Resolution*, p. 2).

<sup>150</sup> Hamilton’s comments, first published in James Fenno’s *Gazette of the United States* (22 September, 1792), are reprinted in Philip M. Marsh, ‘Randolph and Hamilton: “Aristides” Replies

breechology of professor Higgenbottom', a theorist who advocates 'the surprising and intimate connection between the seat of honour, and the seat of intellect' (HNY, 549), Hamilton's caricature uproots the President from a serious political context and replants him firmly within a burlesque realm: the topsy-turvy reliance of the head upon the tail, the cheeky implication that the head of state is talking through his arse, resemble nothing more than Cervantes' own breech-humour analogy between writing a book and 'blow[ing] up a dog', both tasks where plenteous supplies of wind produce a prodigiously bloated tail (DQ, 420).

As a signifier within the discourse of partisan politics, Don Quixote was not solely used by the Federalists to mock the democratic notions of Jeffersonian republicanism; in his role as a would-be warrior, repeatedly beset by imaginary enemies, Quixote was used to critique the paranoia of party politicians and the dangers of partisanship *per se*. As early as 1778, Samuel Stanhope Smith dismissed 'the bigot[s] of all parties' as 'true knight-errants in philosophy', 'doubty [*sic*] champions' who, 'like Don Quixote when they cannot find real adventures have an admirable talent at inventing imaginary ones'. In Stanhope Smith's opinion, 'when all parties are afraid lest the opinions of their antagonists are destructive of religion, it is a proof that none of them are so'.<sup>151</sup> Party politics was proving to be a deadly business, though, and by the time that Mathew Carey published *The Olive Branch*, in 1814, 'the madness of party' was even threatening the outcome of the 1812 Anglo-American War. Carey dedicates his political tract to a country that is 'DRUGGED INTO A DEATH-LIKE STUPOR' and lies 'PROSTRATE AT THE FEET OF A RUTHLESS FOE', 'A BELOVED BUT BLEEDING COUNTRY, TORN IN PIECES BY FACTIOUS, DESPERATE, CONVULSIVE, AND RUINOUS STRUGGLES FOR POWER'.<sup>152</sup> Writing the tract with an eye to healing wounds, Carey calls for a

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to "An American," "Catullus," and "Scourge", *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 72 (1948), 247-252 (p. 249).

<sup>151</sup> Letter to James Madison (15 September, 1778), in *The Papers of James Madison*, ed. by William T. Hutchinson and William M. E. Rachal, 12 vols (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962-79), I, 257.

<sup>152</sup> *The Olive Branch; or, Faults on Both Sides, Federal and Democratic*, 6th edn (Philadelphia: Carey, 1815), pp. [5-6].

truce between Federalist and Republican parties, though in his preface to the sixth edition he admits that he is ‘struck with astonishment at [his] Quixotism and folly, in expecting to make an impression on a community, torn in pieces by faction; a prey to the most violent passions; and labouring under the most awful degree of delusion’.<sup>153</sup> While Carey claims that his ‘fears of civil war are regarded as visionary—as the wild effusions of a disordered brain’, he draws attention to his own quixotic tendencies only to re-locate them with his duped compatriots, who are, according to Carey, ‘deluded by the madness of party’ and oblivious to America’s precarious political reality.<sup>154</sup>

Washington Irving was no stranger to the dirty business of party politics; in 1807 he campaigned for his ‘forlorn brethren the federalists’ in New York’s hard-fought gubernatorial election.<sup>155</sup> Nonetheless, in *Salmagundi*, his clutch of quixotic commentators reveal an underlying ambivalence towards the legacy of Federalism. Published in twenty numbers between 24 January, 1807, and 25 January, 1808, *Salmagundi; or, The Whim-Whams and opinions of Launcelot Langstaff, Esq.* was the irreverent magazine that Irving wrote pseudonymously with James Kirke Paulding and his brother, William Irving. *Salmagundi* is as close as early republic fiction comes to representing a community of quixotic figures, a gentleman’s club after the manner of Sir Roger de Coverley, the benevolent baronet who had proved so popular in Addison and Steele’s *Spectator*.<sup>156</sup> Launcelot Langstaff and his own conservative cronies divide their time between New York town and rural Cockloft Hall, where the library bears ‘comparison, in point of usefulness and eccentricity, with the motley collection of

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<sup>153</sup> *Olive Branch*, p. 30.

<sup>154</sup> *Olive Branch*, p. 32. Nonetheless, the canny Mathew Carey transformed his self-confessed quixotism into a lucrative commercial success, as his essay ran to seven editions within the year and became a political best-seller second only to Paine’s *Common Sense*.

<sup>155</sup> Letter to Mary Fairlie (2 May, 1807), in *Letters*, I, 231-2.

<sup>156</sup> It must be said, however, that the universal benevolence of Sir Roger de Coverley, whose ‘Humanity and good Nature engages every Body to him’ (*Coverley*, p. 16) is somewhat lacking in the crabby quixotes of *Salmagundi*. Despite his professions of benevolence, Christopher Cockloft refuses to open his door to either Frenchmen or Democrats.

the renowned hero of La Mancha'.<sup>157</sup> In the opening number of *Salmagundi*, Langstaff describes the magazine as a brand of 'humorous knight-errantry', and declares that 'the thrice valiant and renowned Don Quixote, never made such work amongst the wool-clad warriors of Trapoban, or the puppets of the itinerant showman, as we promise to make amongst [the] fine fellows' of urbane New York (S, 85; 87). It seems entirely appropriate that Irving's New York Federalists should adopt Don Quixote as one of their own; American quixotes had frequently inhabited the margins of society, and by 1807, when Irving's motley collection of superannuated bachelors arrived on the scene, the Federalist Party was also on its last legs, full of 'gripes and grumblings' (DQ, 27) but devoid of power, still using the partisan press to lash out at the Jeffersonian regime, but destined to remain in political exile.

In the opening number of the magazine, Langstaff declares his intention to 'instruct the young, reform the old, correct the town and castigate the age' (S, 49), and on one level, the group of Federalist friends function as the voice of common sense for the city and the moral locus of the magazine, lambasting the deluded pride of New York town, its obsession with fashion, its cultural ignorance and its lack of political integrity. But the exhortations of *Salmagundi*'s quixotic coterie fall upon deaf ears: ineffectual and out of touch, they find themselves peripheral to the New York they depict. Worse still, when they do venture into town, figures such as William Wizard and Anthony Evergreen appear even more ridiculous than the victims of their satire. Die-hard Federalists writing at a time when the demise of the Federalist party is imminent, members of a ruling-class that has not been elected to rule for more than seven years, they stand powerless in the face of progress, frustrated and bewildered by the speed and scope of change in their beloved city of Gotham.

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<sup>157</sup> *Salmagundi; or, The Whim-Whams and Opinions of Launcelot Langstaff, Esq. & Others*, in *History, Tales and Sketches*, ed. by James W. Tuttleton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 45-362 (p. 303). Further references to this edition are prefixed by S and given in parentheses in the text.

### *Reading Cervantes and Authoring the Nation*

Common currency in political debate and philosophical discussion, Don Quixote was on the tongues and in the libraries of the nation's most influential decision-makers. Joseph Harkey has argued that 'practically every eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century library of any size included *Don Quixote* in its holdings'.<sup>158</sup> George Washington, as we have already seen, purchased his first copy of *Don Quixote* on the day he ratified the Constitution. John Adams read the work at least twice during the turbulent decade of the 1770s, and upon his death both French and Spanish editions of the text were found amongst his books.<sup>159</sup> Thomas Jefferson included 'Don Quichotte' in the 'plan of reading' he framed for his daughter, and by 1778, the text was on the recommended reading list at Yale University.<sup>160</sup> Joseph Dennie's 'Lay Preacher' claimed to have 'read ten times the adventures of Don Quixote, lunatic knight', and according to Cervantes biographers, *Quixote* was indeed a layman's text, appreciated by all and not just a tome for scholars.<sup>161</sup> In 1816, the *Portico* marvelled at the 'universal reception' of the socially-levelling *Quixote*, observing that Cervantes 'is not only read by the humorous, the witty, and the gay; but he is studied and consulted, by the dull, the serious, and the austere. The king and the counsellor, the peasant, the tradesman, and the gentleman, all give a loose to merriment and hilarity, over his fascinating

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<sup>158</sup> 'Don Quixote and American Fiction Through Mark Twain', pp. 51-52.

<sup>159</sup> Adams's diary entry for 2 July, 1771, recorded that he had been 'reading the Atchievements of Don Quixotte'; the sole contents of his entry for 18 May, 1779, written while anchored off the French coast, was as follows: 'On Board all day, reading Don Quixot' (*The Adams Papers: Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, ed. by L. H. Butterfield, 4 vols [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961], II, 43; II, 375).

<sup>160</sup> Jefferson, *Papers*, VI, 374. Joseph Tuft's *Don Quixots at College* (1807) was a short satirical pamphlet comparing Cervantes' knight to the carping students of Harvard University, who took direct action to improve the quality of the college food.

<sup>161</sup> Dennie, *The Lay Preacher*, ed. by Milton Ellis (Walpole, NH: Carlisle, 1796; Philadelphia: Hall, 1817; repr. New York: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1943), p. 157. Harkey's doctoral thesis has discussed *Quixote*'s influence 'on popular culture in America', best exemplified in 'the proverbs and colloquialisms that Sancho and others in the novel have given us' (pp. 46-48). My own favourite is 'the proof of the pudding, is in the eating of it' (DQ, 305).

page'.<sup>162</sup> The characters of 'king', 'counsellor', and 'peasant' may belong to a cast of Old World readers, but the democratic sentiment belongs to a newly-confident republic, re-energised by the 'emotional catharsis' of conflict and vindicated by success in the War of 1812.<sup>163</sup>

Fictional readers of *Don Quixote* were commonplace in the novels of the period and included the virtuous P. P. in Gilbert Imlay's *The Emigrants* (1793), the noble but naïve protagonist who takes up *Don Quixote* as a 'cheerful' restorative to the woes of *Othello*. Too noble-minded to survive the machinations of English society, he emigrates to America, where he leads a reclusive life in the Allegheny Mountains.<sup>164</sup> As early as 1789, the lovestruck Harrington in William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy* declares his visit to Harriot's house 'an adventure that would have done honour to the Knight of *La Mancha*', and in Rebecca Rush's *Kelroy* (1812), the magnanimous Walsingham compares himself with Don Quixote when he tries to bring about the marriage of his ill-starred friends.<sup>165</sup> In his preface to *Ira and Isabella*, published posthumously in 1807, William Hill Brown set about comparing 'the different romance and novel writers in Europe' by awarding his favourite authors marks out of twenty for their 'genius, satire, knowledge, taste, style and pathos'. The 'scale of novelists' he compiled awarded Cervantes top marks for his 'Genius' and 'Style' and ranked him a close third overall.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> 'Michael de Cervantes', *The Portico*, 1 (1816), 244-51 (p. 245).

<sup>163</sup> Watts, *Republic Reborn*, p. 321.

<sup>164</sup> *The Emigrants*, ed. by W. M. Verhoeven and Amanda Gilroy (London and New York: Penguin, 1998), p. 103.

<sup>165</sup> William Hill Brown, '*The Power of Sympathy*' and Hannah Webster Foster, '*The Coquette*', ed. by Carla Mulford (New York and London: Penguin, 1996), p. 36; *Kelroy: A Novel*, ed. by Dana D. Nelson (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 1-103 (p. 94). Given he is a nobleman and an Englishman, Walsingham's heroic stature is unconventional for its time: English aristocrats invariably played the villains in American fiction, and *Kelroy* was published in the same year that the 1812 War broke out with Great Britain.

<sup>166</sup> *Ira and Isabella; or, The Natural Children* (Boston: Belcher & Armstrong, 1807), p. xiii. Brown awarded Cervantes 117 points, Johnson 122 points, and Swift 121 points.

More recently, in 'Bibliography and the Cultural Historian: Notes on the Eighteenth-Century Novel', Robert B. Winans has calculated and tabulated 'the novels most frequently listed in American catalogues of books, 1750-1800'. According to Winans, these catalogues provide 'the best evidence' for 'determining which novels were the most widely and continuously distributed' in the period, and his table of results provides another measure of Cervantes' astonishing popularity: from over two thousand novel titles, *Don Quixote* holds second place in Winans's best-sellers list.<sup>167</sup> Coming in above Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield* (3), Le Sage's *Gil Blas* (4), and Fielding's *Tom Jones* (5), it is second only to Henry Brooke's *The Fool of Quality*, a British quixotic fiction that did itself include a four page panegyric of the knight and his squire.<sup>168</sup> As for possible reasons why no American edition of *Don Quixote* was published until 1803, Winans has argued that the popularity of a novel did not necessarily correlate with the number of domestic editions published; it was the length of a book that determined the viability of American reprints. The five volume *Fool of Quality*, for example, saw only one American edition, in 1794, and Winans has pointed out that 'the novels printed in three or more American editions have one thing in common. They are all rather short'—not a characteristic that *Don Quixote* shares. According to Winans, 'the greater the length of a novel, the more crucial became its cost of production, and therefore its potential profitability, in the face of competition from English imports'.<sup>169</sup> This would explain why Cervantes' *Galatea*—only 108 pages long—was published as early as 1798, five years before the better known *Quixote*; when the first US edition of *Don Quixote* was

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<sup>167</sup> Winans, in *Printing and Society in Early America*, ed. by William L. Joyce and others (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1983), pp. 174-185 (p. 177). The prevalence of comic fiction in Winans's table also challenges critical assumptions about the predominance of sentimental fiction in the period, and Winans concludes that 'the novel of sensibility in general was not as paramount in America as has been presupposed' (p. 184).

<sup>168</sup> Winans, p. 178.

<sup>169</sup> Winans, pp. 181-82.





Fig. 4 W. Haines, 'Don Quixote begging of his Landlord to Beknight him',  
Don Quixote, 1803





Fig. 5 S. Seymour, 'Don Quixotte', *Don Quixote*, 1803

published by John Conrad, using Smollett's translation of 1755, it ran to four volumes and fourteen-hundred pages.<sup>170</sup> There appear to be several variant editions of Conrad's 1803 *Quixote*; the edition I have consulted contains just two illustrations, both of which appear in Volume One.<sup>171</sup> The first is the frontispiece (fig. 4), depicting 'Don Quixote begging of his Landlord to Beknight him'; the second, towards the end of the volume, is simply titled 'Don Quixotte' (fig. 5), and figures the knight sat astride Rosinante, reading Cardenio's sonnet.<sup>172</sup> The presence of variant spellings within the same edition is certainly in keeping with Smollett's contradictory Quixote; it is a typographical analogue to the way in which the 1803 edition contains two plates by two engravers, two quixotes and two variant perspectives of Cervantes' knight.

The frontispiece presents a demeaned and ridiculous Quixote down upon his knees before a portly innkeeper: the would-be knight is a picture of impotence, subservient to his social inferior and wielding a spindly stick for a sword (the comical Captain Crowe had performed this ludicrous rite of passage in Smollett's own *Sir Launcelot Greaves*). With the educated landowner down on his knees and social hierarchies turned on their head, this engraving might well have appealed to an anti-authoritarian America where, in the words of Gordon S. Wood, 'ordinary people were no longer willing to play their accustomed roles in the hierarchy [...] were less dependent, less willing to walk while gentlemen rode, less willing to doff their caps, less deferential, less passive, less respectful of those above

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<sup>170</sup> *The History and Adventures of the Renowned Don Quixote*, trans. by Tobias Smollett, 4 vols (Philadelphia: Conrad, 1803).

<sup>171</sup> The bibliographical note that accompanies the edition filmed for the *Early American Imprints* series, observes that 'there are variations of the prints and plates', and while the *National Union Catalog* makes reference to a frontispiece and 'several plates' in Conrad's 1803 *Quixote*, the microprint edition which I have been consulting contains just the frontispiece (engraved by W. Haines) and one additional plate (engraved by S. Seymour).

<sup>172</sup> The second illustration relates to the episode where Sancho and Quixote come across Cardenio's portmanteau in the wilderness. Sancho is delighted to find 'a pretty large heap of crowns of gold', while Quixote is intrigued by a 'richly garnished' pocket-book, containing 'the rough draught, tho' very legible, of a sonnet' (DQ, 168-69).

them'.<sup>173</sup> The second plate, however, is a kind of back-to-frontispiece, an inverse image of the earlier plate, with Quixote raised up on his steed and a portly Sancho Panza kneeling at his feet, rummaging through Cardenio's portmanteau for loot. With his well-proportioned body, snugly-fitting armour, and professional-looking lance, this particular Quixote is uplifted and ennobled, a gentleman of letters rather than a man of the world, oblivious to the scramble for material gain and attentive to the beauties of the literary text.

By the end of the eighteenth century, Don Quixote was largely established as 'a symbol of sublimity' in the eyes of British critics, an object of the 'greatest veneration' in the 'saddest' of tales.<sup>174</sup> Early US critics would maintain a more ambiguous stance, and a full-blown Romantic reading was some years away. Not until 1836 would the *New-York Mirror* castigate misguided detractors of Don Quixote for failing to recognise the 'heroick virtue' of the knight and the tragic dimension of his tale:

This immortal work of Cervantes is the most melancholy book that ever was written, and those who can laugh at the whims and mistakes of the gallant and noble-minded Don, are ridiculing the most disinterested and generous instance of heroick virtue that ever shed its halo upon a degenerate age. The entire extinction of chivalry has been dated from the appearance of Cervantes' book, as it is always easier to ridicule than to imitate virtue.<sup>175</sup>

The New York minister Samuel Miller, was one of those critics who saw only ridicule in *Don Quixote*. Writing in 1803, the satire was the sum for this conservative reader, and Cervantes' 'performance was expressly intended to pour ridicule on those masses of absurdity and impurity which had so long maintained

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<sup>173</sup> Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, pp. 145-46.

<sup>174</sup> *Aesthetics of Laughter*, p. xv; Hazlitt, *Lectures*, p. 108; *Don Juan*, p. 445.

<sup>175</sup> 'Don Quixote', *The New-York Mirror*, 13 (1836), 379 (p. 379). George Ticknor would consolidate such Romantic readings of *Quixote* in his *History of Spanish Literature*, defining the text as 'the oldest classical specimen of romantic fiction', and warmly praising the 'generous and elevated nature' of its knight (3 vols [New York: Harper, 1849], II, 118; II, 114).

an influence over the world: Few works were ever so much read, or so effectively answered their proposed end'.<sup>176</sup>

'Silva: Don Quixote', an article published in the *Monthly Anthology and Boston Review* of September, 1807, saw beyond the satire but nonetheless reversed the *New-York Mirror's* romantic relationship between the text and its time. Rather than perceiving the book as a monument of melancholy, misread by an age too quick to laugh, this article contrasted the gravity of Renaissance Spain with the peerless comedy of *Don Quixote*:

It seems a problem in literature, that a nation the gravest and most seriously disposed by its natural temper and the gloomy despotism of its government and religion, should have produced the most lively work that ever was written. It abounds in original humour and exquisite satire. It displays the most copious invention, the most whimsical incidents and the keenest remarks on the follies of its contemporaries. There is no book in whatever language that so eminently possesses the power of exciting laughter.<sup>177</sup>

If this was the 'problem' that underpinned *Quixote*, there was a similar 'problem' or paradox that underpinned *Quixote* criticism in the years of the early republic: while critics routinely praised the book for its satire of romantic fiction and chivalric practice, they romanticised its author for his chivalric behaviour, spinning their own romantic fictions around Cervantes' mysterious and eventful life.

Quite possibly referring to the more romantic, European readings of *Don Quixote*, Joseph Dennie explained that 'as to the serious purpose of it, various opinions have been given, probably with more fancy and subtlety than truth. Perhaps he had nothing further in view than to write a diverting and instructive satire of the extravagant tales, which, under the title of romances, over-ran the age'. Later on in the article, though, Dennie concedes that 'though [Cervantes] chose to make the fictions of chivalry the object of his ridicule, [he] had much of

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<sup>176</sup> Miller, *A Brief Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century*, 2 vols (New York: Swords, 1803), II, 157.

<sup>177</sup> *The Monthly Anthology and Boston Review*, 4 (1807), 493 (p. 493).

the romantic in his own composition; and in the points of love and heroism was a true Spaniard'.<sup>178</sup> What's more, this disparity—between the rational or Enlightenment reading of *Don Quixote* on the one hand and the more Romantic reading of Cervantes on the other—was especially pronounced in the early republic because of the largely biographical nature of its literary criticism. The little *Quixote* criticism published in the period invariably consisted of passing comments in biographical essays of Cervantes; Dennie's comments in his *Port Folio* article, 'The Life of Miguel Cervantes de Saavedra', fell into just this category. The celebrated 'Vida de Cervantes', written by Don Vincente de los Ríos, and first published in 1780, was translated and abridged around the world, re-worked for periodicals and re-cycled for new editions of *Don Quixote*. Don Gregorio Mayáns I Siscár's 1738 biography continued to be re-used through the eighteenth century, and Smollett's 'Life of Cervantes' invariably prefaced editions of his translation. The story of Cervantes' life, with its peripatetic tendencies and its poverty-stricken protagonist, was a mini-picaresque in itself, an excellent warm-up for the marathon fiction to follow.

While Smollett was keen to recast Quixote as a middling kind of man, and shied away from 'raising him to the insipid rank of a dry philosopher, or debasing him to the melancholy circumstances and unentertaining caprice of an ordinary madman', he had no such qualms about distinguishing Cervantes (DQ, 19). 'Notwithstanding all the shafts of ridicule which he hath so successfully levelled against the absurdities of the Spanish romance', Smollett was certain that Cervantes 'himself had a turn for chivalry: his life was a chain of extraordinary adventures, his temper was altogether heroic, and all his actions were, without doubt, influenced by the most romantic notions of honour' (DQ, 8). Tobias Smollett, a proud Scotsman who lived in an unappreciative London for much of his life, described himself as a 'perpetual exile' from the nation that had failed to recognise his work.<sup>179</sup> Not surprisingly, then, Smollett's 'Life of Cervantes' emphasised the alienation of the Spanish author from his country, arguing that

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<sup>178</sup> *The Port Folio*, 2 (1802), 44-45 (p. 44).

<sup>179</sup> 'Epistolary', *The Port Folio*, 1 (1801), 2-3 (p. 3).

while Cervantes' 'admirable genius and heroic spirit conduced to the honour of his country, the distress and obscurity which attended his old age, as effectually redounded to her disgrace'. Disregarded by an ungrateful nation, Smollett's Cervantes had been disowned by his family, too, for 'no inquiry hath, as yet, been able to ascertain the place of his nativity', and 'no house has hitherto laid claim to such an illustrious descendant' (DQ, 1). For Tobias Smollett, Cervantes' 'silence on a subject' so integral to his 'self-respect' suggests a family rift or feud, a supposition he considers 'not at all improbable, considering the jealous sensibility of the Spaniards in general', and of Cervantes in particular (DQ, 2).

While Smollett's speculations rest upon national stereotypes and Smollett's Cervantes is the epitome of a Spanish character trait, the orphaned genius that Joseph Dennie brings to light in 1802 appears peculiarly American. Dennie uses the dubiety surrounding Cervantes' familial origins to emphasise the youthful independence and self-reliance of the Spanish author, arguing that Cervantes' 'total silence as to the manner in which he passed his youth [...] seem[s] to prove that he had no other patrimony than his sword and learning'.<sup>180</sup> Dennie's emphasis upon military skill and educational accomplishment would certainly have met with approbation from his post-Revolutionary compatriots, who were themselves separated from their parent country, victorious in war, and proud of their highly literate populace.<sup>181</sup> Transforming the Spanish orphan into a self-made man, Dennie goes on to praise *Quixote* for its innovation: freed from his past, this new man has produced a work which has 'enriched every modern language with words and phrases to express new ideas'. Recuperating the alien artist as an entrepreneurial inventor, representing Cervantes as the manufacturer of quality literary goods, Dennie proclaims that the author's work 'cannot but rank with the capital productions of the human invention'.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> *The Port Folio*, 1802, p. 44.

<sup>181</sup> In 1816, the *Portico* likewise admired Cervantes' combination of literary and martial talent, declaring that 'it has been the fortune of few writers, to unite valour with wit. Cervantes presents a remarkable example of their happy combination' (p. 250).

<sup>182</sup> *The Port Folio*, 1802, p. 45.

Published a decade earlier, in 1792, a two-part biography in the *American Apollo* plays to a nation remembering the Revolution and engaged in Barbary conflict, representing Cervantes as an heroic freedom fighter, a slave who risked his life in the struggle to liberate himself and his fellow prisoners from captivity in Algiers.<sup>183</sup> Although just a single episode in a colourful life, the biographer devotes over a third of his 'Life' to the incident. Cervantes' history turns into a melodramatic captivity narrative and the biography slides into fictional serialisation as Part I culminates with a sensational cliff-hanger: 'a party of moors' appear from nowhere, the rescue attempt is foiled, and readers must wait for the next issue to learn of Cervantes' fate.<sup>184</sup> A good story aside, the *American Apollo* is primarily concerned with glorifying the struggle for freedom in the face of tyranny. The biography condemns 'the tyranny of the Kings of Spain' and 'her sub-tyrants the priests'; it describes Cervantes's story of 'The Slave' as 'one of the most interesting episodes' in *Don Quixote*, and it pointedly asks its US readership, 'What will not the love of liberty incite us to?'<sup>185</sup> Artistic freedom is also an issue for the *American Apollo*, as the silences and omissions in Cervantes' life story once again provide the scope for alternative authors to emerge in print. Commenting on Cervantes' decade of silence following the publication of *Don Quixote* in 1605, the 'Life of Cervantes' which is prefixed to William Miller's London edition of the text, attributes the Spaniard's disappearance to 'the purpose of appearing with greater eclat' when he re-emerges to publish his sequel in 1615.<sup>186</sup> For the *American Apollo*, however, Cervantes' silence is not a stunt designed to generate suspense or build anticipation; it is a symptom of the ruthless censorship and atmosphere of intimidation that plagued Renaissance Spain. Drawing attention to the vehemence of Cervantes' detractors and his fear of writing in an age when 'the inquisition subsists in full force', the *Apollo* explains

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<sup>183</sup> Despite being written during the Tripolitan War of 1801-05, Dennie's biography makes little of Cervantes' Barbary captivity, mentioning only that 'several romantic circumstances, but of dubious authority, are recorded of him whilst a slave at Algiers' (p. 44).

<sup>184</sup> *The American Apollo*, 1, Part II (1792), 100-102; 116-19 (p. 102).

<sup>185</sup> *The American Apollo*, p. 118; p. 116; p. 101.

<sup>186</sup> *Don Quixote*, 1801, p. xli.



that, 'overawed by the host of scribblers in combination against him, he durst not for many years put any thing to press. His means of support thus cut off, he fell into extreme indigence'.<sup>187</sup> The impecunious scape-goat, overwhelmed by difficulties and bereft of any literary community, presents an altogether bleaker model of authorship than the entrepreneurial Cervantes we see in Dennie's 'Life'; between them, though, these two competing perspectives of the Spanish author would articulate the longings and anxieties experienced by a generation of early republic authors.

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The American colonies had always had a peculiar relationship with fiction, and with romance fiction, in particular. Recounting the 'absolute fanaticism for books of chivalry' in sixteenth-century Spain, George Ticknor reveals that 'the passion for such fictions was so strong, and seemed so dangerous, that in 1553 they were prohibited from being printed, sold, or read in the American colonies'.<sup>188</sup> The influence of 'such fictions' was evidently thought to pose a particular threat to the New World colonies, themselves perceived to be romantic ventures, removed from European reality, and operating in an unknown and a seemingly marvellous world. The Puritan leaders of British North America evinced a similar suspicion towards fictional works; in the words of Emory Elliott, they reasoned 'that the senses were unreliable, that appeals to the imagination were dangerous, and that the use of figurative, imagistic, or symbolic language bordered upon idolatry'.<sup>189</sup> As early as 1640, then, the preface to *The Whole Booke of Psalmes* (known today as *The Bay Psalm Book*) refused to apologise for its 'plaine translation'; it may not have produced the smoothest of translations but this was because 'God's Altar

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<sup>187</sup> *The American Apollo*, p. 118.

<sup>188</sup> *History of Spanish Literature*, I, 253-54.

<sup>189</sup> Elliott, 'New England Puritan Literature', in *The Cambridge History of American Literature, Volume I: 1590-1820*, ed. by Sacvan Bercovitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 169-306 (p. 226).

needs not our polishings', and therefore the translators had 'attended Conscience rather than Elegance, fidelity rather than poetry'.<sup>190</sup>

Published in the eighteenth number of *Salmagundi*, Washington Irving's 'The Little Man in Black' (1807) would lay bare the depth of suspicion that many post-Revolutionary Americans harboured towards authors, artists and antiquarians, men who wasted their time 'in catching butterflies' when they would be better employed in the 'principal business' of building a nation, as Benjamin Rush succinctly put it.<sup>191</sup> Taking his name and his attire from Oliver Goldsmith's quixotic philanthropist, Irving's 'mysterious individual', 'a little black looking man of a foreign aspect', arrives one day in a village, with 'a large book [...] under his arm'. Frequently 'seated under a tree poring over his volume', the bookish newcomer is vilified by the baffled villagers 'because he followed no trade, nor even seemed ambitious of earning a farthing' (S, 313; 314). Set apart by his 'foreign aspect' and cut off by his 'outlandish tongue' (S, 313), the little man in black is both a racial and cultural alien in the eyes of the Hudson Valley villagers, forced to lead a lonely and persecuted existence before he finally dies of starvation. Discovered and finally unmasked on his deathbed, 'the bugbear of every house' and the bogeyman of every child turns out to be an antiquarian, a harmless scholar who has spent his time reading the literary works of his 'illustrious ancestor', Linkum Fidelius (S, 315; 319). Recognising 'the stirrings of Romantic sensibility' in Irving's short story, Michael T. Gilmore has described the little man in black as 'the first fully differentiated artist in American literature'.<sup>192</sup> Marginalised by society, lacking a literary community, and threatened by poverty, the man in black dramatises a whole raft of anxieties voiced by disenfranchised authors of the new republic. Experiencing what Lewis P. Simpson has described as 'the paradoxical, complex estrangement of American

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<sup>190</sup> *The Whole Booke of Psalmes Faithfully Translated into English Metre* ([Cambridge, MA]: [no pub.], 1640), pages unnumbered.

<sup>191</sup> 'Observations upon the Study of the Latin and Greek Languages', in *Essays*, pp. 21-56 (p. 39).

<sup>192</sup> 'The Literature of the Revolutionary and Early National Periods', in *The Cambridge History of American Literature, Volume I: 1590-1820*, ed. by Sacvan Bercovitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 539-693 (p. 663).

men of letters from the Revolution and the new nation', a self-pitying Irving would himself lament the fate of 'the man of letters', 'unfitted for business, in a nation where every one is busy; devoted to literature, where literary leisure is confounded with idleness [...] an insulated being, with few to understand, less to value, and scarcely any to encourage his pursuits'.<sup>193</sup> The difficulties of following an authorial vocation are most convincingly evidenced by the careers of the writers I discuss: Irving writes nothing substantial in the decade following his *History*; Brockden Brown renounces fiction in 1803, trying his hand at literary criticism before settling down in the family business; Tenney allegedly tries to have her one fictional work recalled, and neither Judge Brackenridge nor Judge Tyler give up their day jobs in order to write their books.

Writing fiction in such an economically competitive and culturally apathetic environment was deemed to be an ill-timed and decidedly quixotic occupation; an article 'On the State of American Literature', published in Charles Brockden Brown's *Monthly Magazine* of April, 1799, declared that 'distinguished literature can expect in this country very little *reward*. For a literary character to think of living by his pen in America, unless in very uncommon cases, would be found a delusive hope'.<sup>194</sup> Given that 'literary characters' writing fiction perceived themselves and were perceived by others as intellectual quixotes, harbouring 'delusive' hopes about turning professional, perhaps it's no surprise that the fictional quixotes they invent are frequently would-be authors, revealing a near compulsion to write that differentiates them from their British counterparts. Goldsmith's Man in Black, Lennox's Arabella, Graves's Geoffry Wildgoose, Fielding's Parson Adams, and Smollett's Launcelot Greaves: all of these are eighteenth-century British quixotes and all are characters in somebody else's tale, represented by a third-person narrative voice. In the new American republic,

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<sup>193</sup> *The Brazen Face of History: Studies in the Literary Consciousness in America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), p. 24; Irving, [Review of *The Works...of Robert Treat Paine*], in *Miscellaneous Writings, 1803-1859*, ed. by Wayne R. Kime (Boston: Twayne, 1981), in *The Complete Works of Washington Irving*, XXVIII, 49-64 (p. 52).

<sup>194</sup> *The Monthly Magazine and American Review*, 1 (1799), 15-19 (p. 18).

however, fictional quixotes are bursting to relate and write down their tales: Updike Underhill—the scholar who spouts Greek in sea ports up and down East Coast America—is both the main protagonist and the pseudonymous author of his autobiographical narrative; pseudonymous historian, Diedrich Knickerbocker, devotes a large chunk of his text to unravelling the process of writing a history; Arthur Mervyn—who spills his entire life-story to a number of unsuspecting auditors—cuts short Dr Stevens in the final chapters and takes over as the author of his tale; *Female Quixotism* closes with a lengthy letter from Dorcasina Sheldon, nor is this the first time she has organised her correspondence into book form.<sup>195</sup>

Deploying the quixote—misguided reader of misleading fictions—allowed authors to criticise the reading and writing of extravagant fiction within the framework of their own extravagant fictions; the chapters that follow will reveal the extent to which Quixote stood at the centre of an ongoing debate about the place of literature in American society. With fiction perceived as suspect and dissent perceived as disloyal—even criminalised in the wake of the 1798 Alien and Sedition Acts—the contradictory and mis-readable figure of the quixote would licence authors to explore the most sensitive issues and voice the most outrageous opinions with impunity. After all, who could know for sure just who or what was being lambasted, so contested was Quixote, so unstable the ironic stance of quixotic fiction. As we shall see, his susceptibility to being misread would also enable this most errant of knights to slide beyond authorial control, to slip through the net of critical consensus, and to emerge as the most ambiguous and potentially seditious of fictional types.

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<sup>195</sup> The connection between quixotism and authorship, and between the marginal quixote and the alienated artist in particular, proves an enduring one in American literature. In *Don Quixote, Which Was a Dream*, Kathy Acker's female Quixote is a delusional poet whose 'words sit on the edges of meanings' (*Don Quixote* [New York: Grove, 1986], p. 191), while in *Timbuktu*, Paul Auster's Willy G. Christmas has 'filled the pages of seventy-four notebooks' with an œuvre that includes 'poems, stories, essays, diary entries, epigrams, autobiographical musings, and the first eighteen hundred lines of an epic-in-progress, *Vagabond Days*' (*Timbuktu* [London: Faber and Faber, 1999], p. 9).

### 3. City on the Hill, Quixote in the Cave: The Politics of Retreat in the Fiction of Hugh Henry Brackenridge

The time for fixing every essential right on a legal basis is while our rulers are honest, and ourselves united. From the conclusion of this war we shall be going down hill.

Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1781)

From the high ground on which we stood we are descending into the Valleys of confusion & darkness.

George Washington, letter to James Warren (1785)

#### ***Retreat***

‘The Cave of Vanhest’ (1779) was a seven-part serial, written by Brackenridge and published in his own *United States Magazine*.<sup>196</sup> It is narrated by a tutor who has formerly ‘spent some time in the army’ (USM, 254), and is now returning with his student from an educational visit to the site of the Battle of Monmouth. Lost in the wilderness, they stumble across ‘a kind of gothic building in the bosom of the mountain’ (USM, 15). Greeted by a well-educated hermit, shown into his well-appointed cave, and introduced to his well-favoured daughters, the travellers are enchanted with the civilised life of the ‘Vanhest’ family, and easily

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<sup>196</sup> A modern edition of ‘The Cave of Vanhest’ can be found in Daniel Marder’s *A Hugh Henry Brackenridge Reader, 1770-1815* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1970), pp. 78-92. It is, however, a heavily edited version, so all quotations in this chapter refer to *The United States Magazine*, 1 (1779), 14-15; 61-63; 106-10; 149-50; 213-16; 253-55; 311-13.

persuaded to extend their stay. Over the course of the seven instalments, the visiting tutor gives a detailed account of the Revolutionary battle fought at Monmouth; he goes walking along the banks of the Raritan with his host, and he relates his past experiences and present disenchantment with the study of law, theology, and literature. July's instalment assures its readers that the story is '*to be continued*' (USM, 313), but this is the last we hear of 'The Cave of Vanhest'.

The narrator's quixotic credentials are established in the opening lines of the first instalment, for he declares that in his 'younger years', he has 'read much of that romantic kind of writing, which fills every mountain with a hermitage' and every hermitage with 'some old man, who, when the usual civilities are over, tells you a long story of his conflicts with the evils and accidents of life, untill sick of the world, he has retired from it to this cell, in which alone he has found happiness'. The tutor admits that he has 'often wished it might, one day, be [his] special fortune, to fall in with some such individual of the hill, and to hear from his own mouth the tale of his disappointed love or ambition'.<sup>197</sup> Articulating his romantic expectations, the narrator sets the tone for what is to come; situating the tale within the tradition of romance literature, he presents his readers with a ready-made interpretative framework and invites us to share his romantic vision. Generations of critics have done precisely this, reading the tale as a paean to rural retreat and a searing critique of the violent world without. Daniel Marder's interpretation is classic 'Vanhest' criticism:

The hermit has attained happiness with his family by removal from society, although he is aware of its movements and thoroughly educated in its culture and history. Sustained by sweet plums from the trees he himself has planted in the wilderness and by the fine company of his daughters, the hermit emerges as the prototype of the ideal pioneer; a cultured individual, he has created his own life in the wilderness and

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<sup>197</sup> USM, 14. Standing on the brink of manhood, Brackenridge's anonymous narrator is similar in age to Smollett's Sir Launcelot Greaves, to the Benevolent Quixote, William Thornborough and to the Spiritual Quixote, Geoffry Wildgoose. As with his English counterparts, his romantic ideals are fuelled by the books he reads, but while William Thornborough's books inspire him to abandon his seclusion and 'redress the grievances of mankind' (p. 57), the narrator's books lead him away from mankind and towards a life of seclusion.

fostered a self-sustaining social unit. His family is not only cultured and beautiful but also protective of the weak, as symbolized by the care his daughter gives to a half-witted servant who suffers an injury. Comparisons between the harmony and beauty in the cave of Vanhest and the disrupted, destructive life of society at war cause the narrator to review his own ambitions with all their frustrations.<sup>198</sup>

Emory Elliott has read 'The Cave of Vanhest' along similar lines, arguing that 'the story sets up a series of comparisons between the ideal and the actual', presenting a 'basic contrast between the quiet seclusion of the cave and the chaotic clamor of the outside world'. While 'the engines of war are destroying nature and people' without, Elliott argues that within the cave, 'the narrator and his companion find humanity, affection, and stability', 'best illustrated when the servant, Barnardus, [*sic*] injures his foot, and the members of the family all care for him'.<sup>199</sup> Christopher Looby contrasts the 'cultivated hermit' with 'the disorders of revolution', and Robert Lawson-Peebles is equally enamoured with what he calls 'the Edenic existence of the hermit's family', though he argues that Nardy's sprained ankle, tended by the visitor from without, provides a hint of 'potential disorder in this apparently self-sufficient microcosm of American culture'.<sup>200</sup>

With family members rallying around 'poor Nardy', and literary critics falling over themselves to comment on his injured foot, it is worth pointing out that the injury is a minor one, 'not a dislocation or a fracture, nor indeed any thing but a small disprain' (USM, 255). What's more, this is neither the first nor the poorest foot to merit the narrator's attention. Instalment III, recounting the field trip to Monmouth, concludes with the grisly discovery of a soldier's shallow grave, so shallow indeed 'that one foot of the poor fellow was still uncovered'. The narrator explains that though the man 'had been once our enemy, yet touched with humanity, we did him the small office of throwing the loose soil over him to

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<sup>198</sup> Marder, *Hugh Henry Brackenridge* (New York: Twayne, 1967), p. 77.

<sup>199</sup> Elliott, *Revolutionary Writers*, pp. 178-79.

<sup>200</sup> Looby, *Voicing America: Language, Literary Form, and the Origins of the United States* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 261-62; Lawson-Peebles, *Landscape and Written Expression in Revolutionary America: The World Turned Upside Down* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 124.

a greater depth' (USM, 107; 110). Nardy's 'small disprain' seems insignificant, the histrionic reaction of the cave dwellers self-indulgent, when viewed alongside that chilling corporeal grave-marker, the fallen soldier's protruding foot.

The circumstances surrounding the fall, though, clearly do betray more serious ramifications, repaying closer scrutiny and inviting more politicised readings of the hermit and his cave. For I would argue that the tale, in general, and the fall, in particular, belie the romantic expectations of the narrator and work against uncritical interpretations of the hermit and his cave. Bernadus, we are told:

...had been born in the cave, and had scarcely ever had the curiosity to go above ground. He had belonged to the man who built the cave, and who having died some years ago, left it to be inhabited by the present family, on whom the boy continued to attend, as on his former master [...] Bernadus having conceived a great affection for the young gentleman who had walked with us to the plumb-tree, had been willing to follow, and to be one of the company; but, poor fellow, he had been so long accustomed to the cave, that as soon as he had reached the head of the steps that led from it, in the rays of the sun he began to *hallucinate*, and turning to get in again, he fell from the steps, and had hurt his ancle in the fall. The young lady was of the opinion that poor Nardy's *foot was broke*, and that it might be past all remedy. (USM, 62-63; 254)

Poor Nardy, indeed. The sheltered life of the subterranean cave has left him ill-equipped to cope with the world outside and he is quite literally an image of stunted growth, not a half-wit, as Marder assumes, but constrained and crippled by his lack of experience. Bernardus is part slave, 'born in the cave' and bred to serve, passed down from his previous owner, and struggling without success to emancipate himself from the confines of the cave. He is part savage, a native Caliban of the Western wilderness, sleeping on a bed of leaves, and reposing his trust in the more 'enlightened' master of the cave. And he is part American rebel, the 'boy' who has never been allowed to grow up, the man-child who makes a belated bid for independence.

The visiting tutor, having spent his youth steeped in romance fiction, reads the hermit of Vanhest from a distinctly romantic perspective. He cannot doubt that the hermit is 'a friend to America'; after all he is a man of 'visible benevolence' and 'good sense', one whose eyes glisten with tears at all the right



moments (USM, 115). But a more politicised reading of the tale—entirely appropriate given the political content and patriotic commitment of the *United States Magazine*—yields a very different kind of hermit, a potent symbol of British rule, who lords it over Bernadus, and works to contain the Revolutionary impulses of the new arrivals. The hermit's attitude towards his young American guests is emphatically paternal; the visitors introduce themselves as '*Friends*', as equals, but the hermit only ever addresses them as 'My Sons' (USM, 15), and encourages their amorous overtures towards his daughters. The opulence of his cave, meanwhile, smacks of Old World luxury; taking stock of 'the subterranean apartment', the narrator is 'struck with the richness of the furniture. There stood a bed at one angle of the cave, with a set of hangings of the finest chintz, variegated with a thousand flowers of the springing year. At another angle was placed a beaufet replenished with china cups and bowls, and with silver plates and vases of every shape and dimension. The floor was covered with a very rich carpet whose variety of figures resembled that which Themistocles alluded to in his conversation with the king of Persia' (USM, 62).

To read this description as a 'blending of nature and man'—as Emory Elliott has done in *Revolutionary Writers*—is to read 'The Cave of Vanhest' in a social and political vacuum.<sup>201</sup> Writing in 1779, the narrator's focus upon exotic fabrics could hardly have been accidental. The provenance of cloth was commonly perceived as a measure of patriotism during the hard-pressed years of Revolution. The spinning bee became the most acceptable way for American women to contribute to the war effort, Royall Tyler thought it shameful that the 'gauze and ribbands' worn by 'wives and daughters' were 'not wrought in our own looms' (AC, x), and an article in July's *United States Magazine* discoursed upon the 'extreme demand of wool' and the inappropriate use of 'superfine cloth' (USM, 309; 310). Political independence depended upon commercial as well as military success, and read within the context of colonial wool shortages and Transatlantic trade wars, the cave of Vanhest is an Old World aberration. With its imported Persian carpet, its highly wrought bedspread, and its 'hangings of the

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<sup>201</sup> *Revolutionary Writers*, p. 179.

finest chintz', the cave is far from being a paean to nature; instead it thumbs its nose at America's manufacturing industry. Its fabrics are refined and worked abroad, its woven flowers are merely grafted onto the American landscape, and their blossoming is unseasonal and unnatural given the harsh climate of Revolution and the abstemious temperament of Revolutionary Americans.

More damning still, the narrator recalls how 'the lady handed each of us a dish of tea or coffee according to our choice' (USM, 62). Tea? This was no time for patriotic Americans to be drinking tea. The beverage had become an especially potent symbol of British oppression, of unfair taxation and colonial exploitation. Just three issues later, in an article called 'Green Tea in America', the *United States Magazine* would declare that East Indian tea was 'the ostensible price of some of the best blood in America', expressing its hope that 'great numbers' of Americans would 'sacrifice vanity, curiosity, and foreign expensive trifles, to virtue, good sense, oeconomy, and the love of their country' (USM, 116-17). The hermit's underground tea party would have been an anathema to patriotic Bostonians, who had played host to their own, very different Tea Party, in December, 1773.

In much the same way that George III's alternative to war would impose perpetual immaturity upon the colonists, creating 'a set of great lounging infants tied to mama's apron at two and twenty', in the words of the *New York Packet*,<sup>202</sup> the hermit's alternative to the Revolution is the patriarchal cocoon of the underground cave. He is extremely desirous to 'longer' 'detain' his guests, to keep them cloistered within a private and domestic sphere, to dissuade them from entering the field of military battle and public life. Predicting that 'we shall have a rain of some days continuance', this shaman of the forest advises the new arrivals to 'think not of leaving this retreat, until fair weather with her dry breezes shall again come to visit us'. Following his advice, they 'composed [them] selves to sleep, and the heavy air of the morning sealed up [their] eyes in a pleasing reverie of soft dreams and slumbers' (USM, 61). The patriarch of the cave encourages his

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<sup>202</sup> Quoted in Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution against Patriarchal Authority, 1750-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 98.

guests to slough off their worldly responsibilities, to while away their time within his otherworldly retreat, a soporific, and seemingly enchanted cave, where the narrator and his charge have become so bewitched by the family, 'so perfectly resigned to their pleasure, that we sat down in a sweet and romantic disposition, ready to forget the world, and all the hopes of eminence that we formed in it' (USM, 63).

In fact, the narrator's visit to the cave of Vanhest is more than a little reminiscent of Don Quixote's sojourn in the Cave of Montesinos. In this particular adventure, Cervantes' knight is lowered into the cave on the end of a rope, where he swings like a pendulum in the pitch-black 'pit'. Just when he is 'tired and out of humour at finding [him] self hanging and descending by a rope, through that dark and dreary dungeon, without knowing any certain or determined way', Don Quixote perceives a 'spacious cavity' and rests himself upon the stone, 'overpowered by a most profound sleep' (DQ, 552). He wakes up in the 'most beautiful, charming and delightful meadow that nature could create, or the most fertile imagination conceive', and is met by Montesinos, 'a venerable old man', whose 'deportment, air, gravity, and dignified presence, filled [him] with surprise and veneration' (DQ, 552-53). When Don Quixote sees a procession of romance figures—including Dulcinea—'in a state of enchantment', he learns it is reserved for him to release the spell-bound shades from Merlin's spell (DQ, 559). Raised to the surface and shaken awake by Sancho Panza, the knight believes he has seen 'the most delightful prospect and agreeable life that ever mortal saw or enjoyed' (DQ, 551). The adventures of Montesinos and Vanhest share several features: in both adventures, the protagonist sleeps deeply in a cave, meets a venerable old man, wanders through idyllic meadows, and makes contact with the damsel of his choice. In *Don Quixote*, though, the subterranean interlude restores the spirits of the knight and inspires him to push on with his journey through the Spanish landscape; the air of enchantment which envelops the Cave of Vanhest is more pointedly disabling, its amnesiac qualities disturbing, and its lassitude inappropriate at a time when every ounce of American energy was being directed towards the struggle for independence.

Despite the tutor's romanticised perspective, the narrative he writes and the cave he visits sit more comfortably alongside Samuel Johnson's *History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia* (1759), another story about a twenty-something protagonist who wants to 'make his *choice of life*', and a text which more openly critiques romanticised perceptions of retreat.<sup>203</sup> In Chapter Twenty-one, the prince comes across a hermit in the woods. An architectural blueprint for Brackenridge's New World cave, the hermit's cell is described as 'a cavern in the side of the mountain', a cave containing 'several apartments, appropriated to different uses, and often afford[ing] lodging to travellers, whom darkness or tempests happened to overtake'.<sup>204</sup> Rasselas expects to find the height of contentment and '*the happiness of solitude*' in this retreat, but the hermit soon puts him straight. Sure, he has spent fifteen years in solitude, but he was driven into this state by 'resentment' rather than 'devotion': passed over for military promotion, he turned his back on the world in a fit of pique. And he might have started his life of solitude like any other hermit, collecting minerals from the rocks, and 'examining the plants which grow in the valley', but 'that enquiry is now grown tasteless and irksome' to the peevish recluse, who has decided to abandon his retreat and 'return into the world tomorrow'.<sup>205</sup> The Vanhest hermit appears far more alluring: the visiting tutor is clearly enamoured with his person and his way of life, and the young man's sense of longing, of yearning after ideal worlds, is palpable. But the narrator's perspective is skewed, his vision devalued when set against surrounding pieces in the magazine. Articles, columns, addresses and fragments, on the consumption of tea, the production of cloth, and the progress of the War, rub fractiously against the narrator's romantic vision of Vanhest, precluding an homogenous viewpoint, and instituting a policy of editorial discontinuity and ideological polyphony that Brackenridge would return to in *Modern Chivalry*.

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<sup>203</sup> *Rasselas*, ed. by Geoffrey Tillotson and Brian Jenkins (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 45. *Rasselas* was first published in America in 1768 (Winans, p. 178), and saw two further editions before the end of the eighteenth century.

<sup>204</sup> *Rasselas*, p. 55.

<sup>205</sup> *Rasselas*, p. 57.

The competition between front-line military service and backwoods sequestration underpins 'The Cave of Vanhest'. It does so thematically, as the former soldier considers a future in the rural cave, it does so structurally, as the action moves backwards and forwards between Monmouth plain and the Cave of Vanhest, and it does so stylistically, as dream-like descriptions of the cave alternate with matter-of-fact reportage from the front-line of the Revolution. If Brackenridge's narrator is torn between public service and private retreat, then it would seem that Brackenridge himself is torn between reporting fact and writing fiction, between the plain, public history of the Battle of Monmouth and the fanciful, underground story that surrounds the cave of Vanhest. Undecided as to what kind of writing would best serve the cause of literary independence, he is a war journalist one moment and, in Hawthorne's humorously self-deprecating phrase, a 'writer of story-books' the next.<sup>206</sup> Curiously, though, the narrator's account of events at Monmouth is usually overlooked by critics of 'Vanhest', dismissed as a scene of devastating violence, merely included to contrast with—and decidedly secondary to—events within the cave itself. Daniel Marder has not only drawn simplified 'comparisons between the harmony and beauty in the cave of Vanhest and the disrupted, destructive life of society at war', he has actually excised much of the Monmouth material from his own edition of 'Vanhest' in *A Hugh Henry Brackenridge Reader*. His omissions are as misjudged as they are misleading. They fail to recognise the significance of the Monmouth scenes, telling only half the story and presenting a tale that is far more amenable to his own, mythopoeic reading of 'Vanhest'.<sup>207</sup> Yes, the ripe plums and 'plenteous crops' of the Delaware valley invite comparison with the New Jersey battlefield, where the ground is 'cut with balls, and sowed with grape-shot' (USM, 63, 150),

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<sup>206</sup> Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, ed. by Brian Harding (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 10.

<sup>207</sup> *Hugh Henry Brackenridge*, p. 77. Marder's most notable omission is the entire April instalment, which reports the arrival and actions of George Washington at the Battle of Monmouth. The Monmouth section of the May instalment has also been excised.

but Monmouth should not be read exclusively as an unnatural and dystopic alternative to the natural idyll of the hermit's cave.

In 1779, there seemed no end in sight to the War; the two sides appeared to be locked in a military impasse, and American spirits were low. John Jay's 'Address to the Inhabitants of America'—reprinted right before June's instalment of 'Vanhest'—sought to re-ignite the Revolutionary fervour of '76, and called upon Americans to 'rouze yourselves', to 'finish the great work you have so nobly carried on for several years past' (USM, 252). In the Monmouth sections of the tale, we see American snipers doing precisely this, picking off red coats while Brackenridge's hermit whiles away his days by picking red cherry plums along the banks of the Raritan. Nor is the hermit's interest in plums an exercise in Enlightenment investigation, for the cave is no botanical garden, and the hermit himself no John Bartram. There are no irrigation channels, no sleeves rolled up to the elbows, no hands caked in mud, no specimens being sent around the world, and no ambassadors arriving from Russia. If the crops have never been 'more plenteous', this is because nature's 'sweet showers' do all the work, giving the hermit time to sit back and admire the view, to step back from the land in order to appreciate 'the very agreeable prospect' that the blossoming trees present (USM, 254). Monmouth plain presents a very different arboreal scene. Here the trees are neither differentiated nor aestheticized; here they are pulled together and put to work, represented as 'orchards' and deemed integral to the outcome of the battle, a kind of topographical artillery to be deployed alongside impassable 'morasses' and strategic 'eminences'. A body of troops uses the 'cover of an orchard' to fire at enemy soldiers (USM, 149), and 'Captain Cumings of the Jersey troops', 'born and bred up' in the neighbourhood, and 'well acquainted with the ground', points out a promising piece of high ground to General Washington. He may not be able to name a dozen kinds of Delaware plum, but he uses his intimate knowledge of the New Jersey terrain to wrong-foot British troops and 'put an end to the debate' (USM, 149-50).

In fact, topographical features often crop up in Brackenridge's writing, imbued with moral or political significance.<sup>208</sup> The Battle of Bunker's Hill, for example, is also a battle for 'the virgin honour, and true character, / Of this whole Continent', and even though the patriots ultimately lose the hill itself, the 'noble vigour' they display in combat ensures that they retain the moral high ground.<sup>209</sup> An Independence Day essay, written by Brackenridge and published in the *United States Magazine* of July, 1779, concludes with pride that 'the hill has been defended', and significantly, this is an unnamed hill, not a geographical reality but an evocative metaphor. As for the 'hills within prospect of the York city', it is here where the American 'hero' has 'fallen', 'or rather he has risen to eternal honour, and his birth-place shall be immortal' (USM, 165-67). Time and again, Brackenridge's hill sloughs off its earth and turf reality to become pure symbol. Shining out as a beacon to the watching world, it signals the rising glory of America: it is nature's shrine to American valour.

The cave, meanwhile, assumes a very different set of political associations. On 20 June, 1788, as Virginia became the crucial ninth state to ratify the constitution, a crowd of victorious Pittsburgh Federalists assembled on Grant's Hill, 'a beautiful rising mount to the east of the town'. Called upon to address his new compatriots, Judge Brackenridge hailed them as the 'citizens of a new empire', and rejoiced in the 'noble fabric' that 'rises as it were from the marshy ground'. His speech acknowledged and answered the anti-Federalist opposition in no uncertain terms: 'who are those fell monsters who growl at the shadow of thy structure? They are the opponents of the new system. Ignorance where is thy cave? Whence do thy fogs and vapours arise?' While the sun rises on the dawning of a new American empire, defeated anti-Federalists are represented as primitive monsters, the cave the bastion of their unenlightened ignorance, as

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<sup>208</sup> See Lawson-Peebles, *Landscape and Written Expression* (pp. 122-34) for an excellent discussion of the semiotics of topography in Brackenridge's fiction.

<sup>209</sup> *The Battle of Bunkers Hill* [sic], in *Gazette Publications* (Carlisle: Alexander & Phillips, 1806), p. 295.

Brackenridge adopts the vocabulary used by Enlightenment critiques of romance, where ‘fogs’ and ‘monsters’ are the trappings of a backward literary genre.<sup>210</sup>

Relating the details of General Lee’s precipitous retreat at Monmouth, the narrator is censorious and unsympathetic, including Washington’s harsh rebuke and introducing eye-witness accounts to justify the censure and deepen the General’s shame. The underlying message is clear: only active engagement will secure an independent America; withdrawal and retreat will result in Continental defeat and individual disgrace. Yet the hermit of Vanhest that the narrator-as-romancer so admires can be seen as a fictional counterpart to the ignominious General that the narrator-as-war-correspondent so abhors. Lee was another mysterious figure, a probable traitor, whose ideological attachments were murky to say the least. A former British officer, who had just lost out to Washington when it came to choosing a commander-in-chief for the Continental army, Lee was in talks with the British General Howe in 1777, and was eventually discharged from the American army for his ‘unnecessary, disorderly, and shameful retreat’ from Monmouth plain.<sup>211</sup> Early in 1779, at precisely the time when Brackenridge was writing ‘Vanhest’, a disgruntled Charles Lee was himself drawing up the plans for an ‘ideal colony’, an isolated ‘agrarian community’ that would be situated in ‘some happy climate of America’<sup>212</sup>—a familiar vision to

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<sup>210</sup> *Gazette Publications*, pp. 271-272. Brackenridge could also be recalling a *locus classicus* of this image, the ‘darksome hole’ that is Error’s Cave in Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* (Book I, Canto I, stanza 14).

<sup>211</sup> George Washington, quoted in Paul David Nelson, ‘Charles Lee’, in *American National Biography*, ed. by John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes, 24 vols (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), XIII, 361-63 (p. 363). Mercy Otis Warren provides a near contemporary account of Lee’s behaviour at Monmouth in her *History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the American Revolution*, 3 vols (Boston: Larkin, 1805), II, 94-96.

<sup>212</sup> John Richard Alden, *General Charles Lee: Traitor or Patriot?* (Richmond, VA: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), p. 276. January 1779 also saw Brackenridge publish a private letter written by Lee in his *United States Magazine*. The affair soon blew out of all proportion as Lee challenged Brackenridge to a duel, and Brackenridge refused, causing the General to chase him down the street with a horse-whip (*General Charles Lee*, pp. 271-275).



readers of the *United States Magazine*, a vision not only shared but realised by the hermit of Vanhest.

The Battle of Monmouth gave the patriots no decisive victory; it was a military stalemate, 'a tactical draw' in the words of one political commentator.<sup>213</sup> And this is precisely why it belongs to 'The Cave of Vanhest', itself an inconclusive tale, where both the history of the host and the future of the narrator go untold. Flouting the rules of romance, the hermit is one 'old man' who never does tell us 'a long story of his conflicts with the evils and accidents of life' (USM, 114), and the narrator has neither agreed to stay nor decided to leave the cave when instalment VII abruptly concludes the series. The 'choice of life' is still to be made, and he finds himself torn between the cave and the hill, retreat and engagement, dreams of ease and 'hopes of eminence' (USM, 63). The struggle becomes explicit in the penultimate paragraph of the tale, as the young man discusses his prior commitments to various professions, personified as 'Miss Urany Muse' (a literary career), 'Miss *Theology*', and most recently, 'Miss *Law*' (USM, 311-12). Falling in love with the hermit's daughters, he begins 'to apprehend, that the beauty of some persons not so far distant as the head of the gulph of California, is in a confederacy to draw me away from her; and whereas I first set out with a warmth of affection for the *young ladies of the hill*'—by which he means Parnassus—'I shall this day fall a victim to the *young ladies of the cave*' (USM, 313). Disenchanted with the republic of letters and enchanted by the private world and the winning looks of the ladies in the cave, the narrator is clearly tempted by the prospect of an early retirement from the responsibilities of public duty. Aligned with 'the gulph of California'—an outpost belonging to Spain in 1779—the daughters of Vanhest are themselves distinctly un-American females, Californian sirens who have formed a powerful 'confederacy' to seduce the narrator away from public life and republican virtue. Successful seduction has become an image of seductive secession from the Continental Union.

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<sup>213</sup> *Encyclopedia of American History*, ed. by John Mack Faragher (New York: Holt, 1998), p. 606. Mercy Otis Warren had reached the same conclusion in her 1805 account.

Read the tale in isolation, as a New World romance, and the Cave of Vanhest is the golden age come again; read it as part of a larger, Enlightenment project, the pragmatic and patriotic *United States Magazine*, and Delaware's answer to Arcadia turns out to be an Old World mirage, a dangerous pitfall in a tale that warns against the dereliction of duty and the ignominy of an ill-timed retreat. Either way (or both ways), the story of the well-read quixote roaming across America, would indeed '*be continued*' in 1792, as Captain John Farrago closed up his books and stepped out onto the Western frontier.

### ***Reconnoiter***

Part I, Volume Four of *Modern Chivalry* sees Captain Farrago pay a visit to his own version of the Montesinos cave, 'a great curiosity' of the West, where 'rude sculptures' adorn the rocks without, and eerie statues inhabit the chambers within. While the Vanhest hermit's valley of the plums plays on popular conceptions of an Indian afterlife,<sup>214</sup> the cave in *Modern Chivalry* is a more of a macabre Indian burial ground, home to 'a vast bed of human skeletons', to 'arrow heads and hatchets of stone innumerable' (MC, 276); in short, it contains the petrified world of an Indian civilisation:

Near the entrance, and on the right, was the passage to what is called the petrified grove. This, on their return they entered, and in about thirty steps found themselves in a spacious square, which appeared to have been once the surface of the earth: For here were trees in their natural position, with wasps nests on them, all petrified; and buffaloes standing under, in their proper form, but as hard as adamant [*sic*]. A bleak wind, with a petrifying dew, had arrested them in life, and fixed them to the spot; while the mountain in a series of ages, had grown over them. That which struck the Captain most, was an Indian man reduced to stone, with a bundle of peltry on his back. (MC, 277)

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<sup>214</sup> In William Gilmore Simms's *The Yemassee: A Romance of Carolina*, the Indians travel to 'the plum-groves and the happy valley' after death, to the 'happy home that lies / In the bosom of the hills', 'where the plum-groves always bloom' (*The Yemassee*, ed. by C. Hugh Holman [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961], p. 89; p. 88).

As with the caves of Vanhest and Montesinos, the visitors to the petrified cave encounter a seemingly enchanted subterranean society, standing outside of time and buried deep within ‘the bosom of the mountain’ (USM, 15). For Don Quixote, the vision is regenerative; taking place during a spell of self-doubt and disillusionment, it renews his faith in both himself and his chivalric mission. Aimlessly suspended in the pit, Don Quixote finds security and direction in the bedrock of his own imaginative world, learning that the disenchantment of the Montesinos shades has been ‘reserved’ for his own ‘invincible heart’ (DQ, 553). The narrator of ‘Vanhest’, aimlessly moving from one unsatisfying career to the next, likewise finds spiritual and physical restoration in the world of the cave, and chooses to extend his stay indefinitely. In contrast, *Modern Chivalry* sees the Captain and his party reluctant to linger long in the cave; they are sobered by ‘an impression of extreme cold’, and apprehensive that the permeating dew could ‘probably convert the human body into stone in a very short space of time’ (MC, 276). The chilling spectacle offers cold comfort to its visitors, proving to be both a tomb for the living dead and a testimony to the diminished stature of present-day Americans.<sup>215</sup> ‘The dimensions of some of the skeletons bespoke them giants’, we are told, with one measuring an inch off ‘eight feet’ (MC, 276), and while Joseph Harkey reads the cave as ‘a satire on Jefferson’s interest in prehistoric animals’, I would argue for the deeper significance of the scene.<sup>216</sup> The spectacle in the cave provides an unnerving glimpse beneath the ‘surface’ appearance of American progress; it burrows through the patriotic hyperbole and taps into underlying anxieties which petrified the early republic: the inexorable mutability of the American landscape, in socio-political as well as geological

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<sup>215</sup> The ‘petrified grove’, situated ‘near the entrance’ of the cave, is not the first discussion of petrification (MC, 277). Standing at the entrance to the whole of *Modern Chivalry*, the narrator uses the first sentence of his Introduction to wonder ‘what would be the best means to fix the English language’, declaring his own intention to ‘fix the orthography, choice of words, idiom of phrase, and structure of sentence’ (MC, 3).

<sup>216</sup> Harkey, ‘The *Don Quixote* of the Frontier: Brackenridge’s *Modern Chivalry*’, *EAL*, 7 (1973), 193-203 (p. 195).

terms, and the concomitant fear of New World degeneration, a theory averred by Count Buffon and fiercely rebuffed in Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*.

Significantly, 'that which struck the Captain most' in the cave, 'was an Indian man reduced to stone, with a bundle of peltry on his back'.<sup>217</sup> Drawn to the adamant man, the Captain sees an image of himself, a resemblance reinforced at the end of the chapter when he breaks off the hardened 'skin of a wild cat', and takes up his own peltry, unconsciously adopting the same stance as the Indian statue (MC, 277). Buried a good six feet under, with the frontier world going over both their heads, these two men belong to an older, distant world, the Indian to a long-extinguished New World tribe, and the classically educated, 'old school' Captain to a Europe 'on the decline' and an England at 'too great a distance to be our model', as Noah Webster put it in his *Dissertations on the English Language* (1789).<sup>218</sup> If the Captain's cave experience teaches him anything, it crystallises his own sense of detachment from, and irrelevance to, the American frontier.<sup>219</sup>

John Farrago is introduced to readers as 'a man of about fifty-three years of age, of good natural sense, and considerable reading; but in some things whimsical, owing perhaps to his greater knowledge of books than of the world' (MC, 6). Time and again, the narrator contrasts Farrago's alienation from the

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<sup>217</sup> Half a century later, Nathaniel Hawthorne's 'Man of Adamant' would see stony-hearted Puritan, Richard Digby, retire to a 'tomb-like' cave in the forest, where the petrifying dew stops his heart and then embalms his corpse ('*The Snow-Image*' and *Uncollected Tales*, ed. by William Charvat and others [Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1974], pp. 161-69 [p. 163]).

<sup>218</sup> Webster, quoted in Gilbert Youmans and Greg Stratman, 'American English: The Transition from Colonialism to Independence', in R. A. Burchell, *The End of Anglo-America: Historical Essays in the Study of Cultural Divergence* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1991), pp. 137-59 (p. 147). In fact, the English were indeed allied with native Americans during the 1790s, providing arms and encouraging Indian raids along the Western frontier.

<sup>219</sup> In 1986, Kathy Acker's *Don Quixote* pays a visit to her version/vision of the Montesinos cave. Finding herself 'hanging by and dangling from a rope over a pit which had no bottom', the knight falls asleep and awakes in 'paradise', where she meets an 'old male creep', an Oxford don adorned with 'medals of literary honor'. Addressing her, the 'old male creep' exclaims that 'you are the one, oh valiant knight, who can make me giggle', 'the one who can show us how to be pointless or dream' (pp. 183-84; p. 185).

Westerners he meets with his attachment to the Old World books he reads. ‘Captain Farrago was a good man’, we are told, ‘but unacquainted with the world. His ideas were drawn chiefly from what may be called the old school; the Greek and Roman notions of things’ (MC, 53). Indeed, this old school quixote is ‘so unacquainted with the world’ that when he comes across a bunch of squabbling jockeys at a race, he tries to resolve the dispute by reminding them of ‘the Olympic games of Greece’, the ‘days of heroism and honour’, and the ‘times of chivalry itself’ (MC, 8-9). Not surprisingly, the Captain’s classical remarks go unappreciated, and so his first adventure lands up with him sprawling on the floor, his head broken and his tail between his legs. As *Modern Chivalry* gets under way, the race for cultural and political hegemony is clearly on, but the Captain would seem to be out of the running from the start. To use Raymond Williams’s phrase, Farrago represents a ‘residual ideology’, an ancien régime that is paternalistic, hierarchical, and ill-suited to the social volatility and fierce self-reliance of life along Pennsylvania’s transappalachian frontier.<sup>220</sup>

More often than not, critics of *Modern Chivalry* have voiced approval of the Captain’s ‘considerable reading’: Heiser has written that ‘Captain Farrago is not a Don Quixote’, for ‘the servant is quixotic, and the master a judicial devotee of reason and common sense’; Harkey has argued that ‘unlike Don Quixote’, Farrago’s ‘head has not been turned by his reading’ (just broken it would seem), and Lawson-Peebles has likewise maintained that the Captain ‘is different from Quixote in one vital respect. He has been instructed rather than deluded by his reading’.<sup>221</sup> But the books that Farrago reads have failed to prepare him for the harsh realities of backwoods life, filling him with unrealistic expectations of Western progress, with idealistic delusions of a civilised and stable frontier. The Captain can—and does—lecture the people until he is blue in the face, but his recourse to reason, to Roman notions and Greek philosophers, most commonly falls on deaf ears. Long on sermons but short on action, Farrago appears both

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<sup>220</sup> Williams, ‘Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory’, in Raymond Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso, 1980), pp. 31-49 (pp. 40-41).

<sup>221</sup> *Hispanic Review*, p. 414; Harkey, *EAL*, p. 194; *Landscape and Expression*, p. 127.

pompous and ridiculous, his harangues irrelevant and his 'old school' presence inflammatory along the Western frontier, which was after all the newest of New World locales, the furthest removed—geographically as well as ideologically—from the established hierarchy associated with Old World aristocracy.<sup>222</sup> Western Pennsylvanians were doubly disaffected with the 'East', contemptuous of Europe's monarchical ways and suspicious of Eastern cities such as Philadelphia, which they considered to be a stronghold of British influence and indifferent to the problems faced by Western Pennsylvanians. Eastern talk of law and order, reason and restraint, was mistrusted along the frontier, a makeshift world where 'the virtue' of 'petrification' was perceived as the vice of stasis, inimical to the progress and interests of a constantly changing environment.

Farrago's detachment from the people he deigns to advise becomes all too evident in Part I, Volume Four (1797), when his Irish servant, Teague O'Regan, recently appointed to the post of excise officer, is greeted by a crowd of villagers. 'The Captain', we are told, 'was led to believe that these were a number of the country people, who having heard of the revenue officer coming to his district, had come forward to pay their respects to him, and to receive him with that gratulation which is common to honest but illiterate people, in the first paroxysms of their transport' (MC, 300-01). Farrago is already advising O'Regan on the dangers of celebrity when Duncan steps in to put him straight: the people have not come to pay their respects to the tax collector; instead, incensed by the government's imposition of a federal excise tax on distilled whiskey, they have come to flout federal authority and tar and feather its representative. Unaware of the ignominy surrounding the post of excise officer, and oblivious to the acrimony surrounding the liquor law, Captain Farrago has walked straight into the middle of the 1794 Western Pennsylvania Whiskey Rebellion without even realising it.<sup>223</sup> He

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<sup>222</sup> Aristocracy was not only associated with British rule, it was often condemned within a wider, European context. Thomas Jefferson, for example, scorned 'the Noblesse' of pre-Revolutionary France, the 'tyrannical aristocracy' of post-Revolutionary Geneva, and the 'arbitrary distinctions' of Europe as a whole (*Writings*, p. 82; p. 838; p. 587).

<sup>223</sup> For a recent discussion of the Pennsylvanian uprising see Thomas P. Slaughter, *The Whiskey Rebellion: Frontier Epilogue to the American Revolution* (New York and Oxford: Oxford

may have been riding ‘about the world’ for several years now, with the express intention of seeing ‘how things were going on here and there’, but incredibly, the growing unrest and consequent insurrection in Western Pennsylvania seem to have passed him by (MC, 6). Once again he misreads the situation, misjudges his audience, and beats a hasty retreat when the crowd turns nasty.

This is not to say that his reading doesn’t have its uses: ‘Do you think, Teague, that I have read books for nothing?’ the Captain asks his uneducated Irish servant, and immediately puts his own—Old World—education to use by frightening O’Regan out of marrying a wealthy but elderly ‘enamored’. ‘Have you not seen me in my study, morning and night, looking over Greek, and Hebrew letters, like partridge-tracks? All this to find out what was going on up and down the world. Many a history of witches and conjurers, I have read, and know them when I see them’, he facetiously claims (MC, 96). Farrago deploys his reading and abuses his education in order to disabuse O’Regan of his marital and social aspirations, convincing the bog-trotter that the rich old woman who wants to be his wife is in fact a witch, another Circe who will turn him into pork stew before she lets him into bed. The pattern is repeated time and again as Farrago spends a good deal of Part I lying and scheming in a bid to retain a ‘hireling’ he ‘cannot well spare’ (MC, 16). Whether he is telling Teague that that the ‘Indian treaty-maker’ wants to buy his ‘red-headed’ scalp, or placing him in a workhouse and passing it off as a law school, Farrago is prepared to invent all kinds of machinations in order to maintain the order and propriety of his household, to keep ‘his man Teague at his heels’ and in his ‘proper sphere’ (MC, 55; 58; 6; 11).

For all his preaching about the principles and policies of republican government, his insistence that the basis of ‘republican virtue’ is ‘*humility and self-denial*’, that ‘self-denial is the great virtue of a republic’, the Captain’s own self-interest is never far from his mind (MC, 392; 489). While critics have

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University Press, 1986). For Brackenridge’s own account of the Whiskey Rebellion, in which he was reluctantly embroiled as a mediating influence and a lawyer for the rebels, see his *Incidents of the Insurrection in the Western Parts of Pennsylvania, in the Year 1794* (Philadelphia: M’Culloch, 1795), written to exonerate his behaviour during the affair.

frequently taken Farrago's professions of republicanism at face value—he has been described as 'the thoughtful, knowledgeable, and sensible conscience of *Modern Chivalry*', the 'rational man or philosopher who is more concerned with community welfare than individual profit'—I am more inclined to agree with Edward Watts's assertion that through the Captain, 'the language of paternal authority, revealed as duplicitous in the hands of an untrustworthy elite, is undermined' in *Modern Chivalry*, though as Emory Elliott has observed, 'the satirizing of Farrago's self-interested deceptions and spurious reasoning is rather intricate and often not immediately apparent'.<sup>224</sup>

Not until the end of Part I (1797) is the Captain's 'language of paternal authority' immediately placed before us, openly allied with the language of an aristocratic 'elite'. When Teague is tarred and feathered by the Whiskey rebels, Farrago deems it 'proper to withdraw' for a while, and takes 'his rout [*sic*] towards the mountains' (MC, 308). It is here, in a 'narrow valley at the foot of the mountain', that he meets the Marquis de Marnessie, 'an aged and venerable looking man' who bears more than a passing resemblance to the hermit of Vanhest (MC, 308-9). While Brackenridge's hermit of 1779 is in retreat from the American Revolution, the Marquis has fled from Revolution in France, a ruined aristocrat who has emigrated to the USA in order 'to live upon the earth as regardless of its troubles, as if buried under it' (MC, 310). Both reclusive runaways inhabit a 'romantic' residence in the American wilderness (USM, 11; MC, 309), and like the hermit of Vanhest, the Marquis de Marnessie invites his guest 'to remain in that retirement for some weeks' (MC, 311). Farrago gladly complies, and in 'this rural and obscure recess', this 'elysian, and posthumous valley', the Captain is neither rebuffed nor ridiculed, taken neither for a madman nor a fool (MC, 316; 312). Conversing 'chiefly in the French language, which the Captain spoke very well', Farrago finds an ideological ally in the Marquis de

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<sup>224</sup> Marder, *Brackenridge Reader*, p. 31; Wendy Martin, 'The Rogue and the Rational Man: Hugh Henry Brackenridge's Study of a Con Man in *Modern Chivalry*', *EAL*, 8 (1973), 179-192 (p. 181); Watts, *Writing and Postcolonialism in the Early Republic* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1998), p. 38; *Revolutionary Writers*, p. 186.



Marnessie, another avatar of an ancien régime, ‘detached from the world’, and as irrelevant as any Indian statue (MC, 311-12). This time around, going underground re-invigorates Farrago, and he makes the decision that was left unmade at the end of ‘The Cave of Vanhest’. Leaving the ‘romantic’ residence of the Marquis in the final pages of Part I, he heads straight back to the rebels, and is ‘not wanting in explaining to the people, the illegality and great impolicy of their proceedings, as subversive of the government, and destructive of the first principle of a republican government’ (MC, 325). Marnessie turns out to be Farrago’s Montesinos, the posthumous, paternal figure, who restores the Captain’s faith in himself and his natural right to govern.

### ***Charge!***

As we shall see in the following chapters, a two-part narrative structure was often used to reinforce the dialogical stance of quixotic fictions in the early republic. Initiating counter-trajectories and inviting reversals and upsets, it would build narrative discontinuities and ideological contradictions into the structure of the work. Now, any attempt to read *Modern Chivalry* as a straightforward game of two halves would be overlooking its complex and protracted publication history: as Grantland S. Rice has pointed out, Brackenridge chose to publish his work ‘in at least six volumes over a period of thirteen years by (depending how one tabulates it) at least three different publishers in three different locations’.<sup>225</sup> Nonetheless, when Brackenridge published the fifth instalment of *Modern Chivalry* in 1804, he didn’t call it Volume Five; he called it Part II, suggesting a deliberate break or juncture in a seemingly aimless and endless work. The opening words of Part II reinforce the sense of discontinuity with what has gone before: ‘Here is a great gap. Not a word said about the travels of the Captain, from the packing up of Teague, and sending him off to France, until after the termination of the French revolution, and the armistice or convention of Amiens’ (MC, 329). Published in the same year that saw Napoleon become the French

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<sup>225</sup> Rice, ‘*Modern Chivalry* and the Resistance to Textual Authority’, *AL*, 67 (1995), 257-81 (p. 257).

Emperor, Part II positions itself within a French political context, effectively occluding the Revolution, and moving readers straight from aristocrat to emperor, from Marnessie to Napoleon, in a matter of pages.<sup>226</sup> Bonaparte's 'unprincipled and maniac tyranny', as Jefferson called it, doesn't just provide a political framework and a narrative starting-point for Part II of *Modern Chivalry*; it suggests an interpretive framework for reading the rise and reign of Captain Farrago, Brackenridge's own imperious frontier governor.<sup>227</sup>

With critics concentrating on earlier episodes, Part II has often failed to attract its share of critical attention; in *Writing and Postcolonialism in the Early Republic*, Edward Watts decided to discuss only Part I in his chapter on *Modern Chivalry*, dismissing the second part as 'overlong, repetitious, and, at times, almost unreadable'.<sup>228</sup> But to underestimate Part II is to overlook Farrago's astonishing transition from his Part I role of alienated and itinerant observer to the Part II post of state governor. Early US quixotes are frequently distinguished by their volatile relationship with society: in Washington Irving's *A History of New York*, for example, Peter Stuyvesant goes from respected governor to rejected recluse in a matter of pages, and in *Female Quixotism*, 'the first lady' of the village (FQ, 96) finishes the story 'solitary, neglected, and despised' (FQ, 324). *Modern Chivalry* represents the same instability, but with the opposite trajectory, as the ineffectual outsider becomes the powerful statesman, and Farrago's rhetorical performances are now accompanied by the political power to act. Michael T. Gilmore has argued that 'Brackenridge's sympathies clearly lie with the captain',<sup>229</sup> but I would disagree: confronting the failure of the French republic and Napoleon's rise to emperor, Brackenridge uses Farrago to expose the frightening ease with which 'republicanism'—that talismanic word and

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<sup>226</sup> J. M. Thompson, *Napoleon Bonaparte* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), p. 191. Napoleon was officially declared Emperor in a *Senatus-Consultum* of 18 May, 1804.

<sup>227</sup> Letter to Lafayette (14 February, 1815), in Jefferson, *Writings*, p. 1361.

<sup>228</sup> *Writing and Postcolonialism*, p. 48.

<sup>229</sup> 'The Literature of the Revolutionary and Early National Periods', p. 638.

notoriously slippery ideology—could be co-opted by any astute politician and used to shore up the most monarchical, or imperial, of regimes.

As Part II opens, we see the Captain settling down for a while, arriving ‘within a mile, or less of the village where his home was, and where he had resided some years, before he had set out on his peregrinations’ (MC, 330). After returning to his hometown, and staying there some time, he is ‘obliged to leave the village’, accused of madness by his enemies, and unwilling to stay where his ‘services’ have not been ‘well received’ (MC, 510; 509). Setting out all over again, Farrago does things differently this time round: he is no longer the comical observer who passes comment as he rides aimlessly ‘about the world’ (MC, 6). This time we see Farrago push concertedly Westward, marching through ‘the back settlement’ and ‘the Lack-learning settlement’, and arriving at ‘the new settlement’ in a matter of four chapters (MC, 517; 523; 538). And this time, the Captain is accompanied by a ‘caravan’ of frontier characters, ‘the blind lawyer and fidler [*sic*]; Clonmel the ballad singer; the latin [*sic*] schoolmaster; O’Fin, an Irishman; Tom the Tinker, and others’ (MC, 510). Only the Captain is mounted, we learn; the rest are ‘on foot’, a motley bunch of subservient ragamuffins who nonetheless prove an effective infantry when Farrago reaches his final destination: the most westerly of the narrative’s ‘*western settlements*’, a community ‘bordering on the Indian country’, and called the ‘new settlement’ (MC, 510, 437; 538):

O’Fin the Irishman had, in fact, entered with a log on his shoulder, which he called his shilelah, and threatened death and destruction to all that came his way. Harum Scarum had a branch of an oak tree, which he trailed after him; and Tom the Tinker approached with a club, which he called his hammer [...] poised upon his right shoulder, it had the appearance of a weapon that would do much execution. Teague, the bog-trotter, though with great difficulty, drew after him a piece of a pine log, which he said he had been tired wielding, and knocking down people with [...] From these appearances, there had been no resistance made; and in due time the country thought it advisable to put themselves under the protection of persons whose object it seemed to be to keep the peace, and maintain the laws. The Captain had been chosen Governor. (MC, 636)

Farrago has dispensed with his usual sermons and recourse to classical knowledge. Instead, he has gagged the Latin schoolmaster, and mobilised the brute force of his impromptu army, subduing the people through fear. For as the narrator remarks, the ‘wattles and hearts of oak have a great tendency to procure submission’ (MC, 637).

Having invaded and colonised the new settlement—described by the narrator as ‘a kind of Botany-Bay, to the old country’—Farrago is ‘elected governor of the new state’ (MC, 577; 555). It isn’t long before he starts holding ‘levées’ in the style of European royalty, and takes the title of ‘his excellency’ (MC, 659). The self-professed republican of Part I has shamelessly adopted the power-seeking, power-keeping strategies of Old World imperialism. No longer the comical, ineffectual outsider, Farrago is now compared to the French Emperor, another soldier turned statesman responsible for the overthrow of a nascent republic. Before long, we are told, ‘the words aristocracy were muttered’, ‘the people began to talk of his resembling Bonaparte’, and ‘there were those who threw out hints that he had an understanding with that emperor’ (MC, 660; 636; 637). Even the Captain begins to grow ‘uneasy under this usurped authority’—uneasy enough to deny that he speaks French, that is, though not uneasy enough to relinquish his position of power (MC, 636). In the first chapter of Volume Four (1815), Farrago flings down his oak stick, ‘the badge of [his] government’, averring that that he only ‘took up the government’ in the first place to keep the unruly settlers ‘from having broken heads’. A swift rhetorical reversal ensues, however, as the Captain’s ‘concern’ for the people sees him decide to ‘retain it a little’, after all, ‘with a view to preserve order and regularity’ in the ‘distant quarter of the globe’ he rules (MC, 637-38).

The episode re-plays on a larger scale Farrago’s fight to retain Teague a little longer in Part I, through ‘concern’ for his servant, or rather, with a view to preserving the social ‘order’ of society and the ‘regularity’ of master-servant relations. And while the Governor claims to have spoken French by accident, imitating the unfamiliar sounds of a horse-carrier in ‘the most perfect simplicity of mind’ (MC, 637), readers will recall the ‘several weeks’ that he spent with the

French Marquis, where the pair conversed ‘chiefly in the French language, which the Captain spoke very well’ (MC, 311). Nor is this the first time that the Captain’s professed ‘simplicity’ comes under suspicion. An unnamed member of the settlement, identified only by his brown wig, has already suggested that Farrago’s eccentricity ‘might be a disguise to conceal his views; a masque of simplicity the better to introduce monarchy’ (MC, 508). Of course, there is no reason to give this particular voice from the crowd either more or less credence than any other voice raised in the text—the narrator’s included—for *Modern Chivalry* is defiantly polyphonic, its numerous crowd scenes enabling bit-part players to deliver some of the best lines in the book, while those who speak loudest and longest (notably Captain Farrago and the book’s narrator, named on the title page as H. H. Brackenridge) swing unpredictably between sense and nonsense, insight and stupidity.

In fact, locating any stable or authoritative voice proves impossible in *Modern Chivalry*, an encyclopaedia of contradictory public opinions, distinguished by a polemical tone and a shifting ironic stance. *Modern Chivalry* may present us with a case-load of notes on the state of Pennsylvania, but making sense of the data is a Herculean task. The characters themselves are invariably at a loss when it comes to understanding each other’s speeches or reading each other’s actions. Confidence-tricks, deceptions, and in particular, burlesques, are repeatedly suspected in the text, though the subject of the burlesque is usually impossible to ascertain. So when one politician proposes sending asses to parliament, and ‘an adversary’ claims that his ‘object seems to be to burlesque a representative government’, the advocate for the asses denies such a charge, insisting that his Sanchoesque proposal is rather designed ‘to burlesque the abuses of elections, and of the elective franchise’ (MC, 663). As Christopher Looby has remarked, ‘Brackenridge modeled his narrative closely on Cervantes’, and ‘the elusiveness of his purposes—their endless ironic displacement—is fundamentally true to Cervantes’.<sup>230</sup> We see precisely such displacement in Part II (1804), when

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<sup>230</sup> *Voicing America*, pp. 242-43. For further suspected burlesques, see MC, 417; 505; 699; 703; 794; 805.

Farrago meets his biographer, the ‘mad poet who had been engaged in travesty his travels’ (MC, 386). The author has become a character in his own text, and a crazy one at that, holed up in hospital for his own security, an anthropological curiosity who finds himself observed and judged by his own fictional creation. Turning the tables on the H. H. Brackenridge of the title page, the narrative persona so fond of making his own ‘observations’ and recording his own ‘reflections’, the cameo appearance throws a question mark over the sanity, never mind the seriousness, of H. H. Brackenridge’s lengthy disquisitions.

In 1839, the *Literary Examiner*, and *Western Monthly Review* declared that *Modern Chivalry* ‘was to the West what Don Quixotte was to Europe’, ‘the humorous text book of all classes of society’.<sup>231</sup> Encountering himself as a character in somebody else’s work—as Cervantes’ knight had done in Part II of *Don Quixote*—Farrago’s meeting with the mad biographer is one of several self-consciously Cervantic moments in *Modern Chivalry*. If Farrago really has come out from a lifetime of retreat in order to defend his own elitist hill, to safeguard the pre-eminence of ‘the wise and good and rich’ (Alexander Hamilton’s words) then his self-styled quixotism is an integral part of the ‘masque’ and he has good reason to trumpet his kinship with Don Quixote.<sup>232</sup> A captain of the militia, whose genealogical pedigree is as undistinguished and as obscure as his military record—the narrator confesses to knowing ‘little about him prior to the time of his setting out; and still less of his descent, and pedigree’—Farrago finds a distinguished fictional forefather in Don Quixote de la Mancha (MC, 799). When squire number two—religious zealot, Duncan Ferguson—asks Farrago about his ‘denomination’, his master (mis)responds with characteristic pomposity:

I am denominated Captain, said he; but my name is John Farrago, though I have had other epithets occasionally given me by the people amongst whom I have happened to sojourn, especially since my last setting out on my travels, after the manner of the antient chevaliers. I have been called the modern Don Quixotte, on account of the eccentricity of my rambles,

<sup>231</sup> ‘Modern Chivalry’, *The Literary Examiner and Western Monthly Review*, 1 (1839), 159 (p. 159).

<sup>232</sup> Quoted in *Revolution and the Word*, p. 154.

or the singularity which they conceive themselves to discover in my conversation and manner. I have been called the Knight of the single Horse [...] In some places I have taken my designation from the Irish valet that I had, and of whom you have heard me speak, of the name of Teague, and have been called the Owner of the red-headed Bog-trotter; as it is possible I may now be designated occasionally by the appellation of the Master of the raw Scotchman, by those who may be able by your dialect to distinguish your origin. But all these things I look upon as inconsiderable. It is of little, or perhaps of no consequence to me, what my stile is amongst men; provided it contains nothing in it that may impeach my moral character, and may seem to have been drawn from some bad quality or vicious habit of the intellect. They may call me Don Quixote, or Hudibras, or the Knight of Blue Beard, or the Long Nose, or what they please. It is all the same to me; and gives no affront, unless containing a reflection on my integrity. (MC, 256-57)

Brackenridge was well read in the works of Fielding, Smollett, Swift and Sterne, and well acquainted with the various kinds of quixotes running amok in English fiction. In this exchange alone, the Captain displays the listening skills of an Arabella, the zeal of a Geoffry Wildgoose, and the naming mania of a Walter Shandy. On one level, then, Farrago derives a distinct identity from Cervantes' Spaniard, proudly rehearsing his affinity with the knight and discoursing at length upon the various quixotic epithets he has received. His decision to align himself with the realm of literature and the role of a comic hero is a shrewd one, enabling him to simultaneously de-politicise and naturalise his role as master in a time and a place where it was seriously under threat. Cervantes' Quixote was perceived by many as mad, by some as whimsical, by others as noble, but never as a villain, never as a self-serving political schemer. The bumbling and idealistic quixote provides the perfect smoke screen to mask the Captain's own political ambitions and, better still, it reaffirms his status as 'a natural leader'.<sup>233</sup> After all, Cervantes' Quixote was perceived by many as 'a kind, humane, and beneficent master', the knight/squire relationship was an age-old epitome of feudal hierarchy, and Cervantes himself was praised for his unerring ability 'to avoid that appearance of mean familiarity in the master, and pert equality in the squire'.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Lawson-Peebles has argued that Farrago's 'combination of intellectual vigour, classical learning and rhetorical power' mark him out as 'a natural leader' (p. 127).

<sup>234</sup> *The Bee*, 1793, p. 271; p. 273.

On one level, the narrator H. H. Brackenridge makes Farrago's mask all the more effective by introducing his protagonist as Pennsylvania's answer to Uncle Toby, the quixotic captain of *Tristram Shandy*, whose life is dedicated to planning military strategy with his servant and sidekick, corporal Trim. Toby's unsuspecting simplicity, endearing whimsicality, and child-like ignorance of the world constitute the defining characteristics of a particular kind of quixote, increasingly popular in eighteenth-century English fiction, and defined by Stuart Tave as 'the amiable humorist'.<sup>235</sup> Embodied in figures such as Fielding's Parson Adams and Goldsmith's man in black, the amiable humorist was usually a gentleman of more mature years, and more often than not a confirmed bachelor. In *Modern Chivalry*, the very first sentence of Chapter One co-opts this particular type of quixote and forms Farrago in his mould, for H. H. Brackenridge informs us that the Captain is 'in some things whimsical, owing perhaps to his greater knowledge of books than of the world; but, in some degree, also, to his having never married, being what they call an old batchelor [*sic*], a characteristic of which is, usually, singularity and whim' (MC, 6). The narrator returns to this image in the closing pages of the book, concluding his story of the Captain—now known simply as 'the governor'—with a chapter devoted to the causes of Farrago's bachelordom, and the prediction that 'if we ever get our Don Quixotte married, it is ten to one, but it will be to a spinster' (MC, 798). *Modern Chivalry* is thus book-ended with the sentimentalised sketch of a good-natured quixote, formative first and last impressions, which de-politicise the Governor, disregard his dubious rise to power, and suffuse him with the rosy glow of the amiable humorist.

As the excerpt above suggests, however, despite his best—or rather worst—intentions, Farrago's quixotic 'denomination' proves an unstable and indeterminate entity, one that ultimately slips beyond his grasp. Defined by a series of nominal shifts and grammatical qualifications, he may be denominated Captain, 'but' his name is John Farrago, 'though' he has had other epithets applied to him. And although the Captain claims 'it is of little, or perhaps of no

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<sup>235</sup> *Amiable Humorist*, pp. 140-163.



consequence' what his 'stile is amongst men', he provides us nonetheless with a catalogue of alternative epithets, a series of potential names that could be applied to his character. His professed insouciance is also decidedly conditional, for he will not be affronted 'unless' his name contains reflections on his integrity, and 'provided' it contains nothing in it to impeach his moral character. Farrago's self-image is both conditioned by the people he meets and conditional upon the servant he employs: the grammatical structure of his speech ensures that he remains the passive recipient of the various names he 'ha[s] been called', the names 'given [him] by the people', conferred according to 'the singularity which they conceive themselves to discover' in his behaviour. A change of squire, likewise, means a change of name for the Captain, from 'the Owner of the red-headed Bog-trotter', to 'the Master of the raw Scotchman'. Recalling Tristram Shandy's wry observation that *Don Quixote* is in fact the story of 'Sancho and his master',<sup>236</sup> these topsy-turvy appellations suggest that the Captain's dependency upon his squire is more than nominal—a point brought home when Farrago tenaciously tracks down the errant Irishman in Philadelphia and continues to trail O'Regan long after he has resigned his post as squire. And Farrago's aristocratic ambitions really do depend on O'Regan: only by exposing the 'unnatural hoist' (MC, 14) that the ambitious bog-trotter hopes to effect can he legitimise his own position as a 'natural leader'; only Teague's repeated revolutions can consolidate the Captain's role as a force for stability; only by frightening the people with the levelling anarchy of a Teague O'Regan can he convince them to accept the aristocratic hierarchies of a Governor Farrago.

Farrago is the first to acknowledge that 'no party can maintain power long. The ascendancy carries its overthrow along with it' (MC, 383), he avers, and in Teague O'Regan, the Captain carries along with him both the root of his success and the seeds of his fall. While Ann Marie Cameron's doctoral research into 'sidekicks' in American novels has concluded that 'O'Regan is more of a stereotype than is Sancho and never rises above his role as functionary', I would argue that the Irishman constantly slips away from his designated role as

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<sup>236</sup> *Tristram Shandy*, p. 521

Farrago's foil, the Sanchoesque sidekick who validates his quixotic companion.<sup>237</sup> While the Captain advises that 'the cobbler [*sic*] stick to his last' (MC, 11), and is himself an ageing and intransigent old stickler who cleaves to classical ideals and European precedents, Teague O'Regan sloughs off his Irish roots and moves beyond the stereotypical Irish patriot figured in popular plays such as John Beete's *The Man of the Times* (1797).<sup>238</sup> He may not be running the country—his ambitions are usually thwarted, his success short-lived—but O'Regan certainly drives the narrative, upstaging the quixote and running away with the plaudits. While Farrago's stodgy sermonising alienates him time and again from the people he hopes to impress, Teague O'Regan, interested only in bettering himself, is the man of the moment and the darling of the new republic. Reluctant to retain the same shape for long, the mercurial Irishman is repeatedly made anew, as a sans-culotte and an 'Esquimaux Indian', 'a speaking Panther' and a professor, an author and a judge, to name but a few of the parts he is called upon to play (MC, 26; 689). Reformed and reconstituted according to popular opinion, O'Regan becomes a measure of the social and political climate, a political barometer who, more than any other character in *Modern Chivalry*, embodies the 'special spirit and character of these times' (MC, 154).

Both the precariousness of Farrago's political ascendancy and his symbiotic relationship with Teague O'Regan are crystallised in one particular episode from the penultimate volume of *Modern Chivalry*. If the friction between the imperious Governor and the populist Teague represents a battle for ideological ascendancy in the new nation, then it is fitting that this, their most significant confrontation, should be a military encounter, played out on the American

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<sup>237</sup> 'Sidekicks: A Study of Companions in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century American Novels' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Purdue University, 2000), p. 17.

<sup>238</sup> According to Kent G. Gallagher, the 'reluctance to admit anything on the American continent the equal of a comparable item or custom in Ireland', 'the constant desire to return to his homeland', and 'the unwillingness to relinquish Irish ways', are elements which 'all operate to a greater or lesser degree in every ludicrous stage Irishman from the date of his American birth sometime after the Revolution' (*The Foreigner in Early American Drama: A Study in Attitudes* [The Hague: Mouton, 1966], p. 121).

landscape. Teague is amongst a party of settlers in pursuit of Indians, when his hasty retreat from a possible clash inadvertently renders him a hero:

The word Indians was given; which Teague no sooner hearing, than he began to retrace his steps with some alacrity.—It was on a ridge or bend of a hill; the Indians crossing the hill, had gone into the valley, and come round again nearly to the place where the whites had ascended it. It happened therefore very naturally, that the Indians and the bog-trotter, though neither meaning it, had fallen in with each other [...] The bog-trotter had by this time accelerated his speed considerably, and the declivity of the hill was such that he found it impossible to arrest himself, being under the impetus of the projectile motion which he had acquired; and seeing nothing before him but death from the tomahawk of at least sixty Indians, and nevertheless being unable to stop his career, no more than could a stone projected from the precipice, he raised the tremendous shout of desperation; which the savages mistaking for the outcry of onset, as it is customary with them when they are sure of victory, to raise the war-whoop; magnifying the shout, by their imaginations into that of a large party overtaking them, they threw away their packs and scalps, and made their way towards the Indian country; not doubting but that the whole settlement was in pursuit of them. (MC, 596)

While Farrago's encounter with the petrified Indian is a spectacle of eerie stillness, a moment of shared sympathy and self-reflection, Teague's encounter sees him hurtling toward the Indian tribe, unable 'to arrest himself', and inadvertently effecting a sweeping act of Indian removal.<sup>239</sup> By 'a kind of magic' (MC, 597), the lucky Teague has transformed retreat into victory and ignominy into glory. Embellishing his story and proclaiming a victory, the cowardly squire is declared a hero, and even recommended for the post of 'Major-General', an appointment which would see him outrank Farrago, a mere captain in military terms. The cunning Farrago, however, convinces Teague to decline the commission by persuading him that a military hero is more than likely to lose his head—if not by cannon ball or grape-shot, then by an Indian scalping knife—and

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<sup>239</sup> Teague's downhill dash couldn't be further removed from Diedrich Knickerbocker's uphill struggle in *A History of New York*: pausing for breath at the start of Book II, Irving's historian likens himself to 'the celebrated Hans Von Dunderbottom, who took a start of three miles for the purpose of jumping over a hill, but having been himself out of breath by the time he reached the foot, sat himself quietly down for a few moments to blow, and then walked over it at his leisure' (HNY, 424).

within the context of *Modern Chivalry*, the incident becomes one more inconclusive battle, another tactical draw where neither side can claim success. As deception plays off against deception, Farrago and his man have never seemed so similar, each one prepared to con the people in order to gain the point. And if the knight and squire really are two sides of the same coin, then this is the incident which sees the coin flipped and their roles reversed: claiming victory in a battle that never took place and describing his feat as ‘de greatest battle dat was ever fought since the days of Chevalry’ (MC, 599), Teague usurps the role of the quixote, while Captain Farrago is the voice of common sense, pointing out the non-existence of the battle in much the same way that Sancho dismisses Don Quixote’s adventure in Montesinos cave as ‘a heap of the greatest nonsense that was ever conceived’ (DQ, 558).

Nonetheless, Teague O’Regan has trampled over Brackenridge’s Revolutionary hill, the author’s emotive symbol of rising US glory and lofty national character. He has taken the morally righteous ‘eminence’ of ‘Vanhest’ and turned it into a dangerous precipice, where action is involuntary and victory ignominious, where the coward is the hero and the ‘career’ of the opportunist unstoppable. Was it all downhill from here—as Farrago believed and as many Americans feared—or was Brackenridge merely acknowledging the emergence of a new kind of character and the inexorable transformation of the nation’s socio-political landscape? ‘You may have my bog-trotter, and welcome, for a governor’, declares a world-weary Farrago in the final volume of Part II: ‘I have had as much trouble on my hands with him as Don Quixotte had with Sancho Panza [...] but I hope I shall not be considered as resembling that Spaniard in taking a wind-mill for a giant; a common stone for a magnet that can attract, or transmute metals. It is you that are the Don Quixottes in this respect, madcaps’ (MC, 783). Ironically, though, the shape-shifting Teague O’Regan is himself the ‘common stone’ whose ‘talismanic charm’ magnetically attracts the baser elements of frontier society. And it is Farrago’s failure to acknowledge the transmutation of republican ideals, of popular opinion, and of national character, that makes his claim to power even more tendentious and his hold on power increasingly

insecure. In his *History of the United States*, Henry Adams observed that following the War of 1812, 'monarchy or aristocracy no longer entered into the public mind as factors in future development'; more recently, Steven Watts has argued that 'the "victory" of 1815 marked a watershed in the making of liberal America', providing a 'resounding affirmation' of the 'liberalizing trends' that had been gathering force during previous decades.<sup>240</sup> Put quite simply, there was no place for Captain Farrago in this new political landscape: Napoleon had fallen in 1815; Brackenridge's death the following year would bring a timely end to Farrago's frontier reign.

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<sup>240</sup> *History of the United States of America*, 9 vols (New York, Scribner, 1889-1896), IX, 195; *Republic Reborn*, p. 277.

#### 4. An Alien's Act of Sedition: 'Trans-atlantic peculiarities' and North African Attachments in *The Algerine Captive* <sup>241</sup>

Experience and observation every day teach us to believe that those men who are *outrageously* patriotic in their professions are generally actuated by some criminal selfishness.

George Cabot, 'Political Monitor' (1798)

There is no denying it: Sancho Panza repeatedly outshines and upstages his master in the literature of the early republic. In Joseph Dennie's 'Farrago' columns, published in various periodicals between 1792 and 1802, Don Quixote barely gets a mention, passed over in favour of the 'pithy PANZA', the 'SANCHO PANZA' whose 'very simplicity' enables him to 'inform and amuse'.<sup>242</sup> And even though Royall Tyler, in the voice of 'Spondee', complains about the 'Sancho Panza proverbs of Benjamin Franklin', associating them with the 'extravagant bloated style [...] too prevalent' in American letters, he nonetheless devotes an entire play to Sancho's antics in *The Island of Barrataria* (c1808-1815).<sup>243</sup> Several versions of this story had already been staged back in

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<sup>241</sup> The style of *The Algerine Captive* 'abounds in trans-atlantic peculiarities', according to an article in British periodical, *The Monthly Review; or, Literary Journal*, 42 (1803), 86-93 (p. 93).

<sup>242</sup> *The Farrago*, ed. by Bruce Granger (Delmar, NY: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1985), p. 29; p. 73. Later on in the series, the columnist refers to the 'Quixotish spirit of innovation' in education (p. 80).

<sup>243</sup> 'From the Shop of Mess. Colon and Spondee', *The Port Folio*, 5 (1805), 249-251 (p. 250). Neither performed nor published in Tyler's lifetime, *Barrataria*'s date of composition is unknown, though Marius B. Péladeau has suggested that it was 'probably written between 1806 and 1815', using as his evidence the 'mention of George Washington's death', an 'analogy between James

Europe, and *The Island of Barrataria, A Farce in Three Acts* came with alternative titles—*Tantalization; or, The Governour of a Day*—since ‘the Author is informed there is a farce in print—on the same subject—and perhaps with the Title first Proposed’.<sup>244</sup> Adapting for the stage the Barrataria storyline from Part II of *Don Quixote*, Tyler’s farce sees Sancho Panza as the short-lived ruler of a make-believe island, starved, mocked, and trampled upon, courtesy of Duke Jokeley and his cronies.<sup>245</sup> Against all the odds, though, Sancho comes off rather well in *Barrataria*: he has the sense to realise he is ‘the fool of the play’, and the insight to remark that there are ‘some who govern it for years [...] and have not wit enough to see that they are the Sancho’s of the political play’ (IB, 30). In his own words, he has ‘mother wit enough to find out in a brief day that I am unfit for office’, though in fact, Sancho’s gubernatorial judgements are extremely perceptive and entirely fitting (IB, 30); his table manners may leave a lot to be desired, but he exercises his power with justice and with conscience, displaying an honesty and attention to his ‘subjects’ that is altogether lacking in the indolent Duke Jokeley.

When the pompous Don Formal points out that Sancho is reading a letter upside down, the Governor is quick to respond: ‘Think I did not know that? The way I always read a letter of importance—sure then to get to the bottom of it at once’ (IB, 27). Sancho’s bottom-up approach to reading correspondence is reflected in Tyler’s topsy-turvy structuring of the play: the main plot of

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Madison as Sancho to Thomas Jefferson’s Quixote’, and an ending which ‘reflects the end of the War of 1812’ (‘Royall Tyler’s Other Plays’, *The New England Quarterly*, 40 [1967], 48-60, [p. 58]).

<sup>244</sup> *Four Plays by Royall Tyler*, ed. by Arthur Wallace Peach and George Floyd Newbrough (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965), pp. 1-30 (p. 1). Future references to this edition are prefixed by IB and given in parentheses in the text. Earlier stage adaptations of the episode included James Ayres, *Sancho at Court; or, The Mock-Governor* (London: Torbuck, 1742), Antoine Alexandre Henri Poinset, *Sancho Pança dans son Isle* ([Paris]: Ballard, 1762), and Frederick Pilon, *Barataria; or, Sancho Turn’d Governor* (London: Almon, 1785).

<sup>245</sup> *Barrataria* is based on *Don Quixote*, Part II, Chapters 45, 47, 51, 53 (Part II, Book III, Chapters 13, 15, 19; Book IV, Chapter 1 of the Smollett’s translation).

*Barrataria* (Sancho's ill-fated career as governor) is all low humour and farce for farce's sake, while the sub-plot (Julietta wants to marry Carlos for love but Julietta's father wants her to marry the Governor for money) is Tyler's own, and provides the serious love-interest, the narrative drive, and the moral focus of the play. Questioning the stability and the source of political power, challenging the motives of patriarchal authority, and representing one of the most resourceful literary heroines of its time,<sup>246</sup> *The Island of Barrataria* deserves to stand alone as a literary work; nevertheless, it proves an intriguing narrative sidekick to Tyler's better known work, *The Algerine Captive; or, The Life and Adventures of Doctor Updike Underhill, Six Years a Prisoner Among the Algerines* (1797). Whereas the story of Sancho Panza has compressed and united several episodic chapters from *Don Quixote*, producing a short and rounded drama that fulfils the Aristotelian unities of time and place, the story of Yankee quixote, Updike Underhill, is an attenuated, unco-ordinated hybrid of a text. The play is only as long as Sancho's day of gubernatorial glory; *The Algerine Captive* takes us through Underhill's childhood, his adolescence, and a captivity of 'six years' in Algiers. *Barrataria* takes place in just the one location, Duke Jokeley's make-believe island; *The Algerine Captive*, meanwhile, stretches itself across three continents—America, Europe, and Africa—and takes a subtle swipe at the self-deluded 'island mentality' of John Adams's republic.

### *America*

The geographical and generic discontinuities of *The Algerine Captive* have invariably alienated critics of the text. In November, 1810, the *Monthly Anthology and Boston Review* set the tone for nearly two centuries of Tyler criticism when its 'Retrospective Review' of *The Algerine Captive* remarked upon the inferiority of Volume Two:

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<sup>246</sup> Determined to outsmart her father and secure the husband of her choice, Julietta appears before the Governor in various disguises—as 'Julian' the page, in Act One (IB, 14), as 'an old woman' in Act Two (IB, 20), and 'as a Gypsy' in Act Three (IB, 27)—playing the most socially marginalised of characters in order to gain access to the seat of power.



This little work is very undeservedly hastening to oblivion. It contains an admirable picture of the manners of the interior of New England—of that combination of native shrewdness and well-meaning simplicity, which is so remarkably the characteristic of our countrymen. Whatever foreigners may imagine, we know that Yankees are not all horse-jockies and knaves, but that, united with a native enterprise and quickness of parts, which has been mistaken for cunning, they have a strong sense of religious obligation, and a plain practical piety, equally remote from indifference and ostentation [...] The second volume, which describes his adventures among the Algerines, is much inferior to the first. It is a collection of common-place remarks upon the Barbary powers, and a relation of common incidents, accompanied with many trite reflections.<sup>247</sup>

Deeply imbued with a sense of national and regional identity, this early review sees only differences between the two volumes of *The Algerine Captive*: while the first is represented as an ‘admirable picture’ of ‘remarkabl[e]’ Americans, a carefully composed and illuminating portrait of original, ‘native’ subjects, the second is figured as a ‘collection of common-place remarks upon the Barbary powers’, an unstructured catalogue of unoriginal and ‘trite reflections’ upon a tired and overdone subject; while Volume One looks to ‘the interior of New England’ and patriotically disproves ‘whatever foreigners may imagine’, Volume Two looks beyond the borders of America in order to imagine a foreigner’s world, and is, in consequence, ‘inferior’. More recently, Henri Petter has plainly restated that the ‘second volume is inferior to the first’, William C. Spengemann has remarked that Updike’s ‘not very interesting information’ about Algiers has been ‘gleaned from guidebooks’, and Cathy Davidson has described Updike’s Algerian account as ‘a travelogue that seems far more conventional than was the account of Underhill’s early excursions through America, perhaps because Tyler himself had never seen Algiers and had, in effect, plagiarized his captivity tale from several popular Algerine captivity narratives of the day’.<sup>248</sup> Ironically, given

<sup>247</sup> ‘Retrospective Review’, *The Monthly Anthology and Boston Review*, 9 (July-Dec, 1810), 344-47 (p. 344; p. 346).

<sup>248</sup> Petter, *The Early American Novel* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1971), p. 295; Spengemann, *The Adventurous Muse: The Poetics of American Fiction, 1789-1900* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 135; Davidson, *Revolution and the Word*, p.

their eagerness to emphasise the derivative nature of Updike's Algerian account, critics have failed to spot the extent to which Volume Two borrows from Updike's own American adventures, replaying the events of Volume One, only on foreign soil and with different results.

In both America and Algiers, Updike's adult adventures move through three distinctive phases, broadly definable as close confinement, medical practice, and foreign travel. His initial stint as a manual labourer in Algiers recalls the slavery and contempt he sustains as a teacher in New England. By his own admission, he has acquired an idealistic image of Barbary slavery from 'the works of a Behn and a Colman', where the average slave is 'a Spanish Don with forty noble names', and romantic escape is followed by a marriage 'to Donna somebody' (AC, II, 16-17). Likewise, he has imbibed unrealistic expectations of pedagogy from his classical texts, and early in Volume One anticipates a set of erstwhile 'scholars', seated in 'awful silence' around his 'throne' (AC, I, 44; I, 47). Threatened with a whipping by the father of a recreant pupil in Volume One, and flogged by an Algerian overseer in Volume Two, Updike is soon disabused of his quixotic expectations. Both experiences leave Tyler's hero disempowered and despairing, but both are brought to 'an unexpected period' by a fortunate catastrophe (AC, I, 52). In Volume One, the schoolhouse goes up in flames, leading Tyler's disillusioned pedagogue to declare that his 'emancipation from real slavery in Algiers did not afford me sincerer joy than I experienced at that moment' (AC, I, 52-3); in Volume Two, Updike is seriously ill and 'resigned to die', when he is visited by the renegade mollah, restored to 'pristine health', and appointed medical assistant to the 'director of the infirmary' (AC, II, 70; 73; 71). His subsequent role as a medical surgeon allows him to move more freely around the Barbary state, much as in the middle of Volume One, where he rambles

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207. Don L. Cook, has pointed out that Tyler drew heavily on Mathew Carey's enlarged edition of William Guthrie's *New System of Modern Geography* for his information about Algiers (introduction to *The Algerine Captive* [New Haven, CT: College & University Press, 1970], pp. 7-23, [p. 18]).

around the states of America in the role of itinerant ‘country practitioner’ (AC, I, 104).

In America, Updike’s itinerant practice grinds to a halt when he is ‘reduced to [his] last dollar, and beginning to suffer from the embarrassments of debt’ (AC, I, 144-45). Encouraged by ‘handsome wages’, the companionship of the captain, and the ‘fine chance of seeing the world’, he is persuaded by a friend of a friend to ‘accept the birth [*sic*] of surgeon in his ship’ (AC, I, 145). Several journeys later and Updike finds himself on African soil. The similarities between this sequence of events and those towards the end of Volume Two are remarkable. Once again, Updike undertakes a foreign voyage—this time to Arabia—having lost every last penny of his savings. Once again, it is his friends who recommend ‘a journey into the country’ to restore his flagging spirits (AC, II, 189), and once more seduced by the promise of financial remuneration and ‘agreeable companions on the tour’, he again attends ‘some merchants as a surgeon in a voyage’ (AC, II, 190). Several journeys later and he is back on US soil. Engineering a series of sustained narrative parallels, Tyler encourages his readers to make repeated comparisons between the two volumes Updike writes and the two continents he inhabits. For there is no escaping the fact that the same narrative trajectory yields opposite results on each side of the Atlantic: while Volume One charts the diminution of Updike’s professional prospects and personal attachments along America’s Eastern seaboard, Volume Two sees him achieve professional prominence, social acceptance, and financial independence along the Barbary coast.

The *Monthly Anthology* may have praised *The Algerine Captive* for venturing into the American ‘interiour’, for delving deep into the US continent and the Yankee psyche, but Underhill’s experiences with American interiors are hardly affirmative. The schoolhouse, the church, the tavern, the parlour: Updike ventures into all these American interiors with optimism, only to be repulsed—disgusted as well as rejected—by those he finds within. Delighted with the prospect of ‘entering upon [his] school’, and keenly anticipating the ‘*Pleasures, and Profits of a Pedagogue*’, Updike imagines his students ‘seated in awful

silence' around him, his 'arm-chair', and his 'birchen sceptre of authority' (AC, I, 43-44). Once inside, however, Updike is surrounded by a 'ragged, ill bred, ignorant set' of students; he finds his 'throne usurped' by 'one of the larger boys', and sees his tenuous 'government' shaken 'to the centre' by disrespect and rebellion (AC, I, 45-47).

'Fatigued with the vexations' of school, he tries his luck at the tavern, hoping to make friends 'with some of the young men of the town'. Instead, in an episode that recalls Captain Farrago's failure to communicate with the squabbling jockeys, Updike's experience merely deepens his alienation:

Their conversation I could not relish; mine they could not comprehend. The subject of race-horses being introduced, I ventured to descant upon Xanthus, the immortal courser of Achilles. They had never heard of 'squire Achilles or his horse; but they offered to bet two to one that Bajazet, the Old Roan, or the deacon's mare, Pumpkin and Milk, would beat him, and challenged me to appoint time and place. (AC, I, 48)

As Updike's Latinate diction ('I ventured to descant upon Xanthus') comes into collision with the more informal vernacular used by his companions ('they offered to bet two to one'), as Xanthus is displaced by 'Pumpkin and Milk', and Updike's bookish allusions are displaced by the bookie's pitch, the encounter does more than shorten the odds on Updike's being run out of town;<sup>249</sup> it delivers a wider challenge to classical education, a bitterly contested subject as Americans sought to develop a democratic 'mode of education' that would—in the words of Benjamin Rush—render 'knowledge universal' and preserve 'a republican form of government'.<sup>250</sup> Tyler takes great delight in satirising the inappropriate

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<sup>249</sup> Being hounded out of town is the fate reserved for America's most notorious Yankee pedagogue, Ichabod Crane, the self-deluded misfit of Washington Irving's 'The Legend of Sleepy Hollow'.

<sup>250</sup> Rush, 'Observations upon the Study of the Latin and Greek Languages', in *Essays*, pp. 21-56 (p. 25). For a recent critical discussion of classical education and the early republic, see Linda K. Kerber's 'Salvaging the Classical Tradition', in *Federalists in Dissent: Imagery and Ideology in Jeffersonian America*, 2<sup>nd</sup> revd edn (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1970), pp. 95-134.

education and concomitant peculiarities of his classical quixote: whereas Captain Farrago uses his books to dupe his bog-trotter, turning his ‘considerable reading’ to his individual advantage, Updike’s extravagant attachment to Greek literature gets him nowhere and sees him repeatedly make an ass of himself. Overly keen to apply his education, Updike gives Greek names to his farming tools, cheers the cattle with ‘hexameter verse’, and slaughters the family’s cow—and ‘their winter’s beef’—‘after the manner of Virgil’ (AC, I, 41; 42). Lamenting the irrelevance of his son’s education, Updike’s father compares the study of Greek with ‘the ingenious cruelty of those tyrants [...] who chained the living and the dead together’; young Updike, however, is enamoured with the study of ‘dead languages’—and the sound of his own voice, too—as he ‘*spouteth Greek in a Sea-port*’ and adopts ‘*the Stile of the Ancients*’ across the tea tables and sick beds of New England (AC, I, 39; 73).

In the tavern, it is education that comes under scrutiny; in Chapter Twenty-one it is the turn of medical practice: both present irresolvable ‘contrariety in theory’ (AC, I, 107), as different ways of thinking rub fractiously against each other, pushing themselves forward and jostling for supremacy. Updike’s evening in the tavern is not the only occasion when horse riding provides the context for a cultural clash between competing ideals. The ‘Medical Consultation’ of Chapter Twenty-one sees the ‘cheap doctor’, the ‘safe doctor’, the ‘popular physician’, the ‘musical doctor’, and the quack, all gathered around a drunken jockey, who has ‘fallen from his horse at a public review’ and landed on his head (AC, I, 122-23). Each one in turn pushes to the front of the crowd and argues strenuously for his own course of treatment, but they only resolve their professional differences with ‘a consultation of fisty-cuffs’, leaving the veterinary surgeon to treat the patient successfully with ‘a dose of urine and molasses’ (AC, I, 126). Medical practice was a deeply contentious issue in the fledgling USA. In political terms, lower mortality rates were highly desirable, as population growth was perceived as a tangible measure of America’s success. In academic circles, American doctors such as Benjamin Rush were eager to distinguish themselves and to promote American medical science on the international stage. And

figuratively speaking, problems experienced by the new nation were also explained in medical terms, with Mathew Carey aligning Philadelphia's epidemic of financial speculation with the outbreak of yellow fever in 1793, and Brackenridge using 'influenza' as a metaphor for the 'gradual march' and 'deleterious effects' (MC, 642) of mob mentality in *Modern Chivalry*.<sup>251</sup>

As Updike undertakes his tour of the seaboard states, Tyler's satirical emphasis shifts as well; the Doctor's classical foibles attract progressively less attention, eclipsed by what James Fenimore Cooper would call the 'multitude of local peculiarities', exhibited by the various communities he passes through.<sup>252</sup> Attending a church-service-cum-horse-race somewhere 'southward of Philadelphia', Updike is appalled to see a minister beat his negro slave, 'accompanying every stroke with suitable language', before entering the church and beginning the service with, 'I said I will take heed unto my ways, that I sin not with my tongue' (AC, I, 135; 137). While Chapter One of *Modern Chivalry* sees the Captain sermonising through a horse-race, Tyler's parson races through the sermon, preaching 'an animated discourse, of eleven minutes', before hastening off to the horse-race with his congregation. As well as being 'one of the judges of the race', the minister 'descanted, in the language of the turf, upon the points of the two rival horses; and the sleeve of his cassock was heavily laden with the principal bets' (AC, I, 137-38). Updike is once again the misfit, an 'awkward and uneasy' (AC, I, 138) witness to the whipping of the slave, and a foreigner to the brutal ways and impious words of the South, but he is no longer

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<sup>251</sup> Mathew Carey, *A Short Account of the Malignant Fever Lately Prevalent in Philadelphia*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn (Philadelphia: Carey, 1794), pp. 9-10. As we will see in Chapter Five, Charles Brockden Brown would also deploy the metaphorical potential of disease, using scenes of yellow fever, hysteria, and somnambulism to represent the social ills and economic disorder of the USA.

<sup>252</sup> In an 1822 review of Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *A New-England Tale*, James Fenimore Cooper regretted the lack of American literature dealing with the region's 'local peculiarities', recognising 'but two attempts of this sort which merit any praise, a story called Salem Witchcraft, and Mr. Tyler's forgotten, and we fear, lost narrative of the Algerine Captive' (*Early Critical Essays* [Gainesville, FL: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1955], pp. 97-132 [p. 97]).

the butt of the joke. Instead, Tyler's quixote provides the moral centre for the scene, as the satirical focus is re-directed towards the vested interests of the pastor and his cash-filled cassock. As in the tavern, the barrier that divides Underhill from his fellow Americans is figured as linguistic, as the southern minister and the Northern doctor 'descant' upon very different subjects. Tyler's Yankee protagonist is entirely unfamiliar with 'the language of the turf'; he doesn't 'swear profanely', and even refuses to reproduce what he calls 'the imprecations of others', in his own, New-Hampshire published, book (AC, I, 138; 140). A shared American language seems impossible, with Updike and his peers a world apart.

The highlight of Updike's American adventures comes in Chapter Twenty-three, when Benjamin Franklin makes a cameo appearance. Tyler's ambitious young narrator 'anticipate[s] much pleasure' from an interview with 'one, who, from small beginnings, by the sole exertion of native genius and indefatigable industry, had raised himself to the pinnacle of politics and letters; a man who, from an humble printer's boy, had elevated himself to be the desirable companion of the great ones of the earth' (AC, I, 129-30). But Benjamin Franklin, America's most celebrated self-made man, is most pointedly all that Updike tries and fails to be, while Updike's own American experience belies the nationalistic rhetoric of Franklin's *Information to Those who would Remove to America* (1784), a pamphlet encouraging hardworking Europeans to cross the Atlantic and make something of themselves in America. Referring in particular to 'the professions of divinity, law, and physic', Franklin's pamphlet assures an English readership that strangers 'are by no means excluded from exercising those professions; and the quick increase of inhabitants every where gives them a chance of employ, which they have in common with the natives'.<sup>253</sup> According to this proselytising pamphlet, everybody is welcome in America 'because there is room enough for them all'.<sup>254</sup>

But while Franklin's *Autobiography* bears out such optimism with its author's own success story, Updike's autobiography disproves and discredits

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<sup>253</sup> *Information to Those who would Remove to America* (London: [n.p.], 1794), p. 6.

<sup>254</sup> *Information*, p. 10.

Franklin's *Information*. Despite his 'own acquirements and the celebrity of [his] preceptor' (AC, I, 105), Tyler's newly qualified doctor encounters an overcrowded, inhospitable America, where medical jobs are few and far between. One New England township, as we have seen, already boasts '*a learned, a cheap, a safe, and a musical Doctor*' (AC, I, 107), and in 'sea-ports' up and down the coast, 'the business was engrossed by men of established practice and eminence' (AC, I, 141). Nor does 'the interior country' present a more likely proposition, for Updike writes that here, the people 'could not distinguish or encourage merit. The gains were small, and tardily collected' (AC, I, 141). In short, while the self-made Franklin writes pamphlets encouraging removal to America, Tyler's financially undone doctor is forced to remove from America, squeezed out of the USA by a dearth of opportunity and a growing sense of personal failure. Instead of being a point of arrival, a desirable destination for hard-working emigrants, a refuge for the oppressed, a powerful magnet for spies, dissenters, and disruptive radicals—all ways in which Americans figured their nation during the 1790s—Updike's America is a point of departure, a place that people leave. Not everyone wanted to get inside the new republic—no matter what the Federalists might have thought—and those who left were not always in a hurry to return.

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*The Algerine Captive* does nothing in a hurry, trotting along at a leisurely pace in comparison with other feverish US fictions about ambitious young men setting out in the world. James Butler's *Fortune's Football*, also published in 1797, follows the fortunes of one Mercutio as he bounces back and forth across the world, falling into and out of poverty, and acquiring a string of fiancées along the way. Mercutio is captured by an Algerian corsair, set to work as a galley slave, and ultimately ransomed by friends several months later, but his time as an Algerine captive warrants a mere four pages in a novel that is already filled to bursting with ill-fated voyages and providential escapes. While the pace of *Fortune's Football* is accelerated still further by its absence of chapter breaks, Updike Underhill, whose own work is chopped into sixty-nine chapters, spends



the first three detailing the downfall of a long-dead ancestor and the second three discussing the educational programme of his youth. In fact, the whole of Volume One can be read as a lengthy digression, a deferral of the expectations raised by its title, for the so-called Algerine Captive doesn't actually reach Algiers until the opening lines of Volume Two. Migrating steadily southward in his search for success, the only time that Updike resembles fortune's football is in his mother's dream:

My mother, some months before my birth, dreamt that she was delivered of me; that I was lying in the cradle; that the house was beset by Indians, who broke into the next room, and took me into the fields with them; that, alarmed by their hideous yellings and warwhoops, she ran to the window, and saw a number of young tawny savages playing at foot-ball with my head; while several sachems and sagamores were looking on unconcerned.

This dream made a deep impression on my mother. I well recollect, when a boy, her stroking my flaxen locks, repeating her dream, and observing with a sigh to my father, that she was sure Updike was born to be the sport of fortune, and that he would one day suffer among savages. Dear woman! she had the native Indians in her mind, but never apprehended her poor son's suffering many years, as a slave, among barbarians more cruel than the monsters of our own woods. (AC, I, 25-26)

Blurring the distinction between native American and North African aggressors, Updike is not the first American to locate the Indian 'savage' along the same degenerate axis as the African 'barbarian'. As early as 1788, Hugh Henry Brackenridge had warned that 'a treaty with [the Barbary] powers is like a treaty with savages, it is of short continuance', and Jared Gardner has noted that Algerians were 'referred to in the press as "Africans" and "savages" interchangeably'.<sup>255</sup> In this passage, the connection is reinforced by the striking image of baby Updike's broken head, kicked playfully from one tawny savage to the next. Decapitation was not only associated with native Indians; it was a punishment notoriously meted out by zealous 'Mussulmen' and routinely

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<sup>255</sup> Brackenridge, 'Speech Delivered in the Legislature of Pennsylvania', in *Gazette Publications*, pp. 41-52 (p. 48); Gardner, *Master Plots: Race and the Founding of an American Literature 1787-1845* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 33.

described in contemporary accounts of the Barbary Coast.<sup>256</sup> Delineating the death of the only son and the end of the family line, Mrs Underhill's nightmare raises more than one spectre, and sounds more than one national alarm. It suggests that the fledgling USA is under attack both home and away, cut off in its infancy by a rising generation of 'young' and 'tawny savages', and threatened from without by the depredations of North African adversaries.

Unexpectedly, perhaps, and running contrary to Mrs Underhill's alarmist vision, Indian captivity narratives from the period suggest that Anglo-American women were themselves quite likely to wield the axe. In Abraham Panther's *Very Surprising Narrative* (1787), a genteel 'young Lady', who has just escaped from Indian captivity, decapitates the foreign-speaking giant who insults her and cuts him into quarters with surprising adeptness; in a similar vein, John Filson's *The Discovery, Settlement and Present State of Kentucke* (1784), sees a mother whose home has been 'boldly entered' by an Indian intruder draw 'an ax from a corner of the cottage, and cut his head off'.<sup>257</sup> In contrast, Updike's mother stands helpless at the window in her dream, inverting the trope in order to project the American settler as passive victim and the Indian marauder as unprovoked antagonist. Updike's own allusions to his infamous forefather, Captain John Underhill, posit an altogether different relationship between the Underhills and the Indians, revealing at the same time the inadequacy of New-Hampshire historiography, and the ideological differences dividing Updike from his Underhill ancestors.

While the apocryphal dream of the mother presages the end of the Underhill line, the assiduous research of the son presents the story of the very first American Underhill. Fact and fiction exchange places as Tyler's pseudonymous author relates the biography of a genuine historical figure, 'one Captain John

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<sup>256</sup> See John Foss, *A Journal, of the Captivity and Sufferings of John Foss, Several Years a Prisoner at Algiers*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Newburyport: March, 1798), p. 33; p. 39.

<sup>257</sup> *A Very Surprising Narrative of a Young Woman Discovered in a Rocky Cave* (Fairfield, WA: Galleon, 1972), p. 10; p. 16; *The Discovery, Settlement and Present State of Kentucke* (Wilmington: Adams, 1784), p. 79.

Underhill, an early dissenter, and ally of the ‘good Roger Williams’ (AC, I, 8). Updike Underhill takes the bulk of his material from Jeremy Belknap’s *History of New Hampshire* (1784-92), a widely-read and well-respected work that criticised the Captain for ‘his adultery and hypocrisy, his pride and contempt of authority’.<sup>258</sup> But Updike Underhill—in an act of historical recovery that predates Hawthorne’s custom house by over half a century—has unearthed a piece of evidence to challenge the official Puritan version of events; he has ‘fortunately discovered, pasted on the back of an old Indian deed, a manuscript which reflects great light upon my ancestor’s conduct, and on the transactions of those times’ (AC, I, 13). Calling itself ‘Brother Underhill’s Epistle’, the manuscript brings to light a farcical case of puritanical injustice, as the ‘lords bretherenne’ banish the Captain for the ‘cryinge sin’ of looking at a woman in church (the fingerless gloves of the female in question are absurdly described as ‘Satan’s port-holes of firy [*sic*] temptatione’), finding him guilty of a crime that doesn’t even exist (AC, I, 14; 19; 18; 16).

As Paul Baepler has remarked, ‘in attempting to recover his ancestor’s reputation with this hitherto unnoticed text, Underhill assigns a higher truth to the underside of the deed than to the official government writing on the topside of the document’.<sup>259</sup> But while Updike’s revisionist approach to New England historiography delivers a clear challenge to the myth-making historians of post-Revolutionary America, his version of history still has its blind spots: the ‘official government writing’ that Updike disregards is an ‘old Indian deed’: the Captain’s reputation is only restored at the expense of Indian life and land rights, and not for the first time, either. During his own lifetime, the Captain was acclaimed for his

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<sup>258</sup> *The History of New-Hampshire*, 3 vols, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Boston: Bradford & Read, 1813), I, 45. ‘Deeply tinctured with Antinomian principles, and possessed of an high degree of enthusiasm’ (AC, I, 38), Updike’s colourful forefather can himself be read as an early American quixote, a dissenting figure on the margins of Puritan history, banished from Boston along with Roger Williams (whose ‘disturbant’ ‘quixotism’ was criticised by Cotton Mather), and able to envisage alternative realities to the exacting regime of the ‘lords bretherenne’ (AC, I, 19).

<sup>259</sup> Baepler, ‘White Slavery in Africa: The Barbary Captivity Narrative in American Literature’ (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1996), p. 120.

‘great service to the people of Massachusetts in the Pequod wars’ (AC, I, 22), and in Albany, ‘after Dutchifying his name into Captain Hans Van Vanderhill’, he reputedly ‘killed one hundred and fifty Indians on Long Island, and upwards of three hundred on the Main’ (AC, I, 22). While defeated Indians experience material and cultural dispossession, the victorious Captain Vanderhill is rewarded with ‘fifty thousand acres of land’ (though his rights to the land appear to have gone astray when the Duke of York arrived in 1664, enabling Tyler to anticipate *A History of New York* with a brief burlesque on the subject of land speculation in the early republic). Updike may lay claim to both ‘the impartiality of an historian, and the natural solicitude to wipe the stains from the memory of my honoured ancestor’ (AC, I, 20), but the aims of impartial historian and solicitous descendent are undeniably at odds with each other, and combining the two produces contradictory results. The underside of the deed, then, may erase the ‘dark spots’ of Captain Underhill’s adultery (AC, I, 20), but in bringing it to light, Updike draws attention to the ruthless underside of his ancestor, and the darker deeds of colonial genocide.

Having established that the identity of the Underhill family is founded upon the massacre of native Americans—the family ‘heirloom’ is even ‘a long-barrelled gun’ which ‘had perhaps killed Indians on Long Island’ (AC, I, 80)—Updike makes it clear that he wants nothing to do with the family tradition. Volume One is all about Updike’s search for a profession: he becomes a teacher, then a doctor, then a sea-faring surgeon, struggling in vain to find and make his way in the world, yet at no point does he consider following in the military footsteps of his ‘brave ancestor, captain John Underhill’ (AC, I, 80), an omission that appears especially striking when we recall that Updike was born on 16 July, 1762 (AC, I, 25), and would have turned eighteen during the War of Independence. America’s conflict with Great Britain was evidently no more appealing to Updike than was Vanderhill’s war with the Indians; in 1782, he is busy courting Boston belles with ‘Greek heroics’, and by 1785 he has completed his medical studies without so much as mentioning the Revolution (AC, I, 75; 97). Baffled by his son’s choice of vocation, Underhill senior merely observes ‘that he

did not know what pretensions our family had to practice physic, as he could not learn that we had ever been remarkable for killing any but Indians' (AC, I, 56). Choosing medicine over a military career and determining to heal wounds rather than inflict them, bookish Updike Underhill once again anticipates the Hawthorne of 'The Custom-House', as he sets himself apart from his 'brave ancestor, captain John', and breaks out of the Underhill family mould. For a more compelling spiritual forefather—and another intriguing captain—we must turn to the Tyler family history and to Francis Jay Underhill, another solicitous descendant of Captain John. Writing to Francis Jay Underhill in 1926, E. Royall Tyler explains that 'in the family tradition', 'the "Algerine Captive" was our first ancestor, Thomas Tyler, a sea captain'. According to a family document, 'Thomas was "taken by the Algerines about 1697; carried into Algiers, and has never been heard of since; the Algerines rejecting a considerable ransom"' for his safe return.<sup>260</sup> Thomas Tyler had dropped out of sight and out of history in the African continent; in 1797, Updike Underhill—founded on fact but preserved by fiction—would re-emerge from North Africa in order to relate his tale.

### *The Middle Passage*

American interest in *Don Quixote* coincided with, and was stimulated by, the early republic's political and imaginative preoccupation with the Barbary Coast, a fascination evinced in American biographies of Cervantes, where great emphasis was laid upon the author's experiences as a slave in Algiers.<sup>261</sup> Barbary captivities and subsequent captivity narratives were certainly not a new phenomenon: Morocco had captured its first American ship in 1625, and as early as 1602—five years before his Indian captivity in Virginia—Captain John Smith had been taken by Turks and sold into slavery in Constantinople. The end of the Revolution,

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<sup>260</sup> Letter to Francis Jay Underhill (6 April, 1926), in *Underhill Genealogy: Descendants of Capt. John Underhill*, ed. by Josephine C. Frost, 4 vols ([Brooklyn, NY]: Taylor, 1932), II, 50.

<sup>261</sup> See 'The Life of Cervantes' in *The American Apollo* (1792), where over half the biography is devoted to Cervantes' Algerian captivity. See DQ, 313-44 for the Algerian tale of Zorayda and the Spanish captive, and DQ, 322 for the specific reference to Cervantes' captivity.

however, marked the start of a series of US-Barbary conflicts that remained unresolved until 1815, the year of Stephen Decatur's definitive US victory in Algiers. Having won political independence, America was no longer protected by British treaties with North African powers, and in 1785, Algerian pirates captured two American ships, the 'Dolphin' and the 'Maria'. When a treaty between Algiers and Portugal was negotiated in 1793, the Straits of Gibraltar were re-opened to Barbary corsairs, and eleven more American ships were captured. Even when the United States had 'concluded a treaty with this piratical state on the 5th of September, 1795' (AC, II, 103), American vessels continued to be boarded by Barbary pirates, and the Tripolitan War of 1801-1805 saw still more Americans taken hostage. According to Robert J. Allison's conservative estimate there were seven hundred US citizens enslaved in the Barbary states (Algiers, Morocco, Tunis, and Tripoli) between 1785 and 1815.<sup>262</sup> As well as dominating foreign-affairs pages, the conflicts generated a number of poems, plays, and captivity accounts, and *The Algerine Captive* was one of several books on Barbary to be published in 1797, the year that saw eighty-eight ransomed American captives return to a hero's welcome in Philadelphia. Royall Tyler's fictitious Barbary narrative—with a former captive for its pseudonymous author—would use the same combination of quest and captivity that had proved so popular in *Don Quixote*.

John Foss returned from his Algerian captivity in August, 1797, and his autobiographical *Journal, of the Captivity and Sufferings of John Foss* went through two editions in 1798. An 'eye witness' account of 'detestable piratical barbarians' and 'inhuman scenes of diabolical barbarity', Foss's *Journal* was a cautionary tale, an autobiography designed 'to teach both rulers and ruled' in his own 'happy country justly to appreciate the blessings of liberty and good government'.<sup>263</sup> The *Journal* was rounded off with a soul-stirring paean to American freedom, presented in a poem called 'The Algerine Slaves', an embellished and emotionally heightened re-telling of Foss's prose narrative. The

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<sup>262</sup> *The Crescent Obscured*, p. 107.

<sup>263</sup> *Journal*, p. 38; p. 54; p. 38; p. 68.

final, climactic stanzas of the poem, devoted to the captives' arrival back home, represent 'the kind wife' and 'the lonely fair', re-united at last with their 'long lost' loved ones.<sup>264</sup> But the final, most poignant, reunion of all is reserved for the former captive and his country:

Tis now he tastes what thousands rarely know,  
The balmy sweets, which from fair Freedom flow;  
Looks round the world; and then enraptur'd cries,  
'Tis thine Columbia! daughter of the skies,  
Thine, thine the land, where freedom's gentle reign  
Demands the poets [*sic*] and the Captive's strain.<sup>265</sup>

While John Foss used his experiences to denounce Barbarian despotism and trumpet the libertarian values of the new republic, fictitious accounts of Barbary captivities—on stage, in poetry, and in fiction—repeatedly co-opted the Barbary captivity account for diametrically opposite ends: to expose American liberty as a sham and to campaign against the slavery of black Africans. David Everett's *Slaves in Barbary* (1797) revolves around the comical dramatisation of a Barbary slave auction, where slaves who are 'a little damaged' by 'musket shot' are available 'on easy terms for the purchaser!'<sup>266</sup> Everett's is an international cast, and while Venetian slaves, a talkative Irish captive, and even the Tunisian Bashaw, each display an earnest commitment to the cause of liberty, America's own representative, Kidnap, is 'a wholesale dealer in slaves', and dreams of having 'his slaves whipped thirty stripes each, for singing a liberty-song'.<sup>267</sup> Poetic justice triumphs, however, when the tyrannical Kidnap is sold into slavery

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<sup>264</sup> *Journal*, p. 188.

<sup>265</sup> *Journal*, p. 189. That the obligatory homecoming scene was more of a literary trope than a factual representation becomes clear when we compare the overblown sentiment of 'The Algerine Slaves' with the facts related in the prose narrative. In this version of the tale, John Foss is in no particular hurry to go home. Liberated on 11 July, 1796, the mariner doesn't return to his home town until 23 August, 1797: instead of choosing immediate repatriation he has taken a post aboard a commercial vessel, and headed straight back to the state of Algiers.

<sup>266</sup> Everett, *Slaves in Barbary*, in *The Columbian Orator*, ed. by Caleb Bingham (Boston: the editor, 1797), pp. 102-18 (p. 108).

<sup>267</sup> *Slaves in Barbary*, p. 111.

himself, and placed under the 'instruction' of a 'former slave', 'that he may occasionally have the advantage of a whip-lecture' from the man 'he has treated so kindly'.<sup>268</sup>

In her preface to *Slaves In Algiers* (1794), Susannah Rowson works to depoliticise her play by omitting any reference to international conflict and instead positioning the piece within the realm of quixotic literature. '*Some part of the plot is taken from the Story of the Captive, related by Cervantes, in his inimitable Romance of Don Quixote, the rest is entirely the offspring of fancy*', she insists, declaring that her '*chief aim has been, to offer to the Public a Dramatic Entertainment, which, while it might excite a smile, or call forth the tear of sensibility, might contain no one sentiment, in the least prejudicial, to the moral or political principles of the government under which I live*'.<sup>269</sup> However, not only does the disclaimer seem to press its point a little too strongly to be taken at face value, it is compromised by the closing moments of the drama itself. Renouncing 'the law of retaliation' and refusing to enslave her former master (the Dey of Algiers), Rowson's liberated American heroine makes a declaration of universal independence: 'By the Christian law, no man should be a slave', she proclaims. 'Let us assert our own prerogative, be free ourselves, but let us not throw on another's neck, the chains we scorn to wear'.<sup>270</sup>

Published anonymously in 1797, *The American in Algiers; or, The Patriot of Seventy-Six in Captivity* was a poem in two cantos. With a Revolutionary veteran as its speaker, Canto One contrasts the enlightened and liberty-loving ideals of 'Seventy-Six' with the ugly realities of a Barbary captivity, as one of 'Columbia's sons' finds himself stripped of his American 'birthright' and 'trembling' 'beneath a tyrants [*sic*] rod' in Algiers.<sup>271</sup> When Canto Two opens,

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<sup>268</sup> *Slaves in Barbary*, p. 115.

<sup>269</sup> Rowson, *Slaves in Algiers; or, A Struggle for Freedom* (Philadelphia: Wrigley & Berriman, 1794), p. ii.

<sup>270</sup> *Slaves in Algiers*, p. 70. 'Tho' a woman', Rowson is determined to 'plead the Rights of Man' (p. [2]), and *Slaves in Algiers* provides a stronger critique of female disempowerment than it does of black slavery.

<sup>271</sup> Anon., *The American in Algiers* (New-York: Buel, 1797), p. 5.



however, the patriot of seventy-six has fallen from sight, and in his place stands a 'sable bard' and a black slave narrative, offering readers a parallel story of enslavement, exposing the underside of American republicanism, and giving the lie to America's Revolutionary rhetoric:

From that piratic coast where slavery reigns,  
And freedom's champions wear despotic chains;  
Turn to Columbia—cross the western waves,  
And view her wide spread empire throng'd with slaves;  
Whose wrongs unmerited, shall blast with shame  
Her boasted rights, and prove them but a name.<sup>272</sup>

Unmentioned in the title of the poem, the black slave narrative springs an ideological *volte-face* on the unsuspecting reader, ridiculing America's self-proclaimed status as freedom's champion, and sweeping away in an instant the patriotic sentiment the American in Algiers had raised to fever pitch in Canto One. The rhetorical power of this poem lies in the pause between its cantos, and the unannounced transition from the 'patriot of seventy-six' to the unsettling voice of the 'sable bard'. For it is between these lines, in the blank space on the page, that the ideological break occurs; it is here that everything changes, though nothing is said.

Where literary genre is concerned, *The Algerine Captive* is duplicitous: it is a Barbary fiction that masquerades as a factual account of Barbary captivity.<sup>273</sup> Where ideology is concerned, *The Algerine Captive* is similarly double-tongued:

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<sup>272</sup> *American in Algiers*, p. 21.

<sup>273</sup> When it was published in 1797, *The Algerine Captive* contained nothing to suggest that it was anything other than a factual account of a Barbary captivity, and readers have frequently mistaken the fictional Updike for a genuine Algerine captive. As recently as 1979, historian John B. Wolf mistook *The Algerine Captive* for a genuine experience, a relation of fact written by one Dr. Updyke Underhill. Wolf treated 'Dr. Underhill' as a reliable source, using Updike's figures to estimate the number of men employed in the Algerian army and citing Underhill's experiences with Ben Benjamin's dishonest son as his only example to prove that 'there undoubtedly was some foundation for the hostility we find generated against the Algerian Jews' (*The Barbary Coast: Algiers Under the Turks, 1500 to 1830* [New York and London: Norton, 1979], p. 76; p. 105).

it is a critique of the United States that masquerades as a patriotic reaffirmation of the United States. With its first American edition published in 1797, following the Treaty of Algiers, and its second published in 1816, following Stephen Decatur's military victories along the Barbary Coast, we can infer that Tyler's American audience was, on one level at least, encouraged to read *The Algerine Captive* as a celebration of enlightened American values and their triumph over Barbary's dark, demonic force. But for Updike Underhill—a self-professed expert on the finer points of Greek verse—the silences between the lines speak volumes. As a beau, he treats the ladies to 'a dissertation on the *caesura*' (AC, I, 49), and as a youth he pays 'such attention to the caesura', that a listening minister predicts he will 'equal the Adams's in oratory'.<sup>274</sup> Underhill's attention to the caesura also finds expression in the narrative he writes: *The Algerine Captive* is carefully divided between two distinctive continents and two distinctive volumes, and it is in the geographical and narrative interval between the two, in the middle passage of *The Algerine Captive*, that the ideological crux comes into view. Still patiently awaiting the promised Algerian captivity, readers are instead confronted with an unexpected narrative of black slavery, as Updike recounts his shocking experiences as a surgeon aboard a slaving ship bound for America.

The upbeat mood and quixotic undertones of Underhill's American quest are swiftly dissipated in the face of the diabolical slave trade he encounters along the Ivory Coast. Updike is horrified by the unscrupulous kidnap and inhuman treatment of his African patients, and for once, his imagination offers no escape from the sickening reality of the situation:

When I suffered my imagination to rove to the habitation of these victims to this infamous cruel commerce, and fancied that I saw the peaceful husbandman dragged from his native farm, the fond husband torn from the embraces of his beloved wife, the mother from her babes, the tender child from the arms of its parent, and all the tender endearing ties of natural and social affection rended by the hand of avaricious violence, my heart sunk within me. I execrated myself for even the involuntary

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<sup>274</sup> AC, I, 33. The caesura is defined as 'a pause in verse' by Webster's *Dictionary* and a 'break, interruption, interval' by the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

part I bore in this execrable traffic: I thought of my native land, and blushed. (AC, I, 166)

Scenes of domestic and familial fracture punctuate *The Algerine Captive*, but are nowhere more distressing than here. Already uneasy in the Underhill family, and desperate now to come to terms with this scene of familial severance, Updike turns to the notion of an all-encompassing, Christian family for comfort, and invokes a paternalistic God, ‘the common parent of the great family of the universe, who hath made of one flesh and one blood all nations of the earth’ (AC, I, 169). His commitment to global fraternity strengthens still further when he finds himself imprisoned in the hold of a Barbary corsair: one of the former slaves aboard the ‘Sympathy’ risks his life to secrete provisions to the starving captive; ‘oppressed with gratitude’, Updike pledges that should he live ‘to taste the freedom of [his] native country’, ‘every moment of [his] life shall be dedicated to preaching against this detestable commerce’ (AC, I, 188-89).

Underhill’s return to his native country, however—referred to at both the start of Volume One and the end of Volume Two—sees only silence on the subject of slavery. Indeed, the only ‘detestable commerce’ that Updike preaches against in his preface is the importation of English books, a trade which impresses ‘the vices, of the parent country’ upon ‘the young female mind’, and renders ‘the home-spun habits of her own country disgusting’ (AC, x-xi). And at the end of the second volume, filling in the details of his safe return, Updike produces a homecoming scene guaranteed to please the most patriotic of readers:

I landed in my native country after an absence of seven years and one month; about six years of which I had been a slave. I purchased a horse, and hastened home to my parents, who received me as one risen from the dead. I shall not attempt to describe their emotions, or my own raptures. I had suffered hunger, sickness, fatigue, insult, stripes, wounds, and every other cruel injury; and was now under the roof of the kindest and tenderest of parents. I had been degraded to a slave, and was now advanced to a citizen of the freest country in the universe. I had been lost to my parents, friends, and country; and now found, in the embraces and congratulations of the former, and the rights and protections of the latter, a rich compensation for all past miseries. (AC, II, 226-27)

Figuring himself in the archetypal role of the prodigal son, Updike appears to have forgotten the painful image of the broken Congese family and his solidarity with his 'BRETHREN OF THE HUMAN RACE' (AC, I, 170). At the start of the narrative, he restores his forefather's reputation at the expense of Indian rights; at the end of the narrative he is so busy with the story of his own restoration that he overlooks his earlier promise to campaign against the wrongs of black slavery. Where are the pleas for abolition now? Why do we not see Updike 'fly'—as he promised on the pirate's ship—to his 'fellow citizens in the southern states'? Why do we not see him 'on [his] knees', conjuring them, 'in the name of humanity, to abolish a traffic which causes it to bleed in every pore' (AC, I, 189)? Is the doctor suffering from amnesia?

Read the final pages in isolation and you could only conclude that Updike is no longer 'oppressed with gratitude' for the African slave who slipped him food, for the Greek renegade who nursed him back to health, and for the Portuguese seamen who rescued him from a life of slavery and 'furnished [him] with every necessary' (AC, II, 225). Instead, echoing the sentiments and the vocabulary of Washington's 'Farewell Address' (1796), Underhill's final, astonishing lines warn his 'fellow citizens' against 'foreign emissaries', lest they 'delude us' into 'extravagant schemes [...] by recurring to fancied gratitude' (AC, II, 228). Forgetting the 'fraternal affection' of his fellow slaves, and the 'universal language of benevolence which needs no linguist to interpret', Updike closes *The Algerine Captive* with an isolationist appeal well-suited to the growing xenophobia of 1797,<sup>275</sup> cautioning his readers that 'Our first object is union among

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<sup>275</sup> Taking place in the context of political turmoil in France and Ireland, heated factional disputes between vice-president Thomas Jefferson's Republican allies and John Adams's Federalist administration led Federalists to suspect that Republicans were plotting with French agents to overthrow the government. In response, they assembled a provisional army—composed of faithful Federalists and led by Alexander Hamilton—and pushed through Congress a series of bills known collectively as the Alien and Sedition Acts. In brief, the Alien Law empowered the president to deport foreigners from the United States by executive decree; the Naturalisation Law made foreigners wait for fourteen years before they could apply for citizenship (and vote in elections), and the Sedition Law prohibited criticism of the President and his government. For an excellent

ourselves. For to no nation besides the United States can that ancient saying be more emphatically applied—BY UNITING WE STAND, BY DIVIDING WE FALL’ (AC, II, 15; 228).

*The Algerine Captive* is a carefully framed affair. Standing proud, the patriotic preface and reaffirmative conclusion occlude the divisive anti-slavery debate while more than fulfilling the nationalistic desiderata of the post-Revolutionary years. As Edward Watts has argued, the reader of Updike’s final cliché ‘is safely confirmed in the diction and ideas that could be found in any number of publications’.<sup>276</sup> But the story which unfolds between runs counter to the rhetorical frame, for here, in Updike’s America, ideological divisions drive the satire and Updike’s individual free-fall drives the plot. The true horrors of the black slave trade, meanwhile, are most forcefully brought home not between the lines exactly, but between the two worlds of Algiers and the USA, during Updike’s voyage from West Africa to East Coast America, in a middle passage that forms both the narrative caesura of *The Algerine Captive* and the ideological caesura in the poem that is America.

### *Algiers*

While Updike’s forays into the geographical and psychological ‘interiour’ of America invariably fall short of his unrealistic expectations, the pattern is reversed in Algiers, where the captive encounters a series of unpromising exteriors that reveal unexpected qualities within. The ‘*Sacred College of the Mussulman Priest*’, for example, is described as ‘a large gloomy building, on the outside, but within the walls an earthly paradise’ (AC, II, 34); the ‘dark entry’ and dilapidated ‘outward appearance’ of Ben Benjamin’s house likewise conceal the splendid furnishings and liberal hospitality to be found inside (AC, II, 178-79), while a glimpse through the window of a mosque reveals the ‘dignified elocution’

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discussion of the debate surrounding the bills see James Morton Smith, *Freedom’s Fetters: The Alien and Sedition Laws and American Civil Liberties* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966).

<sup>276</sup> *Writing and Postcolonialism*, p. 92.

of the priest, and a sermon ‘received by his audience with a reverence better becoming Christians than infidels’ (AC, II, 160).

The more Updike delves into America’s interior, the more of an outsider he feels; in Algiers, despite his inferior status as a Christian slave, and despite his initial impression that ‘no town contains so many places impervious to strangers’ (AC, II, 105), Updike soon finds acceptance and friendship in Algerian society. In *The Crescent Obscured: The United States and the Muslim World, 1776-1815*, Robert J. Allison has stressed the extent to which the white slavery of Algiers differed from the institutionalised, black slavery of the USA. According to Allison, captivity in Algiers precluded neither professional advancement nor social integration, for ‘slavery was a way to incorporate kinless strangers into society’, a ‘temporary status’ which gave them a ‘place in society while their permanent fate was determined either by their families and government or by their own choice of Islam’.<sup>277</sup> As the narrative progresses, Tyler’s American slave does indeed become increasingly ‘incorporated’ into Algerian society, and the warm reception which greets him at the home of Ben Benjamin contrasts with the cold shoulder he receives in parlours and drawing rooms across the United States. Updike is toasted by his Jewish host, treated as an ‘intimate’, and even given a set of front door keys. Repeatedly rejected and mocked by his American peers, the narrator’s North African tale is peppered with references to ‘my friend the Jew’, ‘my friend the mollah’, and ‘my friends in the hospital’, generous Algerians who ply their American colleague with gifts, and, according to Updike, ‘expressed sorrow at parting with me’—which is more than his invisible ‘beloved friends’ from the USA ever did (AC, II, 186; 76; 185; 71).

Incomprehensible to his American peers, Updike has no problem making himself understood in Algiers. His fellow slaves speak ‘that universal language of benevolence which needs no linguist to interpret’ (AC, II, 15), and Tyler’s Algerine captive soon becomes an expert on the local dialect:

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<sup>277</sup> *The Crescent Obscured*, pp. 107-08.

It is well known on the sea-coasts of the Mediterranean by the name of *Lingua Franca*. Probably it had its rise in the awkward endeavours of the natives to converse with strangers from all parts of the world; and the vulgar people, calling all foreigners *Franks*, supplied its name. I the more readily acquired this jargon, as it contained many Latin derivatives. If I have conjectured the true principle upon which the *Lingua Franca* was originally formed, that principle is still applied through all stages of its existence. Every person assumes a right to introduce words and phrases from his vernacular tongue, and with some alteration in accent they are readily adopted. (AC, II, 55-56)

No longer a barrier to comprehension, Updike's classical education now facilitates communication, enabling him to master the local dialect all the more readily. His analysis of the *Lingua Franca* figures the Barbary Coast as an international crossroads and a linguistic melting pot, a land of strangers, where the national language is named for 'foreigners', and where foreign-ness is a sign of belonging. While Noah Webster's attempts to introduce American English prove highly controversial back at home, the language that Updike encounters in Algiers is fluid, responsive, and thoroughly democratic. 'Every person assumes a right to introduce words and phrases from his vernacular tongue', writes Updike, and when he himself calls for '*hasty pudding* and *molasses*', the phrase is 'immediately adopted'. Indeed, he is sure that 'if a dictionary of the *Lingua Franca* shall ever be compiled', 'the name of the staple cookery of New England will have a conspicuous place' (AC, II, 56). And while the *Lingua Franca* dictionary remains a distant prospect, the New England doctor is himself 'readily adopted' by open-minded Algerians and soon obtains a 'conspicuous place' in their world.

From a professional perspective, then, Updike's enslavement in Algiers turns out to be a fortunate career move. While 'fortune and fame' elude him in America (AC, I, 141-42), his stint as a Barbary slave enables him to build a solid reputation and a lucrative practice. 'The first amputation' he performs attracts a crowd of 'principal physicians', and Tyler's ambitious young surgeon recalls how 'my friend the mollah came to congratulate me on my success, and spread my reputation wherever he visited' (AC, II, 75-76). In New England, Updike observes ironically that a successful doctor might aspire at most to bestow the

‘great fortune’ of ‘one hundred pounds’ (AC, I, 105-06) at the time of his death; as a doctor in North Africa, the learned slave is soon able to raise a ransom of one *thousand* dollars, and believes that had he ‘conformed to their faith, beyond a doubt [he] might have acquired immense riches’ (AC, II, 84). Indeed, by Chapter Thirteen, Updike claims that, ‘my circumstances were now so greatly ameliorated, that if I could have been assured of returning to my native country in a few years, I should have esteemed them eligible’ (AC, II, 74).

All this sits very uneasily alongside Updike’s claim that expatriation has deepened his attachment to America: ‘If a man is desirous to know how he loves his country, let him go far from home’, he plaintively asserts; ‘if to know how he loves his countrymen, let him be with them in misery in a strange land’ (AC, II, 174). Henri Petter has taken Updike’s rather formulaic outpourings of national affection at face value, insisting that ‘the sincerity of Tyler’s patriotism need not be questioned’.<sup>278</sup> Royall Tyler’s patriotism probably doesn’t need to be questioned: he was, after all, an outspoken Federalist, loyal to his country and sympathetic to the Adams administration. But Royall Tyler should not be confused with Updike Underhill, and Updike’s professions of national allegiance do indeed ring hollow when we recall that he is not with his countrymen ‘in misery’ at all. There are emphatically no other American slaves in the prison, the quarry, or the hospital, and when several ship-loads of American captives do come ashore later on in the volume, Updike binds himself by oath ‘never directly or indirectly to attempt to visit or converse with [his] fellow citizens in slavery’ (AC, II, 176). His earlier determination, ‘betide what would, to seek them the first opportunity’, goes by the board, and only ‘once’ does Updike describe himself as ‘almost tempted’ to break his oath, ‘at seeing Captain O’Brien at some distance’ (AC, II, 175-76). Almost tempted? Five years without speaking to a single one of his much-loved countrymen and he is *almost* tempted? The brief glimpse of the American captain, at a distance, and strangely out of place in Updike’s Algerian world, brings home the captive’s psychological as well as physical alienation from his country and his countrymen.

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<sup>278</sup> *The Early American Novel*, p. 296.



When the American government provides funds and supplies for their prisoners in Algiers, the *Journal* of John Foss describes the ‘generosity of the United S.’ towards ‘their enslaved countrymen’ as being of ‘inestimable value’, and all the more remarkable given that ‘no nation of Christendom had ever done the like for their subjects in our situation’. Updike makes no note of this; instead, he complains that the USA’s ‘extremely pitiful’ ransom offers (AC, II, 182-83) have resulted in a worsening of conditions for American slaves.<sup>279</sup> And while John Foss inserts in his *Journal* a series of encouraging letters from US diplomat, David Humphreys, written to the slaves in 1794, Updike’s letter to William Carmichael—the USA’s *charge des affaires* at Madrid—goes unanswered (AC, II, 182). When letters to American friends and family also miscarry, dialogue between Updike and his countrymen, always problematic, now appears impossible. What we see instead is the Algerine captive engaged in ‘a dialogue’ (AC, II, 42) with his Barbary captors, as the rational and compassionate mollah—himself a renegade from Christianity—tries to convert the American captive to Islam. Conversion attempts were a staple of Barbary captivities. In an article on ‘The Barbary Captivity Narrative in Early America’, Paul Baepler has argued that the narratives ‘are most often framed in religious terms’, conceptualising captivity as a test of individual faith, and nearly always containing a conversion attempt, depicting ‘the atrocities that led to “turning Turk”’.<sup>280</sup> According to a seventeenth-century account by one John Rawlins, for example, the Muslims flog their Christian captives until ‘they bleed at the nose and mouth, and if yet they continue constant, then they strike the teeth out of their heads, pinch them by their tongues, and use many other sorts of tortures to convert them’.<sup>281</sup> The attempt to convert Tyler’s Algerine captive is a far more civilised affair, a measured debate

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<sup>279</sup> *Journal*, pp. 122-23.

<sup>280</sup> Baepler, ‘The Barbary Captivity Narrative in Early America’, *EAL*, 30 (1995), 95-120 (p. 95; p. 100).

<sup>281</sup> Rawlins, *The Famous and Wonderful Recovery of a Ship of Bristol, Called the Exchange, from the Turkish Pirates of Argier [sic]*, in *Piracy, Slavery, and Redemption: Barbary Captivity Narratives from Early Modern England*, ed. by Daniel J. Vitkus (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp. 96-120 (p. 102).

as opposed to an indiscriminate drubbing, but for just this reason it proved a controversial scene, singled out for particular criticism in the *Monthly Anthology* review of 1810:

There is one chapter, however, in this volume, which deserves the most pointed reprehension. It is the conversation between Updike and the Mollah, on the comparative merits of the Christian and Mahometan religions. The author has so decidedly given the Mollah the best of the argument, that the adherence of Updike to Christianity seems the effect rather of obstinacy than of conviction. We enter our solemn protest against this cowardly mode of attacking revelation. It has not even the merit of novelty. Voltaire set the example—and a herd of petty novelists, who thought that to be impious, was to be a Voltaire, have gladly shewn their wit at the expense of their religion.<sup>282</sup>

Staging a rational dialogue to reveal the shortcomings of Christianity may not have seemed so original when viewed alongside the literature of the French Enlightenment, but it certainly was a novel concept for the Barbary captivity narrative, where the gentle manners and civilised rejoinders of the Islamic mollah must have been all the more unexpected in the notoriously violent context of Algiers. And the mollah does indeed get ‘the best of the argument’: ‘Abashed for [his] country’ and his creed, Updike only wriggles off the hook by abandoning the seminary and resuming his ‘slave’s attire’, evading the debate and seeking ‘safety in [his] former servitude’ (AC, II, 50; 53), a truly ignominious sanctuary for a post-Revolutionary American, whose compatriots had laid down their lives to escape the shackles of colonial servitude.

An isolated example in the Barbary captivity genre, carefully-argued conversion scenes such as this were a narrative staple of eighteenth-century quixotic fiction. Samuel Johnson quite possibly wrote the much-discussed conversion chapter of *The Female Quixote*, where a learned clergyman uses philosophical ‘Reasonings’ and ‘Confutation’ to successfully cure Arabella of her notions of ‘Romantick Heroism’,<sup>283</sup> and *Female Quixotism* sees Mrs Stanly try

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<sup>282</sup> ‘Retrospective Review’, p. 346.

<sup>283</sup> *Female Quixote*, p. 368. For a rundown of the arguments surrounding Johnson’s authorship of Book IX, Chapter Eleven, see the editor’s notes on pp. 414-15.

and fail to ‘move’ the deluded Dorcasina ‘by reason and arguments’ (FQ, 252). In *The Algerine Captive*, we see a similar attempt to disabuse the protagonist of misguided beliefs, only this time, instead of romantic fiction, Christianity is the quixotic discourse, and the Algerine captive is the quixote, clinging obstinately to beliefs he is unable to defend. But the way in which Updike as narrator represents the religious testing of Updike as captive reveals a more open mind towards the merits of Islam. Although he has carefully edited and, in his own words, ‘condensed our conversation’, Updike has made no attempt to doctor the argument, to downplay the poor performance of the Christian faith. Instead, presenting the scene in ‘the manner of a dialogue’ (AC, II, 41-42), Updike effaces his own authorial, American voice and lets the mollah speak eloquently on behalf of the Muslim faith. In fact, Volumes One and Two are themselves most profitably read ‘in the manner of a dialogue’. Much more than a trailing echo of the first, American, volume, Updike’s Algerian tale is a cogent response to his ‘home-spun’ experiences; it is a provocative call for the questioning of American ideals and the initiation of transcultural dialogue. For Updike’s Algiers is a mind-altering state, raising questions and opening debate, working against the inward-facing, isolationist clichés that reverberate through the closing lines of Updike’s debut novel and the closing years of America’s inaugural century. ‘Our country, right or wrong!’ was the belligerent toast of naval officer, Stephen Decatur.<sup>284</sup> *The Algerine Captive* questions Updike’s own identification with and assumed allegiance to ‘Our country’: the mechanics of Tyler’s plot undermine his protagonist’s rhetorical patriotism and invite readers to ask in all seriousness, ‘Our country—right, or wrong? Debunking the blind patriotism of a Decatur, *The Algerine Captive* instead adopts the open-minded approach of the renegade mollah, who advises Updike that ‘a wise man adheres not to his religion because it was that of his ancestors. He will examine the creeds of other nations, compare them with his own, and hold fast that which is right’ (AC, II, 42).

Dismissed as being derivative and digressive, the descriptive chapters that follow Updike’s dialogue with the mollah have been repeatedly overlooked by

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<sup>284</sup> *Encyclopedia of American History*, p. 237.

critics. Arnold E. Davidson and Cathy N. Davidson have remarked that Volume Two ‘descends into travelogue’, while Edward Watts has argued that ‘after this segment, the remainder of Volume 2 seems rhetorically flat as Updike passes on the exoticizing and racist myths common in European writing about Islam’.<sup>285</sup> Read alongside contemporaneous Barbary narratives, however, I would counter that Updike’s descriptions of Algiers betray a surprisingly neutral tone and an unusual sympathy for his Barbary captors, resisting patriotic vitriol and shying away from anti-Algerian propaganda. While John Foss excoriates the ‘diabolical barbarity’ of ‘merciless *Barbarians*’, and Mordecai M. Noah denounces Algiers as ‘the sink of iniquity and curse of humanity’, Updike Underhill strives to dispel Christian misconceptions surrounding Islamic culture.<sup>286</sup> Captured by Algerian pirates, he confesses that ‘the regularity and frequency of their devotion was astonishing to me, who had been taught to consider this people as the most blasphemous infidels’ (AC, I, 190). Observing local customs, he finds it ‘to be a vulgar error’ that Algerian men have more than one wife, observing that ‘they are allowed four by their law; but they generally find, as in our country, one lady sufficient for all the comforts of connubial life’ (AC, II, 20-21). While other Barbary accounts emphasise the lustful appetites and sexual voracity of the Muslim world, Updike passes up the opportunity to condemn Algerian depravity and instead appeals to an international, male, audience, with the misogynistic hint that wherever the country and whatever its customs, one wife is quite enough.

As well as dispelling cultural myths, Updike works hard to excuse Algerian foreign policy, and in Chapter Fifteen, a ‘Sketch of the History of the Algerines’, he blames the piratical tendencies of Algerians on European powers, who destroy and re-arm the region as expedience dictates, perpetuating its warring propensities and discouraging the state from peaceably realising its full potential. Were it not for the ‘narrow politics of Europe’, Updike asserts, ‘the state at this

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<sup>285</sup> Davidson and Davidson, ‘Royall Tyler’s *The Algerine Captive*: A Study in Contrasts’, *Ariel*, 7 (1976), 53-67 (p. 63); *Writing and Postcolonialism*, p. 91.

<sup>286</sup> *Journal*, p. 38; p. 9; *Travels in England, France, Spain, and the Barbary States* (New York: Kirk & Mercein, 1819), p. 365.

time might have been as celebrated for the peaceful arts as they are odious for the constant violation of the laws of nations and humanity' (AC, II, 101). And while Tyler's American captive chooses not to perpetuate unflattering Algerian generalisations, he is happy to denounce the English as 'a motley race, in whose mongrel veins runs the blood of all nations', redirecting the very jibe which was most commonly deployed against the multi-ethnic Barbary Coast (AC, I, 148). Likewise, the 'diabolical' cruelty which readers would expect to witness in the Dey of Algiers is also relocated in Europe, in the bugaboo figure of Robespierre, denounced by Updike as 'that Moloch of the French nation', 'that ferocious wretch' with 'inhuman associates, who could not expect a sanction for their cruelties while the last vestige of any thing sacred remained among men' (AC, I, 159). Tyler's Dey, meanwhile, as Malini Johar Schueller has observed, 'seems anything but evil', and the 'signifiers of his power—his riches and accoutrements—are invested with desire rather than loathing'.<sup>287</sup> With a face that is 'rather comely than commanding', and a figure that 'inclin[es] to corpulency', the Dey's 'countenance' is emptied of danger, and his eye 'betrays sagacity' (AC, II, 5).

Edward Watts has also argued that the 'twenty chapters' following Updike's dialogue with the mollah constitute a 'narrative retreat' or 'rhetorical withdrawal' into travelogue, allowing Updike 'the safety of distanced observation', and enabling him 'to understand the non-Western world only as something other'.<sup>288</sup> However, just as Updike's experiences as a slave move away from the catalogue of horrors seen in contemporaneous captivity narratives (such as those by Maria Martin or James Foss), so do these twenty chapters move beyond the conventional travelogue of a foreign observer (such as those of Mathew Carey and James Wilson Stevens). Subverting both genres as he goes along, Tyler relates a captivity that is characterised by increasing social and

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<sup>287</sup> Schueller, *U.S. Orientalisms: Race, Nation, and Gender in Literature, 1790-1890* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), p. 56.

<sup>288</sup> *Writing and Postcolonialism*, p. 91.

geographical mobility, and a travelogue that charts its pseudonymous author's increasing rootedness in the landscape he describes.

The fictional *History of the Captivity and Sufferings of Mrs. Maria Martin, Who Was Six Years a Slave in Algiers* (1806) splits its narrative straight down the middle: the first half is a *History of Algiers*, and is taken almost word for word from Carey's *Short Account of Algiers* (1794), while the second half has a new title—*Captivity and Sufferings of Mrs. Martin*—and relates the attempted violation and subsequent incarceration of the female captive.<sup>289</sup> Maintaining the generic purity of its two parts as well as the chastity of its heroine, the narrative takes great care to divide the story of the captive from the history of her captors. On the title page, 'MARIA MARTIN' gets top billing, while the *History of Algiers* languishes at the bottom of the page. Described as being 'annexed' to the *Captivity and Sufferings of Mrs. Martin*, the Algerian history is subordinate to and separate from the story of the Western heroine.<sup>290</sup> In contrast, *The Algerine Captive* sees a subversive generic miscegenation, with travelogue and captivity genres weaving in and out of each other throughout the length of Volume Two. The first instalment of Updike's story as a slave is followed by a series of chapters discussing 'the Habits, Customs, &c. of the Algerines' (AC, II, 120); these are followed by a continuation of Updike's story, and this in turn culminates with a journey into the Arabian interior and several chapters describing the cities and sights of Mecca and Medina, as Tyler's doctor follows Brackenridge's Father Bombo on a pilgrimage to Mecca.

Within the chapters themselves, the boundaries between the two genres are, at times, surprisingly fluid. Although titled '*The Language of the Algerines*' (AC, II, 54), Chapter Eight is just as concerned with the captive's return to the quarry and his contribution to the local dialect. And while the opening lines of

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<sup>289</sup> Martin, *Captivity and Sufferings* (Boston: Crary, [1806]). Lyle H. Wright has pointed out that 'many passages are parallel, with slight variations, to *An Affecting History of the Captivity & Sufferings of Mrs. Mary Velnet* [1804?]' (*American Fiction, 1774-1850: A Contribution Toward a Bibliography*, 2<sup>nd</sup> revd edn [San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1969], p. 165).

<sup>290</sup> *Captivity and Sufferings*, title page.

Chapter Twenty-eight signal Updike's intention to return to his own story, to 'resume the thread of [his] more appropriate narrative' (AC, II, 166), Tyler's pseudonymous author diverts to more general description in the following paragraph, moving seamlessly from his own experiences in the Jewish quarter to a wider discussion of Jews in Algiers. Interweaving the thread of Updike's story with accounts of Algerian life, the narrative structure of Volume Two works to strengthen the bond between Algiers and the Algerine Captive, and far from being the dull 'narrative retreat' or 'rhetorical withdrawal' that Watts proposes, these chapters consolidate the narrator's withdrawal from America, his retreat from American values, and his transculturation to the Islamic world.

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In Peter Markoe's *The Algerine Spy in Pennsylvania* (1787), a secret agent from North Africa reluctantly visits the United States only to convert to Christianity and settle in rural Pennsylvania with his former wife and her second husband. Purchasing 'two extensive farms', he becomes one of the more exotic new Americans to embrace the agrarian ideal, and enjoy 'the united blessings of FREEDOM and CHRISTIANITY'.<sup>291</sup> Tyler's narrative—an inverse image of the Markoe text—travels in the opposite direction: it takes the farm as its point of departure, and sends its American protagonist off to Algiers, where he becomes accustomed to Barbary ways, and sympathetic to the Mussulman faith. Generically speaking, Updike's transculturation is most unusual. While the possibility of 'turning Injun' was frequently discussed in Indian captivity narratives, there was no question of Americans 'turning Turk' in Barbary captivities.<sup>292</sup> According to Robert J. Allison, 'Americans did not renounce their

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<sup>291</sup> *The Algerine Spy in Pennsylvania; or, Letters Written by a Native of Algiers on the Affairs of the United States of America* (Philadelphia: Prichard and Hall, 1787), pp. 127-29.

<sup>292</sup> Mary Jemison provides a well-known example of 'turning Injun'. In 1758, she was carried into captivity and adopted by the Senecas. She married twice within the tribe, raised a large family, and decided not to return to white society (James Everett Seaver, *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison* [Canandaigua, NY: Bemis, 1824]; repr. *Women's Indian Captivity Narratives*, ed. by

nation or faith'; on the rare occasions when they did, 'the circumstances were extraordinary, and often another nation was to blame'.<sup>293</sup> Nonetheless, as William Spengemann has remarked, 'the fictive logic of Updike's adventures points directly toward apostasy', and readers of *The Algerine Captive* are repeatedly encouraged to question Updike's faith in America, and to suspect his psychological defection to Algiers.<sup>294</sup>

Even before the narrative has begun, the title page calls into question Updike's allegiance to America, for the 'Algerine' in *The Algerine Captive* is an ambiguous adjective: Markoe's Algerine spy was, after all, an Algerian, but Tyler uses Algerine to denote an American, merely held prisoner in Algiers. The epigraph from *Othello*, which promises readers a 'round, unvarnish'd tale', also belies the US origin of the narrative voice, aligning the story told by Updike Underhill with the tale delivered by Shakespeare's North African hero—the 'noble Moor' whose tales of adventure win the love of Desdemona, the 'Barbary horse' whose success incurs the envy of Iago.<sup>295</sup> What's more, Updike's representation of Christian renegades is unexpectedly positive. In the vast majority of Barbary accounts, historical as well as fictional, defectors were regarded with contempt, as a 'class of men' who 'have of late betrayed so much villany [*sic*] that they sustain the most indifferent characters of any people in

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Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola [New York and London: Penguin, 1998], pp. 117-210). Paganism and Islam were not perceived to be the only threats: in John Williams's *The Redeemed Captive Returning to Zion* (1707), the fear is of conversion to Catholicism. Captured by Indians and taken to French Canada, the Puritan minister is 'forcibly pulled' by his 'head and shoulders out of the wigwam' and into the Jesuit church (*The Redeemed Captive*, in *Puritans Among the Indians: Accounts of Captivity and Redemption, 1676-1724*, ed. by Alden T. Vaughan and Edward W. Clark [Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1981], pp. 167-226 [pp. 184-85]).

<sup>293</sup> *The Crescent Obscured*, p. 120.

<sup>294</sup> *The Adventurous Muse*, p. 134.

<sup>295</sup> *Othello*, ed. by Norman Sanders (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), III. 4. 22; I. 1. 111.



Algiers'.<sup>296</sup> Updike himself declares that he 'had ever viewed the character of an apostate as odious and detestable' (AC, II, 31). Yet Updike's most loyal friend is a renegade, 'a Christian of the Greek church', who 'almost immediately conformed to the mussulman faith', and despite his transgression of ideological boundaries, he is, as several critics have observed, the most rational, respected, and compassionate character encountered in *The Algerine Captive* (AC, II, 38). Conversing with Updike in Latin, the mollah is the first person to talk the same language as Tyler's classical quixote. He is also the generous protector who rescues the captive from the misery of the stone-quarry, secures him a post in the infirmary, and bankrolls his trip to Mecca. Updike tells us that his 'very smile exhilarated my spirits and infused health' (AC, II, 72); apostasy, we may infer, need not be so diabolical, after all.

Without its reassuringly patriotic frame, Updike's story of disaffection and divided loyalties would indeed have been a controversial text. 1797 may have been the year in which liberated captives returned to the USA, but it was also a year of political turmoil in the nascent French republic, of increasing paranoia in the American republic, and of discussion about the Naturalisation, Alien, and Sedition Acts. While a treaty of peace had been signed with Algiers in 1795, by 1797 a factional war was raging in the US republic. Infuriated and unnerved by the criticism of Thomas Jefferson and his allies, John Adams and his Federalist administration were drafting the Alien and Sedition Acts in a desperate attempt to shore up their authority and silence dissent. Making it illegal to criticise the President or his policies, the introduction of these laws would make imprisonment in a US jail a far more likely scenario than a Barbary captivity.<sup>297</sup> Flanking his autobiography with a preface that advertises American books and a conclusion

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<sup>296</sup> James Wilson Stevens, *An Historical and Geographical Account of Algiers; Comprehending a Novel and Interesting Detail of Events Relative to the American Captives* (Philadelphia: Hogan & M'Elroy, 1797), p. 266.

<sup>297</sup> In 1798-99 there were seventeen federal proceedings against sedition (*Freedom's Fetters*, p. 187), some of them farcical. In New Jersey, one Luther Baldwin was convicted for drunkenly expressing the wish that a cannonball fired in the President's honour might lodge itself in his generously-proportioned backside (*Freedom's Fetters*, pp. 270-71).

that advocates American unity, Updike Underhill manages to escape charges of sedition even as he discloses his alien status in the USA and his naturalisation in Algiers. And the critical tendency to over-identify Updike with his Federalist creator Royall Tyler, and to over-emphasise the issue of literary nationalism in early republic fiction, has resulted in a body of criticism that continues to downplay Updike's ideological uncertainty and underestimate the more subversive implications of his experiences in Algiers. Perversely, then, the radical fiction that the Algerine captive writes, a work which dares to imagine the material and spiritual rewards of defection from the USA, has been enshrined by critical consensus as a manifesto for American literature and a lesson in American patriotism.<sup>298</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> As early as 1803, the *Monthly Review* concluded that the author 'has wisely exhibited the miseries of captivity, in order that his countrymen may perceive and feel the value of that independence for which they fought and conquered' (p. 93).

## 5. Private Properties, Public Nuisance: *Arthur Mervyn* and the Rise and Fall of a Republican Quixote<sup>299</sup>

The republic is a creature of fiction; it is everybody in the fancy, but nobody in the heart.

Fisher Ames, 'The Dangers of American Liberty' (1805)

Published in 1755, Tobias Smollett's 'Life of Cervantes' extolled the Spanish author as a noble idealist, a romantic hero whose selfless disposition and lofty ideals were not, according to Smollett, 'confined to any particular people or period of time', since 'even in our own country, and in these degenerate days, we sometimes find individuals whom nature seems to have intended for members of those ideal societies which never did, and perhaps never can exist but in imagination' (DQ, 8). Charles Brockden Brown, in the eyes of his contemporaries, was one such individual. His close friend and biographer, William Dunlap, observed that Brown's journals were 'interspersed with plans and scraps of Eutopias, which are left in so unfinished a situation as to be unintelligible', and in 1819, an anonymous reviewer of the Dunlap biography described Brockden Brown as 'a sad enthusiast', 'a whimsical projector of better things for society than he could ever bring to pass'.<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> See the Appendix for a plot summary of *Arthur Mervyn*.

<sup>300</sup> Dunlap, *The Life of Charles Brockden Brown*, 2 vols (Philadelphia: Parke, 1815), I, 57; Anon., *North American Review*, 9 (1819), 58-77; repr. *Critical Essays on Charles Brockden Brown*, ed. by Bernard Rosenthal (Boston, MA: Hall, 1981), pp. 25-40 (p. 27). It should be noted, however, that the figure of Brown the professional author, the literary pragmatist who described his trade as 'book-making' and was deeply concerned with the 'saleability' [*sic*] of his work (Dunlap, II, 100),

Brown was also renowned as the projector of better fictions than he could ever bring to pass, and his *Memoirs of Stephen Calvert*, started in the autumn of 1798, and serialised in the *Monthly Magazine* (1799-1800), was one of several works that he would not complete, managing only the first part of a projected 'five-act drama'.<sup>301</sup> Stephen Calvert is the most self-consciously quixotic of Brown's protagonists, beguiled by the books he reads into contracting unrealistic, romantic notions about the women he meets.<sup>302</sup> Describing himself as a character who 'contained no small portion of enthusiasm', one who 'had mused on ideal forms, and glowed with visionary ardours' (SC, 108), Calvert reflects upon his passion for Louisa, the cousin that he has never even seen:

In this way did the lawless and wild enthusiasm of my character first display itself. I regarded my feelings with wonder and mortification. They reminded me of what I had read in the old poets, of heroes who wept away their lives for love, though the object of their passion had never been seen, and sometimes did not exist. These pictures, which Cervantes had taught me to ridicule or to disbelieve, I now regarded with altered eyes, and perceived that they were somewhat more than creatures of a crazed or perverse fancy. (SC, 112-13)

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has always run parallel with and contrary to the more romantic legend of Brown the visionary artist.

<sup>301</sup> *Alcuin and Memoirs of Stephen Calvert*, ed. by Sydney J. Krause and others, Bicentennial Edition (Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1987), p. 272. Further references to this edition are prefixed by SC and given in parentheses in the text.

<sup>302</sup> Discussing *Carwin the Biloquist* and *Stephen Calvert* in 1824, an anonymous reviewer claimed that Brown's characters, 'so far from having anything peculiar in them, arising either from peculiarity of disposition, or peculiarity of national manners', are 'such characters as might be placed in any age and in any clime, because they are actually such as are met with at all times, and in all countries'. For this reason, the reviewer concludes that Brown 'is far from being a Quixotic writer' ('Carwin the Biloquist, and other American Tales and Pieces [1822]', *The European Magazine*, 85 [1824], 55-60; repr. Rosenthal, pp. 41-47 [pp. 41-42]). But I would argue that 'Quixotic' writers do not necessarily deal with peculiar (odd) characters who belong to peculiar (particular) 'state[s] of society'. As Chapter One of this thesis has shown, Don Quixote was cut loose from his Spanish roots, exported around the world, and even functioned as an 'Everyman'

As a youth, his ‘preceptors were books’; as a result, Stephen is ‘wise in speculation, but absurd in practice’ (SC, 124). In this respect he is not only the biological twin of the more worldly-wise and less cerebral Felix Calvert, whose presence causes havoc later on in the narrative; he is also the literary descendant of Don Quixote and the intertextual double of Arthur Mervyn.

There is strong evidence to suggest that Brown was working on *Arthur Mervyn* as well as *Stephen Calvert* during the autumn of 1798; the similarities between the two protagonists are certainly striking.<sup>303</sup> Both men have a Dulcinea worthy of Quixote’s Aldonza Lorenzo: Ascha Fielding, idolised by Arthur as the ‘standard of ideal excellence’ exhibited by ‘poets and romancers’, is according to Dr Stevens, as ‘unsightly as a *night-hag*, tawney as a moor’, and ‘contemptibly diminutive’ (AM, 624), while the object of Calvert’s veneration is also ‘minute in size, inelegantly proportioned, dun in complexion’, and ‘scarred by the small-pox’ (SC, 113). Both men are drawn to foreigners in distress, with Arthur rescuing Italian refugee, Clemenza, from a house of ill-repute, and Stephen rescuing recent immigrant, Clelia, from a burning house. Arthur’s ‘projects of curiosity’ and ‘impetuous expedition’ recall the ‘impetuous curiosity’ of the youthful Calvert (AM, 393; 473; SC, 121), and just as Mrs Wentworth asks the former, ‘Are you mad, young man?’, so does the latter chide himself for acting ‘with the blind impetuosity of a lunatic’ (AM, 558; SC, 163). Both protagonists repeatedly experience the ‘total revolution’ of their mental state and a ‘strange revolution and turbulence of feelings’ (AM, 514; SC, 247), for both are dangerously susceptible to ‘new impressions’ (SC, 168), easily diverted, and constantly falling in and out of love. What’s more, an alienated Arthur Mervyn declares himself ‘alone in the world’ (AM, 587), and Stephen Calvert ekes out an isolated existence on the

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figure in eighteenth-century British fiction. His cultural and national portability was very much part of his attraction as a fictional type.

<sup>303</sup> For a discussion of *Arthur Mervyn*’s possible dates of composition, see Norman S. Grabo, ‘Historical Essay’, *Arthur Mervyn; or, Memoirs of the Year 1793*, ed. by Sydney J. Krause and others, Bicentennial Edition (Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1980), pp. 447-75 (pp. 454-55). For details of *Stephen Calvert*’s dates of composition, see Robert D. Arner, ‘Historical Essay’ (SC, 273-312 [pp. 298-300]).

western shores of Lake Michigan, another marginal quixote and American hermit who retreats to the very edge of the Atlantic world, 'interposing deserts between [himself] and the haunts of mankind' (SC, 72).

Disparities emerge, however, when we turn to the self-images of the two protagonists. Calvert is, 'in [his] own eyes, a paradox, a miracle, a subject of incessant curiosity and speculation' (SC, 247). Not surprisingly, then, his is a narcissistic memoir, focussing purely upon his private life, delving into his own affairs of the heart. Most of the action takes place indoors or in secluded gardens, and involves a small, incestuous circle of friends and family, for the world without has little place in Calvert's inward-looking account of himself, and the limits of his quixotism, determined by the limits of his myopic world, don't really extend beyond his overactive imagination and his unrealistic images of the opposite sex. Arthur, meanwhile, presenting not merely a memoir of himself, but a memoir of the year 1793, looks further afield for the subjects of his curiosity and speculation. In *Arthur Mervyn*, the romantic quixotism of Stephen Calvert is reconfigured as a peculiarly republican quixotism, and while Calvert is misled by romantic fiction, Mervyn is bewitched by the fictions of a waning republican rhetoric, and becomes engaged in extending the limits of public service at a time when 'virtue' is increasingly perceived as a private matter.

In his preface to *Arthur Mervyn*, 'C. B. B.' declares that 'he who pourtrays examples of disinterestedness and intrepidity, confers on virtue the notoriety and homage that are due to it' (AM, 231). Curiously, such an emphasis upon disinterested virtue involved the unlikely intersection of the 'Laws of Romance' and the tenets of classical republicanism.<sup>304</sup> For Arabella, in *The Female Quixote*, the suitor who places 'Virtue' before 'his own particular Interest' is 'a perfect Hero indeed', and 'such a one was *Oroondates*, *Artaxerxes*, and many others I could name, who all gave eminent Proofs of their Disinterestedness and Greatness of Soul'.<sup>305</sup> For Philadelphian doctor, Benjamin Rush, writing to John Adams in 1778, 'virtue, virtue alone [...] is the basis of a Republic'; he would later insist

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<sup>304</sup> *Female Quixote*, p. 297.

<sup>305</sup> *Female Quixote*, p. 229.

that every citizen should ‘be taught that he does not belong to himself, but that he is public property’.<sup>306</sup> By 1793, the year in which Arthur Mervyn arrives in the city, Rush’s self-sacrificing concept of republican virtue was under attack and on the wane. In *Capitalism and a New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790s*, Joyce Appleby explains that ‘in the context of classical republican thought virtue meant civic virtue, the quality that enabled men to rise above private interests in order to act for the good of the whole’. But by the end of the eighteenth century, argues Appleby, ‘virtue more often referred to a private quality, a man’s capacity to look out for himself and his dependants—almost the opposite of classical virtue’.<sup>307</sup> In *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*, Linda Kerber also perceives a shift, describing the way in which republican values went indoors, unworkable within a competitive market economy but supposedly safeguarded by a generation of ‘Republican Mothers’, who taught their sons the tenets and rewards of republican virtue.<sup>308</sup> At the moment when America’s ideological pendulum is moving away from republican ideals of civic service and swinging towards the capitalist goals of personal gain and greater individualism, Brockden Brown constructs a text that strenuously resists the privatisation of republican values and a character who is fascinated by the lives of others, a well-meaning snoop who mistrusts ‘the perilous precincts of private property’ (AM, 270) and dismantles the barriers shielding private lives from public scrutiny.

### ***Perilous Asylums***

Following his uninvited entry into Mrs. Wentworth’s home, where he has ‘opened doors without warning, and traversed passages without being noticed’, Arthur

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<sup>306</sup> Letter to William Gordon (10 December, 1778), in *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, ed. by L. H. Butterfield, 2 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1951), I, 221; Rush, *Essays*, p. 10.

<sup>307</sup> *Capitalism and a New Social Order*, pp. 14–15.

<sup>308</sup> For Kerber’s discussion of republican motherhood, see *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), pp. 228–231; pp. 265–288.

concedes that 'propriety has certainly not been observed', though he still stands his ground when she orders him out of the house (AM, 551; 552). What's more, he finds 'a sort of charm' in the 'temerity' of his intrusion; reflecting 'with scornful emotions, on the bars and hindrances which pride and caprice, and delusive maxims of decorum, raise in the way of human intercourse', he is 'delighted to shake such fetters into air, and trample such impediments to dust' (AM, 516-17). Denied an audience at the Villars brothel, he snoops around anyway and makes such a nuisance of himself that he ends up being shot in the head by an infuriated inhabitant of the house. When he makes an unexpected call on the Maurice family, the door is once again shut in his face, but Arthur lifts the latch and ventures in regardless, deaf to the distress of Miss Maurice, who orders 'two sturdy blacks' to turn him out, and 'burst[s] into tears of rage' when he just won't go (AM, 574). On this occasion, he is permitted at last to perform his mission, and returns a forty-thousand-dollar legacy to its rightful owner. The rightful owner, however, is ungrateful, avaricious and rude, and Arthur departs with a bitter taste in his mouth, disappointed that where he had hoped to 'witness the tears of gratitude' he has instead found 'nothing but sordidness, stupidity, and illiberal suspicion' (AM, 577). The pattern is often repeated: desperate to get his foot in the door, Arthur forgoes propriety in his quest to win access to private property, but once inside, reality falls short of his extravagant expectations.

Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds has argued that *Arthur Mervyn* figures the hero's 'quest' for 'the stasis of home', a quest that ends successfully as Arthur falls in love with the wealthy Ascha Fielding and 'turn[s] his fantasies of property into actual investments through the practice of benevolence'.<sup>309</sup> Certainly, we see Mervyn in search of both a home and a property, craving a sense of belonging as well as of ownership, but I would argue that the text repeatedly undermines the 'fantasies' of private property. It questions both the purity of the home—the sacrosanct sphere of republican discourse, where republican mothers inspired their sons with a love of virtue—and the stability of property, held up by many as

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<sup>309</sup> Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds, 'Private Property: Charles Brockden Brown's Economics of Virtue', *Studies in the Humanities*, 18 (1991), 165-79 (p. 168; p. 170).



the more secure and prestigious alternative to the 'portable wealth' (AM, 280) and paper currency that was flooding America in the boom and bust years of the 1790s.<sup>310</sup>

*The Man at Home* was a series of loose-knit sketches, written by Brown in the spring of 1798, and published in Philadelphia's *Weekly Magazine*. The serial anticipates *Arthur Mervyn* in its representation of commercial ruin, yellow fever, and precarious private properties. Narrated by an elderly man who has endorsed a note for an absconder, and now hides out to prevent the confiscation of his property, Brown's so-called Man at Home is not at home at all. Reluctant to air his dirty laundry in public, he has retired to the obscurity of the suburbs and is actually writing from a rented room in the home of his washerwoman. A steadfast believer in 'the sacredness of property', the narrator has only agreed to endorse an old friend's note because 'his bottom is a sound one', his property comprised not just of 'floating planks' but also of 'houses and acres', too.<sup>311</sup> Such faith in property, however, proves unfounded: the friend fails to repay the debt and the Man at Home, having spent a life 'labour[ing] not for riches, but security', is now forced to seek asylum in a room that is 'twelve feet square'.<sup>312</sup> Even this refuge proves unable to protect, for the final instalment of the series sees the Man at Home on the move again, this time on his way to the city jail, accompanied by the sheriff who has tracked him down and smoked him out.

In *Arthur Mervyn*, the series of dispossessions that punctuate the narrative likewise work to establish a sense of uncertain and insecure proprietorship. Arthur forfeits his father's 'hundred acres' when Sawny Mervyn remarries, and Sawny in turn is defrauded of his land by a self-serving second wife; Clemenza Lodi loses

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<sup>310</sup> Jane Tompkins has discussed the ways in which a shortage of specie, the 'difficulty of maintaining "sound currency"', and the lack of a 'single standard currency after the Revolution', impacted upon the seemingly improbable plot of *Arthur Mervyn* (*Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* [New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985], pp. 76-77).

<sup>311</sup> *The Man at Home*, in *The Rhapsodist' and Other Uncollected Writings*, ed. by Harry R. Warfel (New York: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1943), pp. 25-98 (p. 95; p. 29).

<sup>312</sup> *Man at Home*, p. 27; p. 40.

her inheritance to the scheming Welbeck and Eliza Hadwin loses her family farm to a boorish and morally suspect uncle. In an episode that recalls the fugitive Man at Home, Arthur's first night in Philadelphia finds him in hiding and in somebody else's house, holed up in Thetford's bedroom closet, having been tricked into entering the chamber by a mischievous new acquaintance. Arthur hopes that he may 'be enabled to profit' from the conversation he overhears; instead, he succeeds in losing his only pair of shoes (AM, 266). When he does finally manage to escape from his 'perilous asylum', the gullible country youth is palpably relieved to find himself back on 'public ground', 'disengaged' from 'the perilous precincts of private property' (AM, 266; 270).

During the course of the novel, a dispossessed and itinerant Arthur Mervyn takes shelter under various roofs, precarious asylums that promise shelter but peddle disease, disseminating infection even as they administer relief. Taken in by Welbeck, Arthur not only shelters in his benefactor's mansion, he is taken in by the stranger's plausible exterior, drawn into his fraudulent schemes and rendered a reluctant accomplice in the morally repugnant murder of Watson. Entering a deserted house in search of Wallace, with the yellow fever raging all around, Arthur inhales the 'poisonous and subtle fluid' of the plague, is knocked unconscious by a plunderer's blow to his head, and narrowly escapes being buried alive by a pair of over-zealous corpse collectors (AM, 360). Arthur's decision to shelter in this house overnight stems less from a desire to protect himself and more from a determination to protect the empty property, for a neighbour informs him that:

This house has no one to defend it. It was purchased and furnished by the last possessor, but the whole family, including mistress, children and servants, were cut off in a single week. Perhaps no one in America can claim the property. Meanwhile plunderers are numerous and active. An house thus totally deserted, and replenished with valuable furniture will, I fear, become their prey. To night, nothing can be done towards rendering it secure, but staying in it. Art thou willing to remain here till the morrow? (AM, 368)

Ever ready to defend the helpless, even when the victim is made of bricks and mortar, the gallant Arthur rises to the challenge and agrees to stay. The house that provides him with 'a roof over [his] head' (AM, 370) but has already contaminated him with the yellow fever, thus turns out to be perilous in two senses: it is both dangerous and itself endangered, a deadly receptacle that simultaneously falls prey to unscrupulous intruders. With houses like this to contend with, there is little wonder that Arthur feels uneasy when indoors and more secure when on the streets. A restless figure, repeatedly opening windows and pacing the floorboards, Arthur stewes in Welbeck's mansion, agonising over the probity of his host, until, 'oppressed' by 'the scorching influence of the atmosphere' (AM, 295), he finally takes refuge outside, in the cooling bath of the courtyard. Whenever there is any thinking to be done, any decisions to be made, Arthur heads for the fields, removing himself from private property and placing himself 'in the public way' (AM, 370). In fact, our very first glimpse of Arthur sees him doubled over in the street, a fever-stricken figure who refuses to 'go into the house' with Dr Stevens, determined to remain outdoors, and convinced that he 'shall breathe with more freedom here than elsewhere' (AM, 234-5).

Though Arthur is constantly on the move—most at home when he is on the road, striding off down the path of righteousness to rescue those in need—his imagination dwells at length upon the 'temporary asylum[s]' (AM, 253) that he passes through, figuring them most often as synecdochic roofs. When Sawny Mervyn remarries, Arthur wonders 'at the folly that detained [him] so long under this roof' (AM, 249-50). Once in the city, he marvels at the miracle that has placed him 'under this roof' with Welbeck, though before long can think of no fate worse than 'that of abiding under the same roof with a wretch spotted with so many crimes' (AM, 278; 402). While Arthur is afforded temporary relief 'under this roof', Clemenza is received elsewhere by a brothel keeper 'under an accursed roof', and Mervyn quite literally seeks asylum beneath a roof when he hides himself above 'the ceiling of the third story' of Welbeck's mansion, in 'a narrow and darksome nook, formed by the angle of the roof' (AM, 426; 534; 423). The synecdochic roof does not merely evoke the image of a refuge, a shelter from the

elements above; it is a figure of speech that deconstructs the concept of a home with four walls; it dismantles the isolationist ideal of a pure and tightly sealed domestic sphere, one that could bar intrusion from without. For Arthur is anxious to turn the inside out, to open up the private sphere to public view and public use. 'Loudly condemned' as a child, for interfering 'publicly' with his father's 'social enjoyments', dissuading Sawny Mervyn from drinking the liquor that 'changed him into a maniac', Arthur's own experience of 'domestic retirements' (AM, 541-42) has taught him that too much privacy can be dangerous, concealing the ugly truth of dysfunctional families, degenerate morals and drunken fathers.

He is not alone in his desire to throw open the home: discussing the fate of Clemenza, Dr Stevens wonders 'who will open his house to the fugitive?' (AM, 430). Answering his own question, he opens his own doors to the refugee, as he did for Arthur before her. While a stint at the doctor's cures Arthur of his fever and restores Clemenza's blighted reputation, Stevens's open-house policy also nourishes his own spiritual well being, making for a healthy home life, a happy marriage, and a clear conscience. Opening one's home to the public is not a policy that all are advised to adopt, however. Mrs Wentworth refuses to shelter Clemenza lest she damage her own reputation, and until Ascha Fielding takes in Eliza towards the end of Part II, it would seem that only men have the prerogative to transform a private home into a public house, to play the part of the benevolent citizen. Even when Ascha does decide to shelter Eliza she does so not in the role of dutiful citizen, but—most emphatically—in the strictly domestic capacity of a surrogate sister: 'I will not be a nominal sister', she insists. 'I will not be a sister by halves. *All* the right of that relation I will have, or none' (AM, 600). The open house assumes a darker aspect still where the dysfunctional Villars family is concerned: this rural home sees the prostitution of three sisters by their mother, a grotesque parody of republican motherhood, who believes that opening for business all hours of day and night is the only way in which she can ensure the survival of her family and 'secure to herself and her daughters the benefits of independence' (AM, 429). In the defensive political climate of 1790s America, where moralists were obsessed with maintaining national purity and statesmen

were determined to resist the prostitution of American principles to debauched European powers, the image of the flourishing brothel would appear particularly sinister.

### *Foul Contagions*

Benjamin Rush may have argued that a ‘proper’ education would be enough ‘to convert men into republican machines’, but in the fall of 1793, as Philadelphia grappled with a yellow fever epidemic that would kill nearly 2,500 of its citizens before the year was out, the theory—and the machines themselves—appeared to have broken down. With terror taking hold of the populace, the struggle for self-preservation was paramount and the evasion of public responsibility all too evident. On a national level, the ‘Colossian fabric’ of the United States speedily came undone in the face of the plague.<sup>313</sup> Mathew Carey’s *Short Account of the Malignant Fever*, which ran to three editions in 1793 alone, recalled how Philadelphian ‘citizens were proscribed in several cities and towns—hunted up like felons in some—debarred admittance and turned back in others’.<sup>314</sup> State and city boundaries that had seemed subsumed by, or at least secondary to, the concept of a United States of America, were now transformed into fractious borders, lines not to be crossed, emblems of a nation divided by fear. Within the city of Philadelphia itself, government officials and avatars of public responsibility—Washington included—had quickly disappeared to their rural retreats, leaving behind just three ‘guardians of the poor’ and a city in chaos.<sup>315</sup> The visibly decreasing circles of public duty, reflecting Philadelphia’s shrinking sense of collective responsibility, were mirrored on a local level, too, as many families immured themselves within the four walls of their homes, and ‘debarred themselves from all communication with the rest of mankind’ (AM, 346). Carey’s

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<sup>313</sup> Wood, *Dorval; or, The Speculator* (Portsmouth, NH: Ledger, 1801), p. 16.

<sup>314</sup> *A Short Account of the Malignant Fever Lately Prevalent in Philadelphia*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn (Philadelphia: Carey, 1794), p. 58.

<sup>315</sup> *Account of the Malignant Fever*, p. 20.

*Account* shudders at the ‘total dissolution of the bonds of society’,<sup>316</sup> and Arthur Mervyn recalls how ‘terror had exterminated all the sentiments of nature’; ‘wives were deserted by husbands’, and children by their parents (AM, 346). Patriotic ties, community ties, familial ties: nation, city, family: all three tiers of the social fabric began to unravel as yellow fever took hold of Philadelphia.

Arthur Mervyn, meanwhile, mocked by neighbours for his expertise with knitting needles, makes it his business to patch up the beleaguered city. As Part I progresses, and his autobiographical yarn expands, so too does his field of public duty, encompassing the ever widening circles of mother, friends, fellow Philadelphians, and ultimately, the foreigner and stranger Clemenza Lodi. As a child, Arthur’s ‘duty to [his] mother’ sees him playing the role of his father’s ‘monitor’ (AM, 542); once in Philadelphia, his sense of duty towards Welbeck prevents him from leaving town before apprising his patron of Thetford’s treachery. Soon after, concerned for the nephew of Mr Hadwin (his latest benefactor) Mervyn returns to the city in search of the youth, where, like a well-oiled republican machine, he reels off pat the republican concept of civic virtue, concluding that ‘life is a trivial sacrifice in the cause of duty’ (AM, 379). Faced with the terrors of the yellow fever and the social turmoil of Philadelphia, Arthur now decides to offer his services as the governor of the infamous Bush Hill Hospital, reasoning that ‘a dispassionate and honest zeal in the cause of duty and humanity, may be of eminent utility’ (AM, 389). As public officers flee the town and the ‘province of duty’ (AM, 401) has all but shrunk to nothing in the struggle to save oneself, Arthur reanimates William Penn’s founding image of Philadelphia as a philanthropic City of Brotherly Love. Hearing stifled sobs from within a locked room, the earnest youth demands admittance, declaring the unknown sufferer ‘a brother in calamity, whom it was my duty to succour and cherish to the utmost of my power’ (AM, 398).

Arthur’s relationship with Clemenza sees him cast his net of benevolence wider than many would have liked. In 1782, Crèvecoeur’s Farmer James had defined his homeland as a ‘great American asylum’, a New World crucible where

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<sup>316</sup> *Account of the Malignant Fever*, p. 23.

all were welcome and none were turned away; in 1793, Americans were welcoming tens of thousands of French refugees, in flight from Robespierre's Reign of Terror and black rebellion in Santo Domingo.<sup>317</sup> Yet in 1798, a year of virulent Francophobia and oppressive legislation designed to eliminate aliens and censor sedition, President Adams was cautioning the people of New York to 'beware', lest America should become 'a receptacle of malevolence and turbulence, for the outcasts of the universe'.<sup>318</sup> With the Peace of Paris all but forgotten, and the French connection severed in the wake of Revolutionary violence, America's expansive vision of global republicanism—much celebrated in 1789—had given way to an inward-looking isolationist approach, promulgated by a suspicious Adams administration.<sup>319</sup> Just as Arthur Mervyn exposes the dangers of a closed domestic sphere, so too does he work against limited and purist concepts of American identity, de-bunking the isolationist myths and re-opening America to asylum-seekers.

While hard line Federalists seek to purge the nation of foreign bodies, to distil a pure American identity from Crèvecoeur's ethnic melting pot, *Arthur Mervyn* evokes the fluid and provisional image of a shifting, transnational identity, one that can be put on or set aside as whim or expedience dictate, not always tailor-made, but most definitely ready to wear. When the penniless Arthur Mervyn—himself a refugee from rural Pennsylvania—seeks asylum with the mysterious Welbeck, he is presented with a wardrobe of clothes 'in the French style', and undergoes an 'instantaneous transformation' from 'barefoot beggar' to urbane Frenchman (AM, 275-76). Likewise, the face of Welbeck may appear to be 'cast [...] in a foreign mould', leading Mervyn to deduce that he and Clemenza are 'illustrious fugitives from Provence or the Milanese', but the enigmatic villain

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<sup>317</sup> *Letters from an American Farmer*, p. 42.

<sup>318</sup> *Works of John Adams*, IX, 223.

<sup>319</sup> One example of the Adams approach is the case of Moreau de St. Méry, a Philadelphian bookseller who found himself on the President's list of suspicious Frenchmen. Accused by Adams of 'nothing in particular', he was nonetheless ordered to leave America on the grounds that he was quite simply, 'too French' (*Moreau de St. Méry's American Journey, 1793-1798*, trans. by Kenneth Roberts and Anna M. Roberts [Garden City, NY: Doubleday Press, 1947], p. 253).

turns out to be the son of a Liverpoolian trader (AM, 276; 280). It is Clemenza who best embodies this provisional, pan-European identity: brought up in Guadeloupe by an Italian father, but now dependent upon her French brother, referred to as 'the Italian girl', but addressed as 'Mademoiselle Lodi', she is above all else 'this foreign lady' (AM, 319; 315; 292), defined by her otherness to the Atlantic world in which she finds herself.

As well as blurring the outline of any hard and fast national identity, *Arthur Mervyn* reverses the usual flow of refugees: instead of reinforcing William Smith Shaw's xenophobic image of 'so many *hordes of Foreigners* immigrating [*sic*] to America', Brown has two of his characters become naturalised Frenchmen.<sup>320</sup> Vincentio Lodi, for example, born in Guadeloupe, but living in France, is 'by no means, inclined to adopt his father's project' (AM, 313) of emigrating to America, and has only made the journey to track down his orphaned sister, sent on ahead before her father's untimely death.<sup>321</sup> Struck down by yellow fever before he finds her, the dying Lodi finds shelter with Welbeck and entrusts him with a twenty-thousand-dollar legacy, an Italian manuscript written by Lodi Senior, and the care of his missing sister. Welbeck promptly embezzles the money, plagiarises the manuscript, and makes Clemenza his mistress. The Lodis' inability to speak English makes them no match for the insinuating multilingualism of Welbeck, who secures the continued estrangement of Clemenza by ensuring that she remains 'wholly unacquainted with our language' (AM, 312). In Welbeck's own words:

Indefinable fears, and a desire to monopolize all the meditations and affections of this being, had induced me to perpetuate her ignorance of any but her native language, and debar her from all intercourse with the world. (AM, 318)

Despite Welbeck's desire to keep Clemenza sequestered from society, she becomes an integral strand of Arthur's tale, that 'tissue of nice contingences' he

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<sup>320</sup> Letter to Abigail Adams (20 May, 1798), quoted in *Freedom's Fetters*, p. 24.

<sup>321</sup> The second character to adopt a French identity is Ascha Fielding's first husband, who has 'laid aside his English name, and taken that of his patron, which was *Perrin*' (AM, 615).



weaves (AM, 427). A dead ringer for her late brother, Arthur imagines that ‘some intercourse would take place’ between them, and that ‘this intercourse might foster love and terminate in—*marriage!*’ (AM, 282). When he realises that Clemenza is pregnant with Welbeck’s child, his speculations of intercontinental union are swiftly discarded, yet when Clemenza is packed off to a distant brothel, Arthur tenaciously seeks her out, and once he has found her, assiduously works to secure her an asylum, despite the fact that their romance—and indeed the storyline—is going nowhere.<sup>322</sup> As soon as Clemenza is safely installed in a suitable asylum, the welcoming home of an American family, she falls out of the narrative, for Arthur seems more concerned about successfully integrating Clemenza into the open house of American society than securing her independence. His attempts to translate the purloined memoirs of Clemenza’s ancestors, to pursue their ‘thread of an eloquent narration’ (AM, 343), suggest his desire to both interpret and naturalise the Lodis’ ‘foreign’ legacy, while his determination to take up the thread of Clemenza’s own story and weave it seamlessly into his own, implies a deliberate nose-thumbing to an anxious administration determined to alienate refugees. Her tale, I would argue, provides a subversive alternative to the anti-French alarmism that was spreading through Federalist newspapers, conservative novels and Congressional debates in 1798.

For the Federalists, French refugees were an ideological counterpart to the insidious yellow fever, and George Cabot’s anxiety that ‘the cursed foul contagion of French principles’ is ‘more to be dreaded’ than ‘a thousand yellow fevers’, was not unusual.<sup>323</sup> As late as 1812, Timothy Dwight’s *Discourse in Two*

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<sup>322</sup> Arthur’s impending marriage to Ascha Fielding at the end of the novel evokes another transnational, mixed-race relationship, with Ascha’s ethnicity remaining enigmatic to the end. Described by Arthur simply as ‘a foreigner’, she describes herself as a Portuguese Jew who has married into the English establishment, though Stevens describes her as ‘tawney as a moor’, with ‘the eye of a gypsey’ (AM, 624). Like Clemenza, then, she eludes categorization and is first and foremost an image of racial otherness, referred to as ‘that *other* creature’, ‘that *other* image’, and ‘the *other* good’ (AM, 599).

<sup>323</sup> Quoted in Shirley Samuels, ‘Plague and Politics in 1793: *Arthur Mervyn*’, *Criticism*, 27 (1985), 225-246 (p. 225).

*Parts* argued that, ‘to ally *America* to *France*, is to chain living health and beauty, to a corpse dissolving with the plague [...] The touch of *France* is pollution. Her embrace is death’.<sup>324</sup> Yet Clemenza is no propounder of seditious ideas; it is she who is deceived by the smooth-tongued Welbeck, and far from proving contagious, she is quarantined from the world around her. Instead of threatening the legacy of American republicanism, it is Clemenza who is robbed of her own inheritance and independence; an overly-trusting innocent, who belies the French whore of Federalist discourse, she is seduced by her protector and secured an ‘asylum’ in a Pennsylvanian whorehouse. Dwight’s grotesque union of French corpse and American youth finds an ugly parody in the dead child of Clemenza and Welbeck, the still-born fruit of an ‘impure and monstrous connexion’, yet Clemenza is less of a bewitching whore and more of a bewildered pawn, emptied of volition and passed unceremoniously from one precarious asylum to the next.<sup>325</sup>

### ***Abracadaver!***

Thomas Welbeck may be the villain of the piece, but this does not place him beyond the bounds of Arthur’s philanthropic crusade, and neither does the fact that he has faked his own death. When the plague-stricken Arthur manages to gain admittance to his sobbing ‘brother in calamity’, none other than Welbeck is revealed, the swindler, seducer, and murderer, who will soon leave Arthur for dead. While Arthur is only mildly disconcerted to see before him the man that he ‘had accompanied to the midst of the river’, the man that he ‘saw sink to rise no more’, a furious Welbeck is unhinged by the sight of his protégé, displaying ‘emotions too vehement for speech’, and fixing Arthur with ‘unstedfast and wild’ glances.<sup>326</sup> ‘Is there no means of evading your pursuit?’ he chokes. ‘Are you actuated by some demon to haunt me?’ (AM, 404). No wonder that Welbeck is

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<sup>324</sup> Timothy Dwight, *A Discourse in Two Parts* (New-Haven: Howe and Deforest, 1812), p. 52.

<sup>325</sup> *Discourse in Two Parts*, p. 52.

<sup>326</sup> As well as drawing upon the image of the Gothic double, this scene recalls the intense, destructive relationship between William Godwin’s over-inquisitive victim, Caleb Williams, and the monomaniacal Falkland of *Caleb Williams* (1794).

desperate to avoid Arthur's fraternal attentions: one quixotic blunder follows the next as Brown's benevolent quixote repeatedly misreads situations, mis-handles rescues, and leaves a trail of devastation and confusion in his wake. Arthur admits that he is 'liable to make a thousand mistakes'; by his own admission, his 'good intentions, unaided by knowledge, will, perhaps, produce more injury than benefit', but this is no deterrent from Arthur's point of view; instead, 'our good purposes must hurry to performance, whether our knowledge be greater or less' (AM, 529; 522). Arriving at Welbeck's mansion just in time to bury the murdered corpse of Watson, barging into the brothel to rescue Clemenza only to witness the death of her baby, turning up instead of a long awaited fiancé at the Hadwin farmhouse and precipitating the death of the lovelorn Susan, Arthur is described by Patrick Brancaccio as a 'meddlesome, self-righteous bungler who comes close to destroying himself and everyone in his path'.<sup>327</sup>

Arthur's mixed success is certainly par for the quixotic course, but his importunity, his speed, and his sense of urgency, are more unusual character traits. In *Modern Chivalry*, for example, the pace of Captain Farrago as he rides blithely 'about the world a little' (MC, 6) is shockingly slow at times. When he comes across a distressed female who has been tricked into entering a brothel, Farrago declares himself unable to revenge her wrongs (the villain is 'too contemptible and base' to warrant his resentment) and instead he lectures her on her 'too great sensibility' (MC, 111). Having offered to help restore her reputation, what Farrago actually does is go back to his hotel room, ruminate on the incident through the night, and set off after breakfast to see what can be done. By this time, however, it is too late to do anything: pushed over the edge by the Captain's disheartening lecture, the young woman has hung herself in the night.<sup>328</sup>

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<sup>327</sup> 'Studied Ambiguities: *Arthur Mervyn* and the Problem of the Unreliable Narrator', *AL*, 42 (1970), 18-27 (p. 22).

<sup>328</sup> Arthur's importunity also sets him apart from the more leisurely, landed quixotes of British fiction. The subtitle of Richard Graves's *The Spiritual Quixote* captures the mood and the pace of these quests: *The Summer's Ramble of Mr. Geoffrey Wildgoose* is a far cry from the frenzied cross-country dashes of an Arthur Mervyn.

In contrast, Arthur's tireless benevolence knows no limits and brooks no delay. 'It is not [his] custom to defer till to-morrow what can be done to-day' (AM, 531); his body seems to need no sleep and his wandering mind is constantly on the move. His feverish activity, nocturnal marathons, and 'precipitate' schemes are invariably perceived to be the symptoms of a 'lunatic' mind, for the indefatigable Arthur is not only working within a city paralysed by yellow fever, he is working within a nation where 'ignominious inactivity' (AM, 351) has replaced revolutionary fervour, and where 'a general inactivity' is—according to the *Monthly Anthology*, 'our reigning characteristick'.<sup>329</sup> Addicted to exercise, it would seem, the peripatetic Arthur is reluctant to mount horses and enter carriages, even when riding would expedite his quests and win him valuable time. Entering a plague-ridden Philadelphia on foot, Mervyn admits that he was foolish for forgetting to borrow a horse, but makes the same mistake all over again when he decides to return to rural Pennsylvania, despite the fact that he is accompanied by a victim of the yellow fever, the emaciated and exhausted Wallace, who is barely able to walk up a flight of stairs, never mind complete a cross-country expedition. Travelling on foot along the path of duty, scorned by landlords behind his back but enjoying the sunshine on his face, Arthur is a most republican hero, one who displays all the modesty—and frugality—of a Thomas Jefferson, another republican quixote ridiculed for his unpretentious mode of travel. For a man of such strong pedestrian principles, however, Arthur is all too easily wrong-footed; for somebody who claims that 'the road of my duty was too plain to be mistaken' (AM, 535), he is side-tracked with surprising regularity. He is just about to leave the city when Welbeck offers him a home, just about to escape from his benefactor when he sees the murdered corpse of Watson and instead becomes Welbeck's accomplice; just about to volunteer for the post of hospital governor, he is himself struck down with yellow fever, and just about to start his medical career, he is diverted by a visit to the Hadwin farm. He is just on the brink of marrying Ascha Fielding when the narrative peters out altogether. For Arthur Mervyn, the course of true republicanism never does run smooth.

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<sup>329</sup> 'Our Country', *The Monthly Anthology and Boston Review*, 3 (1806), p. 579.

Re-enacting time and again his own sudden arrival on the Philadelphia scene, his overnight metamorphosis ‘from a rustic lad into a fine gentleman’ (AM, 437), Brown’s benevolent upstart specialises in sudden arrivals and vanishing acts. In Part I, the undertaker is standing by ‘with hammer and nails in his hand’, when Arthur rises up as though from the dead to save himself from a premature interment, and in Part II, he appears before Watson’s widow ‘as if from the pores of the ground’, leaving her ‘in a swoon upon the floor’ (AM, 364; 571; 570). Arthur’s vanishing acts are just as instantaneous and just as badly timed. He deserts the Hadwin household without warning and at the height of the fever epidemic; he disappears from the Stevens household at precisely the time when he is most required to prove his innocence, and having suddenly appeared at night before the Widow Watson, he vanishes ‘with the same celerity’ (AM, 571), a phantasmagoric and seemingly intangible presence. Welbeck proves extremely perceptive when he comments upon his protégé’s ‘untimely destiny’ (AM, 406). The comings and goings of Arthur Mervyn are as ‘untimely’ as his own republican principles, and as they accumulate, they appear as comical as they are catastrophic, a series of sick jokes, burlesquing the benevolent ideal which was supposed to cement a socially, racially and geographically disparate Union.<sup>330</sup>

### *A Singular Hero*

The amateurish tactics of Brown’s New World Arthurian hero may amuse the readers, but Arthur Mervyn takes himself very seriously indeed, and if Part I attests to Arthur’s widening sense of public responsibility, Part II follows his quest to win a wider public for his tale. At first, Arthur relates events—and with great reluctance—just to Stevens and his wife, huddled round the fireplace in their home. Fearing for his lodger’s reputation, though, Stevens reflects that ‘the story which he told to me he must tell to the world’ (AM, 457). The doctor has nothing to fear on this score: before long, Mervyn is telling his tale in parlours and drawing rooms across Pennsylvania. He assures an up-state lawyer that ‘I am

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<sup>330</sup> The religious enthusiasm in *Wieland* yields a far darker tale, as the novel’s eponymous hero is tricked into believing it is his sacred duty to murder his family.

anxious to publish the truth', and true to his word relates that, 'before the end of my second interview' with Fanny Maurice and Mrs Watson, 'both these women were mistresses of every momentous incident of my life, and of the whole chain of my feelings and opinions, in relation to every subject' (AM, 583; 584). As the garrulous Mervyn admits, 'any one who could listen found me willing to talk' (AM, 590). Replacing Dr Stevens as narrator, Arthur moves from experienced raconteur to amateur author, putting the finishing touches to his own, emphatically public, history, a 'written narrative' that is ready for publication, designed to be read by 'those who have no previous knowledge' of the characters involved (AM, 603; 604). Arthur's acts of benevolence may have landed him his own private property, courtesy of Ascha Fielding, but more crucially still for Arthur's self-image, they have also earned him a coveted place in the public eye and a mass market for the tale he loves to tell.

The 'singularity' of citizen Arthur's sense of public duty proves a popular talking-point amongst the characters in the text, between worthy but mistrustful figures such as Wentworth and Wortley, who find it difficult to separate Mervyn's behaviour from the context of 1790s Philadelphia, a city gripped by feverish speculation, and 'running on in full career, to the goal of prodigality and dissipation'.<sup>331</sup> According to Mrs Wentworth, he possesses a 'most singular deportment'; Miss Villars is likewise bewildered by his 'most singular conduct', and even his future wife declares that his 'language is so singular' it defies comprehension (AM, 555; 519; 527). The repeated use of the word 'singular' not only draws attention to the perceived peculiarity of Arthur's old-fashioned republican ideals, it connects Arthur's single-minded benevolence with his burgeoning sense of identity, subtly pinpointing a process of individuation that culminates in Part II, Chapter Sixteen, with the introduction of Arthur himself as narrator and the start of a narrative told in the first person singular. In Arthur's mind, the straight and narrow road of public service forms the basis of his self-construction. His perception of his own inviolable 'bosom'—a self-reliant 'centre not to be shaken or removed'—is founded upon his sense of collective

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<sup>331</sup> *Account of the Malignant Fever*, p. 10.

responsibility, and as Arthur's 'benevolent activity' (AM, 512) picks up pace in the second part of the book, he grows in confidence and composure. Impressed by the self-determined and single-minded Arthur that emerges in Part II, it is easy to forget the impressionable and disorientated Arthur of Part I, the gullible runaway who eagerly adopts the clothes and deportment that Welbeck desires, the mirror-image first of Clavering, and then of Vincente Lodi, who imagines life as Welbeck's son-in-law and even trails him into the bowels of the house to bury a still-warm corpse, following 'in his foot-steps [...] because it was agreeable to him and because I knew not whither else to direct my steps' (AM, 332).

'No more than eighteen years old' at the start of the narrative, Arthur Mervyn self-consciously strives to outgrow his 'childlike immaturity', to define himself and carve out his place 'among the busy haunts of men' (AM, 237; 493-4). His reasons for becoming a doctor display most clearly his association of public service with self-construction, of public image with self-worth:

I now set about carrying my plan of life into effect. I began with ardent zeal and unwearied diligence the career of medical study [...] My mind gladly expanded itself, as it were, for the reception of new ideas. My curiosity grew more eager, in proportion as it was supplied with food, and every day added strength to the conviction that I was no insignificant and worthless being; that I was destined to be *something* in this scene of existence, and might sometime lay claim to the gratitude and homage of my fellow-men. (AM, 589)

For Crèvecoeur's Farmer James, it is buying a property that makes a man more than a 'cipher'; he declares that the man who has 'become a freeholder [...] is now an American', and 'for the first time in his life, counts for something'.<sup>332</sup> For Arthur Mervyn, however, dispossessed of his patrimonial property and unsuited to the plough, it is civic service and the stamp of public approval that invest him with significance and authenticate his sense of self.

Arthur's disinterested commitment to Eliza Hadwin's welfare leads an astonished Ascha Fielding to exclaim that 'your character, without doubt, is all your own' (AM, 599). Ruling out marriage with his 'dear country girl', Arthur is

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<sup>332</sup> *Letters From an American Farmer*, p. 58.

self-consciously renouncing obscurity and the private ‘conjugal pleasures’ of a life ‘in the woods’, choosing instead a life in the public eye, arguing for ‘the propriety of my engaging in the cares of the world, before I sit down in retirement and ease’ (AM, 590; 498; 497). But this turns out to be another ‘propriety’ that Arthur fails to observe, for a premature retirement from the cares of the world is precisely what he does choose when he falls in love with Ascha Fielding, not only his future wife, but also his surrogate ‘mamma’. One by one, Arthur’s outside interests disappear from sight. Clemenza enters the Stevens household and is not so much as mentioned again, while the doting Eliza is asked to ‘withdraw’ from Arthur’s presence, dismissed from the scene and from the narrative with a decisive ‘farewel’.<sup>333</sup> The medical vocation which was to secure Mervyn the ‘dignity’ of ‘popular opinion’, while enabling him to lighten ‘the distresses of [his] neighbours’, is quietly abandoned, and Arthur’s decision to emigrate anticipates his retirement from America itself (AM, 431). Yet settling down with a wife proves to be the most unsettling of experiences, and in the final chapters of the text, as Arthur turns away from public service and towards the private affairs of his heart, his narrative betrays an unprecedented anxiety.

### *Mummy’s Boy*

The ending of *Arthur Mervyn* has frequently been read as a happy one for its hero. Norman S. Grabo has discussed the ‘good fortune’ of an ‘Arthur triumphant!’, while James H. Justus has described the book as ‘the sunniest of Brown’s novels’, with an ending which has its hero triumph ‘over the machinations of all those who deny the worth of [his] principles’.<sup>334</sup> In *The Romance of Real Life: Charles Brockden Brown and the Origins of American Culture*, Steven Watts has argued

<sup>333</sup> AM, 604. William Dunlap is one of the many critics to criticise Arthur’s treatment of his country girl: ‘Eliza Hadwin is the most worthy and artless and interesting creature of the author’s creation, but in the conclusion she is abandoned both by hero and author, in a manner as unexpected as disgusting’ (*Life of Charles Brockden Brown*, II, 40).

<sup>334</sup> Grabo, *The Coincidental Art of Charles Brockden Brown* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), p. 114; p. 126; Justus, ‘Arthur Mervyn, American’, *AL*, 42 (1970-71), 304-324 (p. 306; p. 305).



that the novel comes to a close ‘with its protagonist reconstituting family and renouncing self, then joyfully retiring to Europe’.<sup>335</sup> Watts is perceptive in recognising Arthur’s self-renunciation, but wrong to place it in such a positive light, as part of a joyful, happy-families ending, for this is a novel that ends with Arthur Mervyn overwhelmed with anxieties and misgivings, tormented by nightmares, and haunted by the inexplicable fear that his marriage will not take place. Read alongside other fictions from the period, his forebodings would appear to be justified. In Leonora Sansay’s *Laura* (1809), another novel that deals with yellow fever, the heroine’s apprehensions turn out to be more than a case of pre-wedding nerves when her fiancé is killed in a duel, just hours before the ceremony is due to take place. In Brown’s own ‘Trials of Arden’, the hero’s fiancée is murdered on the day they are due to elope, and in *Edgar Huntly* (1799), Clithero is unaccountably—but justifiably—tortured by fears that the re-appearance of Mrs Lorimer’s twin brother will somehow prevent his marriage to Clarissa. Read within this context, there is every reason to doubt that Arthur’s marriage will go ahead and little reason to believe that he will be ‘made the happiest of men’ (AM, 637).

By his own admission, Michael Warner does not try to account for the closing chapters of the novel, but he does remark that by the end of *Arthur Mervyn* ‘the premises of the novel have changed. Thematically, civic virtue is no longer an issue’, and ‘problems of intersubjective recognition and mutual esteem have brought Mervyn’s ego into focus’ instead.<sup>336</sup> I would also argue that the shift in narrative focus from public affairs to private relations brings with it problems of subjective independence and of self esteem for Brown’s republican hero. When Arthur carries the cares of the world upon his shoulders, there is ‘nothing in the world before [him] but sunshine and prosperity’ (AM, 512); when his only care is for himself, he begins to show signs of a troubled and fractured identity. Gone are

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<sup>335</sup> *The Romance of Real Life* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), p. 114.

<sup>336</sup> *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 170.

the brisk and purposeful walks along the road of duty, to the homes of Hadwin, Curling and Villars; instead he sleepwalks ‘without design’ (AM, 628) through the city streets, and roams aimlessly and feverishly through a savage landscape:

I left this spot and wandered upward through embarrassed and obscure paths, starting forward or checking my pace, according as my wayward meditations governed me. Shall I describe my thoughts?—Impossible! It was certainly a temporary loss of reason; nothing less than madness could lead into such devious tracts, drag me down to so hopeless, helpless, panickful a depth, and drag me down so suddenly; lay waste, as at a signal, all my flourishing structures, and reduce them in a moment to a scene of confusion and horror [...]

I rent a passage through the thicket, and struggled upward till I reached the edge of a considerable precipice; I laid me down at my length upon the rock, whose cold and hard surface I pressed with my bared and throbbing breast. I leaned over the edge; fixed my eyes upon the water and wept—plentifully; but why?

May *this* be my heart’s last beat, if I can tell why. (AM, 633)

Distinctions between topographical and psychological landscapes dissolve as Mervyn loses both his way and his mind in the wilderness of rural Pennsylvania. In this climactic scene, Arthur has exchanged his place in the public eye for ‘obscure paths’ and ‘devious tracts’; his steadfast purposes have been supplanted by ‘wayward meditations’, and dragged down to ‘so hopeless, helpless, panickful a depth’, he can only watch in dismay as the ‘flourishing structures’ of his promising career in philanthropy are pulled down before his eyes. Arthur has ‘struggled upward’ from poverty and rural obscurity to earn himself esteem and reputation in the public eye; he has reached the pinnacle of personal fulfilment and public approbation, but as is so often the case in Brown’s fiction, the pinnacle is also a precipice. On the brink of proposing to Ascha Fielding, Arthur teeters between self-possession and self-dissolution; leaning ‘over the edge’ of the precipice he is reassured by the ‘cold and hard surface’ of the stone but simultaneously transfixed by the flowing water far below. Even as he cleaves to the rock-solid reality of the stone, Arthur sees his tears engulfed by water: holding fast to a physical certainty merely reinforces his own fragility of self and the frightening uncertainty of his future. In a violent and macabre nightmare, the

somnambulistic Arthur once again experiences the shattering of his increasingly brittle self-image. In reality, the lovesick Arthur knocks on Ascha's door in the dead of night, receives no reply, and sleepwalks back to Stevens's house. In his dream, however, Arthur enters into Ascha's house only to be confronted by her former husband and fatally injured by a knife-wound to the heart. Going indoors turns out to be a deadly mistake, for Ascha's home is where the heart is stabbed, and Arthur discovers that his 'bosom' is no longer the unshakeable centre that he once believed it to be.

This 'temporary loss of reason' in the run up to the marriage proposal is followed by a more thoroughgoing forfeiture of independence and identity once Ascha has agreed to the union. Arthur admits that he is 'wax in her hand', and has 'scarcely a separate or independent existence' from his 'mamma', always assuming the 'form' that she desires (AM, 620). Along with a loss of independence comes a loss of certainty. While an earlier Arthur could place unbounded confidence in himself and his virtue, the Arthur who narrates the closing chapters shares the 'ominous misgiving[s]' and 'unworthy terrors' of his future wife; both distrust their 'present promises of joy' and neither know 'where to place confidence' (AM, 636). During the course of the narrative, the reader's faith in Arthur Mervyn is repeatedly tested, as contradictions and occlusions in his story emerge, and even Dr Stevens has moments of wavering faith in his protégé. But when Arthur Mervyn loses faith in Arthur Mervyn, both narrator and his narrative come undone.

Envisaging his marital 'household' in the closing paragraphs of the book, Arthur explains that 'fidelity and skill and pure morals, should be sought out, and enticed, by generous recompenses, into our domestic service' (AM, 637). Nowhere do we see more clearly his transformation from public benefactor to private homeowner. Arthur's outward-looking ideals of 'civic virtue' have been exchanged for the individualistic and bourgeois ideals of furthering one's own private interests. His 'honest zeal in the cause of duty and humanity' has likewise been supplanted by house-keeping 'duties' that are 'light and regular' and by trifling concerns about the honesty of his household staff (AM, 389). As we have

seen, however, crossing the boundary from public servant to private master proves a dangerous undertaking for Arthur Mervyn. Private property threatens to be just as perilous as it was on that first, fateful night in the city, and going home can dislocate the self.

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If the ending is inconclusive—punctuated with dashes and question marks, plagued by subjunctives and conditionals—it is at least true to the rest of the narrative, where Brown goes to great lengths in order to sow doubt and defer closure, to complicate and mediate our judgement of Arthur Mervyn. Along with the black humour and the failed hero, it is precisely this foregrounded narrative instability, this unresolved question as to how one reads a fictional work, that entitles *Arthur Mervyn* to sit between the more self-consciously quixotic fictions of Hugh Henry Brackenridge and Tabitha Gilman Tenney. In the *Memoirs of Stephen Calvert*, Stephen is unclear as to whether Cervantes has taught him ‘to ridicule or to disbelieve’ the ‘wild enthusiasm’ (SC, 112-13) of romance heroes; in *Arthur Mervyn*, we are likewise uncertain as to whether Brown intends us ‘to ridicule or to disbelieve’ the ‘wild enthusiasm’ of his own romantic hero. Should we smile at Arthur’s outmoded beliefs and idealistic naivety, or should we suspect his motives and mistrust his sincerity? The flip-side of Dr Stevens’s spotless Arthurian hero, then, is Mrs Althorpe’s lascivious fortune-hunter, the lazy, disobedient son, who seduced his stepmother, stole from his father, and headed for ‘the impure recesses’ of a licentious city (AM, 543). Providing no disinterested narrative voice, no impartial judge of character, *Arthur Mervyn* demands that we interrogate the way in which we read. Like Arthur Mervyn himself, we are impelled ‘to ponder on each sentence and phrase; to select among different conjectures the most plausible, and to ascertain the true, by patient and repeated scrutiny’ (AM, 343). Do we read like a Stevens or like an Althorpe? Read like the former—as Norman Grabo and Michael Warner have done—and you will see a republican quixote for whom disinterestedness and self-sacrifice

form the basis of his moral centre and his public identity.<sup>337</sup> Read like the latter—as James Russo has done—and you will see a scheming Sancho, an opportunist and a materialist, whose ‘principal aim is interest’, and whose character ‘is neither that of simplicity nor of acuteness, of courage nor of cowardice, but of interest’.<sup>338</sup> Read either way, *Arthur Mervyn* reveals a devastating breach between the rhetoric of republican virtue and the practices of republican America. The only difference is this: Arthur Mervyn as Don Quixote falls for the outmoded fiction of republican virtue and strives to reanimate the ideal; Arthur Mervyn as Sancho Panza mouths the fictions as loudly and as frequently as he can, using and abusing them to raise himself above suspicion and realise himself a tidy sum. Perhaps it would be truer to say that Arthur is simultaneously a superannuated throwback to classical republicanism and a first-born child of the commercial age, a scurrilous side-kick to the scheming Welbeck who cultivates his own particular brand of self-serving philanthropy and contains within himself the jarring contradictions of a turbulent decade.<sup>339</sup>

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<sup>337</sup> For criticism that reads Arthur Mervyn as a character of ‘perfect sincerity’, see Warner, *Letters of the Republic* (p. 154), and Grabo, *The Coincidental Art of Charles Brockden Brown*.

<sup>338</sup> *Don Quixote*, 1801, p. lxxxii; p. lxxxiii; James Russo offers a particularly ingenious reading of Arthur Mervyn as an out and out con man (‘The Chameleon of Convenient Vice: A Study of the Narrative of *Arthur Mervyn*’, *Studies in the Novel*, 11 [1979], 381-405).

<sup>339</sup> For criticism that sees ‘Mervyn as Quixote with a trace of the Panza in him, a holy innocent who reminds you a bit of a con man’, see William Hedges, ‘Brown and the Culture of Contradictions’, *EAL*, 9 (1974), 107-142, (p. 125). Cathy Davidson provides an eloquent and witty summation of the critical conflict surrounding Arthur Mervyn in *Revolution and the Word* (p. 240).

## 6. Nobody's Dulcinea: Romantic Fictions and Republican Mothers in Tabitha Gilman Tenney's *Female Quixotism*

If the rising generation be not the nearest to perfection of any that have existed since the golden age, it will certainly not be for want of information and advice in every shape.

*Practical Hints to Young Females*, 1816

Anonymous author of *Female Quixotism* (1801) and pedagogical compiler of *The New Pleasing Instructor* (1799), Tabitha Gilman Tenney remains a virtual enigma to contemporary critics and historians. She wrote no memoirs, left no personal papers, and elicited no biographies. Official annals, meanwhile, have overlooked the author in order to enumerate the virtues and accomplishments of Samuel Tenney, Tabitha's husband and three times Federalist senator. Only in the diaries and memoirs of her female acquaintances have tenacious historians lighted upon a few revealing details of the author and her life.<sup>340</sup> In Elizabeth Dow Leonard's *A Few Reminiscences of my Exeter Life* (1878), Tabitha Tenney makes an intriguing cameo appearance when Leonard looks back to the death of George Washington:

It was said that when the news of General Washington's death was announced in Exeter, many ladies thought it necessary to faint, Mrs. Tenney among the number. She had a valuable mirror in her hand when she received the news of G. W.'s fate. She walked leisurely across the

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<sup>340</sup> Cathy Davidson explains that she has found 'only two sources' in which the record of Tenney 'goes beyond the usual and formulaic "highly accomplished lady" encountered in practically all dictionary entries on the author'. The first is Elizabeth Leonard's *A Few Reminiscences of my Exeter Life*; the second is an unpublished diary written by Tenney's peer and rival in love, Patty Rogers (*Revolution and the Word*, p. 191).

room, laid the mirror safely down, placed herself in a proper attitude, adjusted her garments like Caesar when he fell, and then fainted away, and so paid her patriotic tribute to the great man's memory and did not sacrifice her looking glass, as a less sensible and discreet woman would have done.<sup>341</sup>

'Faints' and 'falls' are the narrative staples of sentimental fiction in the early republic, with the former involving a momentary loss of consciousness, a fleeting effacement of self, and the latter—operating most effectively as a synonym for seduction—evoking a more permanent and injurious loss of reputation, the lasting devaluation of a woman's worth in the unforgiving marketplace of marriage. Tenney's quixotic heroine, the self-styled Dorcasina Sheldon, is herself susceptible to frequent bouts of fainting. Struggling to preserve intact her idealised self-image, she repeatedly loses consciousness in a bid to save face when confronted with unpalatable truths and unpleasant realities.<sup>342</sup> Nor is Dorcasina a stranger to humiliating falls: her disregard for the 'inestimable value' of 'a woman's reputation' leads her father to lament, 'Alas! my daughter, how art thou fallen' (FQ, 49), a fall from grace that is comically realised when Dorcasina tumbles down the stairs with her servant and paramour, John Brown.<sup>343</sup> Seduced by the fiction of Tobias Smollett into believing her servant is a nobleman in disguise,<sup>344</sup> and indiscreetly 'tumbling' with a fellow from 'downstairs', her disregard for propriety threatens to sink her reputation to a new nadir: 'Dorcasina's degradation' seems complete (FQ, 239).

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<sup>341</sup> Leonard, *A Few Reminiscences of my Exeter Life*, ed. by Edward C. Echols (Exeter, NH: Two By Four Press, 1972), p. 48.

<sup>342</sup> Sally C. Hoople has catalogued Dorcasina's swoons in 'Tabitha Tenney: *Female Quixotism*' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Fordham, 1984), p. 248. Dorcasina falls 'senseless upon the floor' on a number of occasions—when she is chased by the pack of village boys, when her father forbids her to see O'Connor, when she witnesses O'Connor's whipping, and when she learns of her father's death (FQ, 60; 88).

<sup>343</sup> Mr. Sheldon is quoting here from Isaiah 14. 12.

<sup>344</sup> Dorcasina explains to Betty that in *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748), Smollett's eponymous hero, 'under the name of John Brown, had lived with Narcissa (whom he afterwards married) as a servant' (FQ, 227).

In the case of Tabitha Gilman Tenney, though, falling is a means of strengthening a well-established reputation for propriety: Tenney's feint [*sic*] is supremely self-conscious, her alleged loss of consciousness an accomplished act of self-construction and a masterful piece of propaganda. Aware of her public image, acknowledging an audience beyond the four walls of her room, she lays aside her mirror in order to display the 'proper attitude' towards the death of Washington. Arranging herself before the fall, she becomes the model of a grief-stricken patriot, a cameo of Columbia's ideal daughter, overwhelmed by the loss of the national patriarch. Premeditated and skilfully executed, the fall connotes a 'proper' respect for the Father, fulfilling the social expectation of a self-abnegatory faint, whilst enabling the canny author to build a public reputation from the privacy of her chamber, to construct a public image from a display of personal grief. Careful not to 'sacrifice her looking glass', never losing sight of the ideal image she intends to convey, Tenney becomes a self-promoting spin-doctor who capitalises upon her dizziness. Elizabeth Dow Leonard may not have liked the 'affected' airs of Exeter's 'real live authoress', but she was clearly impressed by Tenney's commanding live performance.<sup>345</sup>

### ***Women's Business***

In fact, the demise of the republican hero and the rise of a republican heroine were closely connected in the post-Revolutionary years, and this chapter will discuss in some detail the representation of idealised womanhood in Judith Sargent Murray's *The Gleaner* (1798) and William Wirt's collection of essays, *The Old Bachelor* (1814). I want to suggest that *Female Quixotism: Exhibited in the Romantic Opinions and Extravagant Adventures of Dorcasina Sheldon* exploits the interpretative instability of the quixotic figure in order to produce a double-talking text, a romantic satire that exposes the unrealistic expectations harboured by and placed upon American women at the turn of the nineteenth century. Read it one way, I will argue, and *Female Quixotism* is the cautionary tale of a girl who refused to grow up; it is an enlightened satire of an irresponsible escapist whose

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<sup>345</sup> *A Few Reminiscences*, p. 47.



un-republican ideals and distinctly un-American attachments—to novels, to romantic self-fashioning, to suspicious Europeans and, finally, to spinsterhood—are perceived to jeopardise the future of the newly founded nation. Read it again, though, this time with greater sympathy, and the text presents the tragedy of a girl who refused to grow into the republican ideals of womanhood available to her; it enacts the drama of one woman's quest for individuation, and it critiques both the plausibility and the desirability of conforming to the period's self-sacrificing ideals of republican wife and mother.

Addressing itself 'TO ALL *Columbian Young Ladies, Who read Novels and Romances*', the compiler's dedication at the start of the text declares the book to be an 'extraordinary piece of biography', not 'a mere romance' as the reader may suspect, but 'a true picture of real life'. Indeed, the anonymous compiler assures the sceptical reader that 'when you compare it with the most extravagant parts of the authentic history of the celebrated hero of La Mancha, the renowned Don Quixote [...] you will no longer doubt its being a true uncoloured history of a romantic country girl, whose head had been turned by the unrestrained perusal of Novels and Romances' (FQ, 3). The irony of tone and instability of narrative voice are thus established from the very start: if *Female Quixotism* is only as 'true' a picture of real life as 'the authentic history' of Don Quixote, then it is precisely what it claims it is not—a romance, a quixotic fiction that merely purports to be founded on fact.

Describing *Female Quixotism* as a satire designed 'to expose the dangers of novel-reading', a 'protest against novel mania', which assumes 'a place of note among other successful satirical works of its time',<sup>346</sup> Henri Petter and Sally Hoople follow a well-worn groove in Tenney criticism: reviewing the novel for their 1855 *Cyclopaedia of American Literature*, Duyckinck and Duyckinck described *Female Quixotism* as 'one of the numerous literary progeny of Cervantes' immortal satire', 'turning' like its 'original' 'on the evils of reading

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<sup>346</sup> *The Early American Novel*, p. 46; Hoople, p. 12; p. 5.

romances'.<sup>347</sup> Yet as I have argued in Chapters One and Two, *Don Quixote* was far from being perceived as an unequivocal satire at the turn of the nineteenth century. Reviewing *Female Quixotism* in 1808—the year that saw a second edition of the novel published in Newburyport, Massachusetts—an enthusiastic critic for the *Monthly Anthology and Boston Review* seems more intuitively open to the ambiguities surrounding the quixotism of *Female Quixotism*. Drawing 'from their dusty shrouds, several respectable tomes, of American parentage', the review doubts not that many of its readers have 'dwelt with great sympathy on the pathetick history of the unfortunate Dorcasina Sheldon, and have been inclined to believe that the ingenious author had almost out-quixoted Don Quixote'.<sup>348</sup> Most unlike succeeding criticism, this review makes no reference to satire or to novel reading. Instead, expressing its 'great sympathy' for Tenney's 'unfortunate' protagonist, it leaves us in some doubt as to who the quixote actually is. While Dorcasina is presented as the sympathetic and sentimental heroine of a 'pathetick history', it is 'the ingenious author', Tabitha Tenney, who has 'almost out-quixoted Don Quixote'.

The same year, 1808, also saw a sermon delivered by the Reverend Samuel Miller in New York, discoursing upon 'The Appropriate Duty and Ornament of the Female Sex'. Explicating a passage from the New Testament, the Reverend observed that Tabitha was 'by interpretation', Dorcas: the former was 'a Syriac word, signifying a *roe* or *fawn*', and the latter was 'a Greek word of the same import'.<sup>349</sup> So when Tabitha Gilman Tenney, conservative moralist and exemplary wife to a Federalist senator, wanted to create an unconventional and

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<sup>347</sup> Evert A. Duyckinck and George L. Duyckinck, *Cyclopaedia of American Literature*, 2 vols (Philadelphia: Rutter, 1855; repr. 1965), p. 521.

<sup>348</sup> 'Modern Chivalry', *The Monthly Anthology and Boston Review*, 5 (1808), 497-508; 554-58 (p. 498).

<sup>349</sup> *A Sermon, Preached 13 March, 1808, for the Benefit of the Society Instituted in the City of New-York, for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children* (New York: Hopkins and Seymour, 1808); repr. as 'The Appropriate Duty and Ornament of the Female Sex', in *The Princeton Pulpit*, ed. by John T. Duffield (New York: Scribner, 1852), p. 10. Miller is discussing the passage from Acts 9. 36-42.

extravagant fictional character, she actually named it for herself. Their nominal kinship shouldn't prove surprising, however, when we consider the cultural context in which the novel-writing senator's wife and her novel-reading heroine first entered into print. As well as being a period which advocated (at least in public) cultural sobriety and intellectual austerity, the early republic saw a conservative shift in attitudes toward the appropriate duty and ornament of the female sex in America. For many conservatives, the female readers and female writers of fiction represented two sides of the same quixotic coin; absurd and extravagant, they were both regarded as inappropriate and undutiful women in America's new republic.

If authorship *per se* was regarded as a dubious occupation in the new republic, then female novelists were doubly damned, not only for writing morally-suspect fiction, but for neglecting the 'sacred duties' of domestic life in order to enter the masculine realm of public discourse.<sup>350</sup> In her preface to *Julia and the Illuminated Baron* (1800), Sarah Sayward Barrell Keating Wood observed that 'custom and nature, which have affixed the duties of woman to very confined and very limited bounds, are by no means likely to patronize a female writer'; apologising for 'thus appearing in public' at all, she assured her readers 'that not one social, or one domestic duty, ha[d] ever been sacrificed or postponed by her pen'.<sup>351</sup> In 1814, William Wirt would categorically condemn both the readers and the writers of fiction as a 'class of victims to a busy indolence', insisting that 'next to those who devote their whole lives to the unprofitable business of writing works of imagination, are those who spend the whole of their's in reading them'.<sup>352</sup> Conservative moralist, James Fordyce, meanwhile, had no doubt as to what the proper 'business' of women should be: his *Sermons to Young Women* made it clear that they had no place entering either 'the province of men' or the

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<sup>350</sup> *Dorval; or, The Speculator*, p. iv.

<sup>351</sup> *Julia and the Illuminated Baron* (Portsmouth, NH: Peirce, 1800), pp. iii-iv.

<sup>352</sup> *The Old Bachelor* (Richmond, VA: Enquirer, 1814), p. 24. M. F. Heiser mentions William Wirt in his article on 'Cervantes in the United States', pointing out that he commenced his career as a lawyer 'with a library consisting of Blackstone, *Don Quixote*, and *Tristram Shandy*' (p. 418n).

realm of 'Profligate and [...] Improper Books', because, as he bluntly put it, 'your business chiefly is to read Men, in order to make yourselves agreeable and useful'.<sup>353</sup>

*Female Quixotism* acknowledges precisely this kind of opinion when it mentions the swathe of potential suitors who steer clear of Dorcasina quite simply because she reads, judging that 'a woman had no business with any book but the bible, or perhaps the art of cookery; believing that every thing beyond these served only to disqualify her for the duties of domestic life' (FQ, 14). Yet while Tenney's fictional narrative scornfully dismisses such votaries as 'enemies to female improvement', her *New Pleasing Instructor* (1799), the only other work she published, reveals its own anxieties surrounding women who read.<sup>354</sup> A compilation of educational excerpts 'designed principally for the use of female schools', the *Instructor* opens with an article entitled 'Reading', a discussion upon the propriety of women reading aloud. According to the 'Polite Lady' who has written the piece, 'there are so many faulty ways of reading' that 'perhaps you will not find one woman in five hundred' who is 'able to read with propriety'. Discussing the faults of various readers, the writer denounces the 'canting tone' of Aunt Filmer, the 'hurry and rapidity' of an unnamed cousin, and the 'slow and slovenly manner' of Mrs Dashwood. If Mrs Nugent is too 'loud and shrill', then Miss Littleton is too 'faint and feeble', and only the governess meets with approbation. While reading 'so slow as to be easily understood by any person', she will not disgust 'those of the quickest apprehension', and 'her voice she carefully adapts to the number and extent of her audience'.<sup>355</sup> For the truly 'polite lady', then, the act of reading is also an exercise in the art of pleasing. And the governess's lesson provides a fitting introduction to *The New Pleasing Instructor*, for Tenney's pedagogical text, which aims throughout 'to blend instruction with

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<sup>353</sup> *Sermons to Young Women*, 2 vols (London: Millar, 1766; repr. London: Pickering, 1996), I, 272; I, 144; I, 273.

<sup>354</sup> *The New Pleasing Instructor; or, Young Lady's Guide to Virtue and Happiness* (Boston: Thomas & Andrews, 1799), title page.

<sup>355</sup> *New Pleasing Instructor*, pp. 9-10.

rational amusement', is itself a pleasing instructor in more than one sense, designed not only to please its female readers, but to instruct them in the art of pleasing others; Dorcasina Sheldon, on the other hand, as we shall see, is a woman who reads to please herself.

The alleged evils of reading fiction appeared especially pernicious in the newly constituted USA, where the vitiated sentiments of European novels were perceived to pose an insidious threat to the purity of the nation and the future of republicanism. Voicing this anxiety in his 'Thoughts upon Female Education', Benjamin Rush argues that 'the subjects of novels are by no means accommodated to our present manners. They hold up *life*, it is true, but it is not as yet *life* in America'. Carefully differentiating New World life from Old World luxury, Rush claims that 'as yet, the intrigues of a British novel, are as foreign to our manners, as the refinements of Asiatic vice', though his repetition of the qualificatory phrase, 'as yet', expresses the fear that American life may be all too susceptible to the infiltration of European immorality.<sup>356</sup> For Thomas Jefferson, writing to Nathaniel Burwell in 1818, the novelistic genre was both a 'mass of trash' and 'a great obstacle to good education', the cornerstone of republican ideology. Its corrupting effect on readers was 'a bloated imagination, sickly judgment [*sic*], and disgust towards all the real businesses of life'.<sup>357</sup> And if fiction was especially dangerous when transported to American soil, it was considered to be most dangerous of all in the closets of American women, for Jefferson's American 'Angels' were regarded as the moral guardians of the new republic. As John Adams put it in a letter to Benjamin Rush, 'without national morality a republican government cannot be maintained. Therefore, my dear Fellow Citizens of America, you must ask leave of your wives and daughters to preserve your republic'.<sup>358</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> 'Thoughts upon Female Education', in *Essays*, pp. 75-92 (p. 81)

<sup>357</sup> Letter to Burwell (14 March, 1818), in *Writings*, p. 1411.

<sup>358</sup> Letter to Benjamin Rush (2 February, 1807), in *The Spur of Fame*, p. 76. For further discussion of the feminisation of virtue in the post-Revolutionary years see Ruth H. Bloch, 'The Gendered Meanings of Virtue in Revolutionary America', *Signs*, 13 (1987), 37-58, and Glenna Matthews, *The Rise of Public Woman: Woman's Power and Woman's Place in the United States, 1630-1970*

The romantic heroines of English fiction could generally get away with their propensity for over-reading fictional works and misreading the world around them. Charlotte Lennox's Harriot Stuart, despite believing herself to be 'nothing less than a Clelia or Statira', ultimately marries her Dumont,<sup>359</sup> and Arabella, who plays the titular role in *The Female Quixote*, ends up happily married to the loyal and long-suffering Glanville. In Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (written 1797-98; published posthumously in 1818), Catherine Morland is so entranced with Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* that she longs to spend her 'whole life in reading it'; nonetheless she trades in *Udolpho* for a husband at the relatively tender age of eighteen.<sup>360</sup> In *Angelica; or, Quixote in Petticoats*, a comic drama published anonymously in 1758, the heroine's quixotism is not even a failing, but more of an endearing foible. Angelica provides an unusual instance of an unreformed quixote, whose quixotism not only goes unchecked, but actually remains intact at the end of the play; instead, Angelica herself is seen as the laudable reformer of Careless the rake, 'the wildest young fellow about town', who closes the play with the ardent wish that 'ev'ry rake' could meet 'so kind, so good a wife, / Then ev'ry Careless would—reform his life'.<sup>361</sup>

While the romance-reading women of British literature most frequently inhabited comic texts, raising laughter on their way towards a happy end, their American counterparts were the tragic figures of cautionary tales, fallen women facing ridicule, ruin, and even death. William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy* (1789) included the footnoted 'story of Miss *Whitman*', a New World morality tale that illustrated all too clearly the pernicious influence of novels: 'A

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(New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). For Jefferson's contrast between French 'Amazons' and American 'Angels', see *Writings*, pp. 922-23. For a further discussion of attitudes towards women and novel-reading in the early republic see Davidson, *Revolution and the Word*, pp. 45-49.

<sup>359</sup> *The Life of Harriot Stuart, Written by Herself*, ed. by Susan Kubica Howard (London and Madison: Associated University Presses, 1995), p. 66.

<sup>360</sup> *Northanger Abbey, Lady Susan, The Watsons, and Sanditon*, ed. by John Davie (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 23.

<sup>361</sup> *Angelica*, pp. 39-40.

great reader of novels and romances', Elizabeth Whitman 'imbibed her ideas of *the characters of men*, from those fallacious sources', and subsequently fell foul of a seducer. 'Delivered of a lifeless child', she ended her life 'alone and friendless' in a distant tavern.<sup>362</sup> Taken from the *Salem Mercury* (29 July, 1788), Whitman's story was all too tragically founded on fact, though it wasn't long before Hannah Webster Foster turned the tale to fictional use in a novel she called *The Coquette* (1797). Renounced by her respectable suitor, the Reverend Boyer, and pining for the faithless Colonel Sanford, Foster's Eliza Wharton begs her correspondent to send her 'some new books', preferably not those that 'require much attention. Let them be plays or novels, or anything else, that will amuse and extort a smile'.<sup>363</sup> Underpinning Eliza's downfall is not just the type of book that she chooses to read ('plays or novels'), but why she reads them (for 'amusement' rather than edification), and how she reads them (with the minimum of critical 'attention'). Rejecting the dictates of reason for 'delusions of fancy', Eliza swallows the seductive fictions of Colonel Sanford—'a second Lovelace' in the words of one discerning character—falls pregnant with his child, and surrenders her 'reputation and virtue', along with the life of herself and her new-born child.<sup>364</sup>

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<sup>362</sup> *The Power of Sympathy*, p. 23.

<sup>363</sup> *The Coquette*, p. 193.

<sup>364</sup> *The Coquette*, p. 145; p. 134; p. 237. A deep suspicion of women of letters reveals itself in American writing as early as 1645, in John Winthrop's diary entry for 13 April: 'Mr. Hopkins, the governor of Hartford upon Connecticut, came to Boston, and brought his wife with him, (a godly young woman, and of special parts,) who was fallen into a sad infirmity, the loss of her understanding and reason, which had been growing upon her divers years, by occasion of her giving herself wholly to reading and writing, and had written many books. Her husband, being very loving and tender of her, was loath to grieve her; but he saw his error, when it was too late. For if she had attended her household affairs, and such things as belong to women, and not gone out of her way and calling to meddle in such things as are proper for men, whose minds are stronger, etc., she had kept her wits, and might have improved them usefully and honorably in the place God had set her. He brought her to Boston, and left her with her brother, one Mr. Yale, a merchant, to try what means might be had here for her. But no help could be had' (*The Puritans*, ed. by Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson [New York: American Book Company, 1938], p. 140).

### *Broken Homes*

Patricia Jewell McAlexander, amongst others, has argued that the Revolutionary period saw ‘an intense cultural dialogue’ regarding ‘the proper role for women’.<sup>365</sup> Even as Thomas Jefferson thanked America’s lucky stars that their ‘Angels’ found contentment ‘in their nurseries’ and not on the streets, that ‘the influence of women’ did ‘not endeavor to extend itself [...] beyond the domestic line’,<sup>366</sup> wives and daughters managed farms and businesses while their husbands, sons, and fathers took up arms in the cause of Independence. There were even stories of American women taking up arms themselves, and in 1776, Abigail Adams took up her pen in order to issue a stern warning to her husband: ‘if perticular [*sic*] care and attention is not paid to the Ladies we are determined to foment a Rebellion [*sic*], to ‘subdue our Masters, and without voilence [*sic*] throw both your natural and legal authority at our feet’.<sup>367</sup>

By the turn of the nineteenth century, though, the Revolutionary tide had turned against ‘the Ladies’. Lecturing in 1808, Samuel Miller could recall that ‘there was a time, indeed’, which dared to contend that ‘all distinctions of sex ought to be forgotten and confounded; and that females are well fitted to fill the academic Chair, to shine in the Senate, to adorn the Bench of justice, and even to lead the train of War, as the more hardy sex. This delusion, however, is now generally discarded’, much to the relief of the Reverend Miller, who concludes ‘that the God of nature has raised everlasting barriers against such wild and mischievous speculations’.<sup>368</sup> 1790s fiction confirmed the trend: *The Female Review*’s Deborah Sampson—who had dressed up as one Robert Shurtliff and joined her country’s Revolutionary troops in a bid to escape the ‘too-cloistered situation’ of her ‘sex’s sphere’—had relinquished her pseudonym and returned

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<sup>365</sup> ‘The Creation of the American Eve: The Cultural Dialogue on the Nature and Role of Women in Late Eighteenth Century America’, *EAL*, 9 (1975), 252-266 (p. 253).

<sup>366</sup> Letter to Anne Willing Bingham (11 May, 1788), in *Writings*, p. 923; letter to George Washington (4 December, 1788), in *Writings*, pp. 932-33.

<sup>367</sup> *The Adams Family Correspondence*, ed. by Lyman Butterfield, 4 vols (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1950), I, 370; I, 402.

<sup>368</sup> *Princeton Pulpit*, pp. 13-14.



home to marry a Massachusetts farmer.<sup>369</sup> The cross-dressing heroine of *The History of Constantius and Pulchera* (1794) had likewise sloughed off the role of Valorus, hung up her soldier's uniform, and given her hand to her childhood sweetheart. Martinette Beauvais, however, a female freedom-fighter in Charles Brockden Brown's *Ormond; or, The Secret Witness* (1799) had not come home; instead she had crossed the Atlantic to fight alongside French revolutionaries. And viewed alongside the returned and re-feminised soldiers we see in *Constantius and Pulchera* and *The Female Review*, she is a monstrous anti-heroine, a sanguinary advocate of 'massacre and tumult', and a far cry from *Ormond's* seamstress and domestic goddess, Constantia.<sup>370</sup>

Published in 1814, an essay in William Wirt's *The Old Bachelor* sought to enlist its female readership into the ranks of a very different 'revolutionary' cause:

I here frankly confess that my purpose is to court the fair; nay, if I can, to draw them into a conspiracy with me; a conspiracy to bring about a revolution in this country, which I am sensible that I can never effect without their aid. I cannot better explain myself than by describing a picture which I saw some years ago, in the parlour of a gentleman with whom I was invited to dine.

It was a small plate which represented a mother as reciting to her son the martial exploits of his ancestors.—The mother herself had not lost the beauty of youth; and was an elegant and noble figure—She was sitting—her face and eyes were raised—her lips were opened—her arms extended aloft, and her countenance exalted and impassioned with her subject. The little fellow, a beautiful fellow, apparently about twelve or fourteen years of age, was kneeling before her; his hands clasped on her lap, and, stooping towards her, his little eyes were fixed upon her's, and swimming with tears of admiration and rapture.—'Such,' said I to myself, 'is the impulse which a mother can give to the opening character of her child, and such the way in which a hero may be formed!'

I am sure that I am understood. *The virtues of this country are with our women, and the only remaining hope of the resurrection of the genius and character of the nation rests with them.* Need I assert that since the revolution this character has most woefully declined? Look to our public bodies and the question is answered. Where is the remedy? No national institution can be hoped for: it would cost money! How is the glory of

<sup>369</sup> [Herman Mann], *The Female Review; or, Memoirs of an American Young Lady* (Dedham, MA: Heaton, 1797), p. 108.

<sup>370</sup> *Ormond; or, The Secret Witness*, ed. by Mary Chapman (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 1999), p. 205.

the republic to be retrieved? How is the republic itself to stand? As to our men they are differently employed: how employed, through pity to them, I will not now say. But the mothers of the country, and those who are to become mothers, have the character of the nation in their hands.<sup>371</sup>

For Wirt's old bachelor, motherhood is the 'national institution' that will resurrect 'the genius' of the nation and restore 'the glory of the republic'—at absolutely no cost to the public purse. With 'the character of the nation in their hands', and the history of the nation on their tongues, America's mothers have it in their power to effect a moral revolution: with historical romance as their balm, they will simultaneously bind and heal the fractured limbs and degenerate morals of a Union in woeful decline.

In 1786, the *Columbian Magazine, or Monthly Miscellany* had declared that 'posterity' may 'be taught to venerate the purity and virtue of their fathers'.<sup>372</sup> Thirty years later, however, in the eyes of Wirt's disillusioned old bachelor, the Union's fathers are 'differently employed'—in the chase for financial gain and sexual gratification, we infer—and American men are barely worthy of a mention. Beneath the bachelor's contempt, they are all but erased from his picture, a pitiful set of figures whose dubious pursuits, literally unspeakable according to the essayist, have compromised the good character of their nation. In contrast, the mother in his essay is endowed with all the attractions of a sentimental heroine. Described as 'an elegant and noble figure', she is beautiful, youthful, and 'impassioned'; her eyes are raised, her lips are opened, and her arms are held aloft; no wonder she evokes the 'rapture and admiration' of her not so little son of fourteen years. The fall of the republican hero, then, precipitates the rise of a republican heroine, and while the nation's father, George Washington, had gone to the grave in 1799, the concept of republican motherhood grew extremely popular in the formative years of the nineteenth century. Practising the 'arts of gain' as opposed to acts of self-sacrifice, and preferring personal autonomy to collective responsibility, the men who had fought for and founded the new

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<sup>371</sup> *The Old Bachelor*, pp. 31-32.

<sup>372</sup> 'Preface', *The Columbian Magazine; or, Monthly Miscellany*, 1 (1786), pages unnumbered.

republic were able to compensate for their own republican shortcomings by displacing their obligations onto American women. In a bid to disguise the growing rupture between the idealistic rhetoric of republicanism and the individualistic reality of post-Revolutionary America, Columbia's daughters were speedily matured into republican mothers, re-figured as idealised role-models and called upon to infuse their sons with the same republican values that the fathers seemed so ready to ignore.<sup>373</sup> And yet, by perpetuating a set of ideals that already appeared outmoded to many, republican mothers found themselves playing the part of ideological quixotes, performing, in the words of Linda Kerber, 'an exercise in nostalgia', and providing a 'mechanism by which the memory of [...] civic humanism was preserved long after it had faded elsewhere'.<sup>374</sup>

In short, republican motherhood proved extremely convenient for America's post-republican men. As Robert E. Shalhope has argued, 'by constraining women within the confines of an ever more rigid domestic ideology', American men 'became free to explore the outermost boundaries of a revolutionary rhetoric dedicated to equality, freedom, autonomy, and opportunity

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<sup>373</sup> I am indebted to the pioneering work of Linda K. Kerber, and in particular to her seminal *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*, for my understanding of republican motherhood. I should stress, though, that the model of republican motherhood, although predominant, was neither unconditional, nor the only ideal in circulation. Jan Lewis argues for the importance of the 'republican wife' ('The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic', *WMQ*, 44 [1987], 689-721, [p. 689]), and the ignominy attached to being a single mother (Eliza Wharton appears to die quite literally of shame soon after child-birth) makes it clear that the republican mother was, *de facto*, already a wife. Furthermore, as Barbara J. Harris has argued, 'the life-style that this ideal prescribed was accessible only to white, middle- and upper-class women in more settled areas of the country' (*Beyond Her Sphere: Women and the Professions in American History* [London: Greenwood, 1978], pp. 32-33). Sharon M. Harris has addressed the issue of class in relation to *Female Quixotism* in 'Lost Boundaries: The Use of the Carnavalesque in Tabitha Tenney's *Female Quixotism*', *Speaking the Other Self: American Women Writers*, ed. by Jeanne Campbell Reesman (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1997), pp. 213-28.

<sup>374</sup> *Toward an Intellectual History of Women: Essays by Linda K. Kerber* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), p. 142; p. 144.

with little sense of contradiction or ambivalence'.<sup>375</sup> William Wirt's sentimentalised female figure is one such woman who fits a little too snugly for comfort into the paradigm of republican motherhood: rigidly constrained on multiple levels, she is contained within a 'small plate', an engraving which hangs in 'the parlour of a gentleman', and is described within and framed by the narrative of an old bachelor. She is fetishised, too, for as 'public bodies' are perceived to fail the American people, Wirt's old bachelor pins his hopes and his gaze upon the private body of his republican mother, dismantling her person and eagerly devouring her open lips and raised eyes, entranced by both the miniature engraving he views and the overblown picture his narrative paints. What's more, the bachelor's self-confessed 'conspiracy' may not be quite so as harmless as it first appears: the opening essay of *The Old Bachelor* reveals that the last time the essayist examined a woman's body—in his capacity as a newly qualified doctor—she ended up dead, a victim of the younger bachelor's dubious medical skills. And that unfortunate patient was his own beloved mother, finished off by her own 'fine fellow' before his book begins.

Absent mothers were a narrative staple in the fictions of the early republic, either dead from the start (Harriet's mother in *The Power of Sympathy*, Melissa's mother in *The Asylum*, and Dorcasina's mother in *Female Quixotism*), dying in the course of the narrative (Aurelia's real and adoptive mothers in *Dorval*), or living on the wrong side of the Atlantic Ocean (Ascha Fielding in *Arthur Mervyn*, Rachel Temple in *Charlotte Temple*). This wholesale fictional matricide was by no means restricted to American fiction; Jane Austen's Emma and Anne Elliot are motherless, and in *The Female Quixote*, Arabella's mother is also long dead before the narrative gets underway. Significantly, though, while the English novel blames the bad reading tastes of the mother for the romantic quixotism of the daughter—Arabella gets her notions from the 'great Store of Romances' that 'the deceased Marchioness had purchased'—Tenney's American version of the tale assumes that the late Mrs Sheldon would have exercised a positive and

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<sup>375</sup> Shalhope, *The Roots of Democracy: American Thought and Culture, 1760-1800* (Boston: Twayne, 1990), pp. 127-28.

preventative influence.<sup>376</sup> Like any good, republican mother, she would have demonstrated ‘the plain rational path of life’, and prevented her daughter’s ‘imagination from being filled with the airy delusions and visionary dreams of love and raptures, darts, fire and flames, with which the indiscreet writers of that fascinating kind of books, denominated Novels, fill the heads of artless young girls, to their great injury, and sometimes to their utter ruin’ (FQ, 4-5). This is precisely the role that the exemplary Mrs Stanly plays when she successfully prevents her own daughter, Harriet, from reading novels, but Mrs Stanly, ‘the best of wives and mothers’ (FQ, 294), is also dead by the end of the novel, and Dorcasina and Harriet—the women who do make it through to the final page—are both childless, thwarted mothers who for different reasons prove unable to fulfil the predominant ideal prescribed by their society.

From early on in the narrative, Dorcasina’s romantic tendencies have disqualified her not only from marriage, but from motherhood, too. ‘Naturally fond of children’, she is ‘highly gratified’ when Mrs Stanly gives birth to a ‘charming little girl’. Having ‘begged’ and been granted ‘the favour of furnishing it with a name’, Dorcasina is delighted when the new arrival is ‘christened by the names of Harriet Caroline Clementina’—the names of the three heroines in *Sir Charles Grandison*—and in its ‘infantine’ years, ‘she seldom passed a day without seeing it, either at home or at Mr. Stanly’s’ (FQ, 15). As soon as young Harriet reaches ‘a proper age’, however, Mrs Stanly enrolls her at a Philadelphian boarding school, ‘with an express injunction to the governess, never to indulge her in perusing novels: so great [is] her aversion to them’, and so determined is she to send her daughter ‘out of the reach of Dorcasina’s influence, who she was sure, would not fail to infect the mind of her young friend with the same poison which had operated so powerfully on her own’ (FQ, 16). In a nation where women were perceived to exercise ‘incalculable’ influence,<sup>377</sup> and where older

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<sup>376</sup> *Female Quixote*, p. 7.

<sup>377</sup> Miller advised no woman to think ‘that she has nothing to do beyond the sphere of her own household. In every walk, and in every hour of life, she may be contributing something to the

women were expected to transmit republican values to the rising generation, the woman who rejected 'Reason and fact' in favour of 'the figments of fancy' was a national health hazard,<sup>378</sup> a carrier of inappropriate beliefs, and an intolerable threat to the future of republicanism. Harriet is quickly ushered out of harm's way, effectively placed in isolation, while Dorcasina is denied contact with her young friend and god-daughter. The childless fates of Tenney's Dorcasina, Brown's Miss Whitman, and Foster's Eliza Wharton made it all too clear that reading novels and rearing children were mutually exclusive occupations.

This is not the only time that Dorcasina strives and fails to play the role of a surrogate mother. She agrees to marry three men during the course of the novel: each potential groom is half her age and each courtship sees Dorcasina roll the parts of lover and of mother into one. 'Needy adventurer', Patrick O'Connor, is 'many years younger' than his ageing 'enamored' (FQ, 34), who actually dresses up as her mother during the course of their affair, donning the narrative's sole material trace of the late Mrs Sheldon when she clandestinely visits O'Connor in 'a strange old-fashioned bonnet, which had been her mother's' (FQ, 57). Captain Barry is the second object of Dorcasina's affection, and when she announces her nuptial intentions to Betty, the common-sensical maid rather tactlessly reminds her mistress that 'you're old enough to be his mother' (FQ, 154). By now 'a thin, plain woman, near fifty', of 'matronly age and appearance' (FQ, 158), Dorcasina is undeterred, however, and nurses the military invalid back to health, pressing the head of 'the dear youth' 'against her bosom', and 'giving him a thousand charges to be careful of his health, not to sit up too long, nor, by taking cold, expose himself to a relapse' (FQ, 160; 159). Captain Barry himself declares that he 'could not have been treated with more tenderness in the house of my parents' (FQ, 158). John Brown, meanwhile, Dorcasina's third and final fiancé, is a 'hale, robust young fellow', whose youth renders him as unacceptable to Mrs Stanly as his inferior social status, for she declares it 'infinitely more respectable' to 'live

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purity, the order, and the happiness of the community to which she belongs' through the 'incalculable' power of her 'influence' (*Princeton Pulpit*, p. 20).

<sup>378</sup> Jefferson, *Writings*, p. 1411.

single', 'than to marry a man so much younger, even supposing him to be your equal in rank and character' (FQ, 227; 254).

Dorcasina can think of far more enjoyable things to do with a handsome young man than feed him tales of ancestral heroism, but her soft spot for the rising generation proves an unacceptable reality and an impossible dream within the parameters of republican America. In a study called *States of Sympathy: Seduction and Democracy in the American Novel*, Elizabeth Barnes has explored the ways in which 'marriage and paternalism intersect' in American fiction, with 'husbands and fathers becom[ing] inextricably connected', and embodying 'an ethos of seductive paternalism that characterises republican culture'.<sup>379</sup> Sure enough, in *Female Quixotism*, John Brown dresses in the late Mr Sheldon's clothes and is mistaken for his ghost, while Sheldon and O'Connor are figured as rivals for Dorcasina's affection, each one declaring his love for Tenney's heroine in a bid to exercise greater control over her person and her property. Yet Dorcasina's radical attempts to embody an ethos of seductive maternalism are figured as ineffectual and impermissible. Each successive engagement, broken and unconsummated, testifies to the heroine's thwarted desires, and ultimately, far from combining the roles of wife *and* mother, Dorcasina is prevented from fulfilling either role. Instead, she remains a spinster, the 'ridiculous' subject of a hundred 'dramatic pieces', in the words of *Salmagundi*'s Andrew Quoz (S, 35), and 'a freak of nature' in 'young America', according to Janet Wilson James's historical survey of the period.<sup>380</sup>

Thomas Jefferson may have advised American women to look to 'their nurseries' for 'contentment', but infant mortality was a grim reality for republican mothers, and at the end of *Female Quixotism*, we learn that Harriet Barry's child

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<sup>379</sup> *States of Sympathy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 43; p. 56.

<sup>380</sup> Quoz reveals the extent of the ridicule when he explains his own reasons for placing the 'ancient maiden in a ridiculous point of view': 'Has it not been done time out of mind? Is it not sanctioned by daily custom in private life? Is not the character of Aunt Tabitha, in the farce, the same we have laughed at in hundreds of dramatic pieces?' Tabitha, then, would appear to be a byword for an 'ancient maiden'; James, *Changing Ideas About Women in the United States, 1776-1825* (New York and London: Garland, 1981), p. 133.

has died at three weeks old. Significantly, the same 'twelvemonth' period (FQ, 320), the pivotal year of 1800, also sees the death of Mrs Stanly, leaving the Barrys with a motherless, childless home, and leaving readers with a motherless, childless text, a disturbing alternative to the pictures of domestic bliss envisaged by the avatars of republican motherhood. Harriet is just as fearful of losing her husband, whose health has been 'severely attacked', and whose life has been 'endangered by a colic' (FQ, 321), for contrary to the fatherless picture of mother-son felicity that Wirt's old bachelor paints, the would-be republican mother is all too dependent on the virtue and the purse of her spouse. Captain Barry may be the closest thing to a hero that the novel has to offer, but even he is sickly and emasculated, a perpetual invalid whose initial injuries in an unsuccessful Indian skirmish foreshadow his failing health and his lack of domestic control.<sup>381</sup> The 'weak state of both heads of the family' leaves the Barrys vulnerable to abuse, and Harriet has to endure the disappearance of 'her principal female servant, one in whom she put the greatest confidence', and who has stolen 'several articles of considerable value'. In short, Harriet declares she has suffered more since her marriage than she 'ever did before, in the whole course of [her] life' (FQ, 320-21).

While Wirt's republican mother is every inch the romance heroine, a changeless picture of youthful beauty and passion, Tenney's Harriet is a picture of difference. Re-appearing after a period of absence at the end of the narrative, she has been 'metamorphosed, by one year's matrimony', from a 'sprightly' and irreverent prankster 'into a serious moralizer' (FQ, 321). The last time we saw Harriet, she was striding across the countryside, disguised as Captain Montague and dressed in her father's military garb. Eager to cross domestic and gender lines, she was by far the most dashing of the men to pursue Dorcasina. Not only

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<sup>381</sup> The 'defeat of St. Clair by the Indians', where Captain Barry receives his initial wound (FQ, 152), refers to a 1791 Indian ambush that decimated the troops of US General Arthur St. Clair. Thus, the only reference to historical events in the novel (as in *The Algerine Captive*, the Revolution goes unnoticed) is one that represents another failure of domestic authority, this time within the realm of US politics, as white Americans see their paternalistic authority flouted by rebellious native Americans.



was she wearing the trousers, she was brandishing the sword, mistaken for the devil and loving every minute of it. When Harriet Stanly returns as Mrs Barry, she is indeed a different woman. 'The youth, the beauty, the engaging sprightliness' (FQ, 273) of her Montague are gone; she is a shadow of her former exuberant self, confined to her bed-chamber and ensconced in a vexing domestic sphere that has failed to deliver contentment. Only now does Dorcasina re-think her idealistic notions of domestic bliss: 'I find that, in my ideas of matrimony, I have been totally wrong. I imagined that, in a happy union, all was transport, joy, and felicity; but in you I find a demonstration that the most agreeable connection is not unattended with cares and anxieties' (FQ, 320). Dorcasina's eventual disenchantment, then, is clearly a double one: if the 'perfect Sir Charles Grandison' (FQ, 28) is only to be found in fiction, and not after all in the empty professions of an Irish impostor, then the same goes for the happy ending enjoyed by *Sir Charles Grandison's* Harriet and propounded by authors such as William Wirt, with their cozening images of fire-side felicity.<sup>382</sup>

More worrying still, it becomes clear that Harriet's post-nuptial misfortunes nonetheless present the best case scenario: Dorcasina's final 'suitor', Seymore the school-master, already possesses 'an amiable wife and several fine children', in South Carolina, but having 'squandered his time and money in gaming houses and brothels', he runs up debts and is 'obliged to flee, leaving his family overwhelmed with distress' (FQ, 297). 'Mr M.', meanwhile, 'who has children grown up, and who has been one of the best fathers and husbands', has changed for the worse since reading a book 'by one Tom Paine'. His behaviour now transformed, 'he keeps a Madam' who goes dressed like a queen, while 'he hardly allows his wife and daughters enough to keep them decent' (FQ, 316). The ideological upheavals and economic uncertainties that give rise to the reassuring ideal of republican motherhood in the first place surface here in the references to Tom Paine's theories and South Carolina's gaming houses. And one thing

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<sup>382</sup> We are also told in *Salmagundi* that Miss Charity Cockloft remained single because she 'never met with a lover who resembled sir Charles Grandison, the hero of her nightly dreams and waking fancy' (S, 172).

becomes quite clear: unsettling, socio-economic changes have not only brought about a compelling maternal ideal; they are also responsible for leaving republican mothers in a precarious state, vulnerable to desertion and distress as their increasingly mobile, post-republican husbands decide to cut their family ties and start the world anew.<sup>383</sup>

### ***Big Wigs***

While *Female Quixotism* chooses ‘a middling kind of person’, of ‘middling stature’ (FQ, 5), and unremarkable accomplishments for its heroine, Judith Sargent Murray’s *The Gleaner* presents its readers with a catalogue of exemplary women. Writing under the pseudonym of Constantia, and placing side by side a series of four articles first published in the *Massachusetts Magazine*, Murray presents an extensive and eclectic array of role models, jostling both for prominence and approbation in a volume that boasted John Adams and George Washington amongst its subscribers.<sup>384</sup> However, while Constantia’s ‘Observations on Female Abilities’ are determined to prove that women are just as ‘heroic’, ‘as brave’, ‘as influential’, ‘as energetic and eloquent’, ‘as faithful, and as persevering’, and as capable of governing and of writing as their male counterparts, her examples are almost exclusively culled from antiquity and from European soil. The heroism of Lady Jane Grey, the bravery of Margaret of Anjou, the governing skills of Elizabeth of England and the writing abilities of Sarchisa

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<sup>383</sup> In 1811, Mary Palmer Tyler, wife of Royall Tyler, published her own child-rearing manual, *The Maternal Physician*, in which she declared her intention to form ‘the future guardians of our beloved country’, to bring up ‘our sons in such a manner as shall render them most useful and happy’ (quoted in Marilyn S. Blackwell, ‘The Republican Vision of Mary Palmer Tyler’, in *Mothers and Motherhood: Readings in American History*, ed. by Rima D. Apple and Janet Golden [Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1997], p. 31). In private, however, this exemplary republican mother ‘had far less confidence in her ability to shape the future than she had expressed publicly’, and Blackwell tells us that ‘fear of poverty’ ‘dominated Mary’s concerns’ (p. 38).

<sup>384</sup> ‘Observations on Female Abilities’, ‘Observations Continued’, ‘Further Continuation’, and ‘Observations Concluded’, in *The Gleaner: A Miscellaneous Production*, 3 vols (Boston: Thomas & Andrews, 1798), III, 188-196; III, 196-205; III, 205-217; III, 217-224.

of Naples are all admired, while a discussion of female patriotism curiously omits to mention the very recent patriotism of American women during the Revolution, and instead discourses upon ‘the *patriotism* of the Roman ladies’.<sup>385</sup> While lamenting ‘the paucity of national attachment’ toward the new republic, Constantia’s catalogue of European role-models does itself seem curiously unpatriotic: having made the claim that America is not ‘destitute of females, whose abilities and improvements give them an indisputable claim to immortality’, Constantia perversely turns to Isabella of Spain for her proof, citing the example of the Old World monarch who sold her jewellery in order to fund a New World expedition.<sup>386</sup> Yet her choice of heroines speaks less of a covert Europhilia and more of a tacit recognition that the Amazonian women she depicts will seem far less menacing, far more palatable to conservative readers, when viewed from afar. For when the series finally does touch down on American soil—and this is not until the fourth and final essay—Constantia’s encomiums start to resemble a catalogue of conservative desiderata: despite her bold declaration that American women will form ‘a new era in female history’, she goes on to paint a watered-down picture of the new American woman. Self-effacing and supremely sensitive to the male ego, these ‘daughters of Columbia’ ‘will rather *question* than *assert*’, while their ‘retiring sweetness will insure them that consideration and respect, which they do not presume to demand’.<sup>387</sup>

Aside from Constantia’s glancing references to ‘a Warren, a Philenia, an Antonia, a Euphalia, &c. &c.’, just the one example of American womanhood is singled out for a special mention, and this is an unnamed individual from Massachusetts, whose peculiar anonymity sets her apart from the encyclopaedic catalogue of illustrious names surrounding her. Equipped to ‘attain that independence, for which a Wollstonecraft hath so energetically contended’, she is instead identified by her affinity with the most controversial of British feminists, a connection that reinforces the radicalism of her unmarried status. Functioning as a

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<sup>385</sup> *Gleaner*, III, 198; III, 206.

<sup>386</sup> *Gleaner*, III, 260; III, 218.

<sup>387</sup> *Gleaner*, III, 260; III, 189-191.

symbol of self-sufficient independence, she is ‘a complete *husbandwoman*’, a physically robust and emotionally independent figure who is ‘without a matrimonial connexion, yet constantly engaged in useful and interesting pursuits’, ‘realiz[ing] all that independence which is proper to humanity’.<sup>388</sup> In a shift of perspective that mirrors the broad historical transition from Revolutionary Amazons in the field to nineteenth-century Angels in the house, Constantia’s radical cameo of the happily unmarried spinster—self-fulfilled and ‘complete’ in her own right—is almost immediately superseded by her sentimental and climactic representation of self-sacrificing motherhood, in a vignette which brings the four-part series to a close:

Where are the powerful emotions of nature? Where is the sentiment, at once sublime and pathetic, that carries every feeling to excess? Is it to be found in the frosty indifference, and the sour severity of some fathers? No—but in the warm and affectionate bosom of a *mother*. It is she, who, by an impulse as quick as involuntary, rushes into the flood to preserve a boy, whose imprudence had betrayed him into the waves—It is she, who, in the middle of a conflagration, throws herself across the flames to save a sleeping infant—It is she, who, with dishevelled locks, pale and distracted, embraces with transport, the body of a dead child, pressing its cold lips to her’s, as if she would reanimate, by her tears and her caresses, the insensible clay. These great expressions of nature—these heart-rending emotions, which fill us at once with wonder, compassion and terror, always have belonged, and always will belong, only to Women. They possess, in those moments, an inexpressible something, which carries them beyond themselves; and they seem to discover to us new souls, above the standard of humanity.<sup>389</sup>

Murray’s Constantia anticipates Wirt’s old bachelor in several respects here. She, too, passes over the nation’s fathers in her search for republican virtue. Scorning the ‘frosty indifference’ and ‘sour severity’ of the patriarch, she looks to the mother for the ‘sentiment’ ‘that carries every feeling to excess’. With her talk of emotional distraction, ‘dishevelled locks’, and tearful, transported embraces,

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<sup>388</sup> *Gleaner*, III, 219-220; III, 222. Abigail Adams provides another example of the self-sufficient ‘husbandwoman’, eager to acquire ‘the Reputation of being as good a Farmeress as my partner has of being a good Statesmen [*sic*]’ (*Adams Family Correspondence*, I, 396-97).

<sup>389</sup> *Gleaner*, III, 224.

Constantia likewise moves away from the essay genre and towards the realm of the sentimental novel, flirting with the extravagant and sensationalised vocabulary of melodrama, and figuring the mother as an over-wrought and eroticised heroine, overcome by an excess of emotion and maternal desire. The life-endangering scenarios that Constantia paints, however, couldn't be further from the cosy, fire-side vignette envisaged by the sentimental old bachelor. Proving her mettle in the dangerous outside world, fighting her way through fire and flood, *The Gleaner's* mother is an action woman for the new republic, a sight designed to 'fill us at once with wonder, compassion and terror'. The 'heart-rending' emotions she feels, however, expose the fractured and potentially painful rite of passage experienced by American women as they outgrow their Revolutionary role of Columbia's daughters and assume the responsibilities of republican motherhood. And the vignette's third and final image makes it clear that the enterprise is fraught with the possibility of failure, as we see the powerless mother beside herself with grief, cradling the 'insensible' corpse of the child she could not save.

Ultimately, though, *The Gleaner's* anonymous mother is beside herself throughout the extract, emptied of individual personality and identified only by the abstract and self-effacing quality of maternal self-sacrifice.<sup>390</sup> Associated with and subsumed by the larger forces of Nature, she comes into her own amid the elements—the rising floodwaters, the burning home, the 'insensible clay' of an infant's corpse—only to be carried 'beyond' herself and into the gendered, generalised realm of 'Women'. An ambiguous panegyric of the ideal American woman, one which erases female personalities even as it elevates female virtues, the final sentence of the series declares that women possess in these moments of

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<sup>390</sup> Nor does Murray herself fare any better. Having introduced herself as 'a plain man' in the opening article of *The Gleaner* and maintained the 'masculine character' throughout the text, she 'unmasks' herself as 'Constantia' in the final column. Despite her claim to 'now take leave of every unnecessary disguise', Judith Sargent Murray still deems it necessary to conceal her own name behind a pseudonym, choosing the well-worn 'Constantia' (III. 314). The personification of an abstract and passive virtue, the name of Constantia was associated with maternal virtue in particular. *Ormond*, for example, makes reference to 'the maternal despair of Constance' (pp. 141-42), Arthur's mother in Shakespeare's *The Life and Death of King John*.

maternal expression, 'an inexpressible something, which carries them beyond themselves', discovering 'new souls, above the standard of humanity'. While the concept of republican fatherhood is centred in one man, embodied in the era's most popular political celebrity, George Washington, republican motherhood remains a one-dimensional, disembodied allegorical ideal, attached to no name, and attributed no personality.

There is a sense in which Dorcasina's own romantic manifesto is not so far removed from Constantia's climactic encomium, for Tenney's heroine echoes both the vocabulary and the sentiment of *The Gleaner*, as she longs to experience 'that fascination, that enchantment, that inexpressible something, which draws the soul along' (FQ, 28). As Cathy Davidson has commented, 'the fictions of her novels and the fictions of her society' are not 'after all, that different from one another',<sup>391</sup> for the matrimonial desires that have 'governed all the actions' (FQ, 324) of Dorcasina's most unorthodox life are themselves conventional enough. But Dorcasina has no desire to conform to the emptied-out female that republican culture extols. Far from endorsing an ideal of feminine self-effacement, Dorcasina's tendency to fall senseless on the floor when things aren't going her way suggests her willingness (like Tenney upon the death of Washington) to turn disempowering expectations of female behaviour to her own advantage. Quite content to be carried away by enamoured suitors, Dorcasina has no desire to be carried 'beyond' herself, to be made over as an abstract virtue or an allegorical shadow. This is a heroine who draws her soul along with her, jealously guarding her right to a personality, clinging to the self-image she has lovingly constructed for herself. Dorcasina runs deeper than the dedication leads us to expect, goes further than Tenney herself had intended, I suspect, out-performing her cautionary role to become the most memorable female character in the fiction of the early republic. Egocentric and exuberant, eccentric and extravagant, Tenney's self-styled romance heroine is, if nothing else, a personality, a local celebrity, a woman with a big wig and an iron will who demands to be seen and heard. In an

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<sup>391</sup> *Revolution and the Word*, p. 189.

era which sees a surplus of Amelias and Constantias, of Harriets and Charlottes, all jostling for the reader's attention, Dorcasina Sheldon is a one-off.

Davidson's assertion that 'Tenney *denies* Dorcasina Everywoman status' (my italics), that 'Every woman who reads *Female Quixotism* is encouraged to see herself as different from what Dorcasina was', fails to acknowledge that differentiation is precisely what Dorcasina desires.<sup>392</sup> Undeterred by the fact she is 'a middling kind of person', unpromisingly 'like the greater part of her countrywomen' (FQ, 5), Dorcasina does everything in her power to set herself apart from her countrywomen, to avoid becoming the abstract and de-personalised 'Everywoman' defined by Davidson, the Everymother admired by *The Gleaner*, or the Everywife extolled by Seymore towards the end of *Female Quixotism*, when he claims that Dorcasina is 'the exact counterpart' of his late 'angel wife' (FQ, 302). Taking her manners, her behaviour, and her expectations from the novels she reads, Dorcasina, in effect, produces a Platonic conception of herself, inventing just the sort of romance heroine that a seventeen year old girl would be likely to invent. Adding a 'romantic termination' to her 'unfashionable and unromantic name' (FQ, 6), plain old Dorcas grows into the fanciful, girlish Dorcasina: more memorable and certainly more of a mouthful, the lengthier name seems entirely appropriate for the larger than life Miss Sheldon, a woman committed to making the most of herself.<sup>393</sup>

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<sup>392</sup> *Revolution and the Word*, p. 190.

<sup>393</sup> It would appear that Dorcas Sheldon's name change was not entirely unprecedented in the period. During a heated discussion on names in Sarah Wood's *Dorval*, Burlington asserts that 'it was by no means uncommon for ladies to change their names, if they were not perfectly agreeable, and perfectly modish', and Miss Barton does not believe 'this folly is peculiar to our sex'. She knows 'a gentleman, whose name was Hosea, and who substituted that of Henry'. The sensible Mrs Monsue, who has herself changed her name several times over the years, wants to save her own new born child 'from so great a folly', and determines to 'give it a name that is soft and easy, and not liable to change'. Ironically, the only names they can conceive 'that would not admit of alteration' are 'Patience, or Dorcas, or Faithful, which were all too unpleasant to be admitted' (pp. 77-78). Who can blame Tenney's protagonist, then, for wanting to alter a name that even the most sensible of American women condemns as too unpleasant to be admitted?

While *The Female Quixote*'s Arabella surrounds herself with 'her Women', and likens herself to Statira, Clelia, and 'the divine *Mandana*' with monotonous predictability, Dorcasina is thoroughly unwilling to share the narrative limelight with any other would-be heroines, fictional or otherwise.<sup>394</sup> She may name the Stanly's baby for all three of the heroines in *Sir Charles Grandison*, but Harriet Clementina Charlotte is conveniently bundled out of the story in Chapter Three, and doesn't return to the village of L— until Book II is well underway.<sup>395</sup> Indeed, the novel can be read as a series of vanishing acts, as female figures who resemble Dorcasina repeatedly find themselves written out of the narrative. After Harriet Stanly, then, comes the prostitute in the grove, who is mistaken for 'the lovely Miss Sheldon' (FQ, 35) by O'Connor, and is carried to the village inn with a view to immediate marriage. When the Irishman discovers the mix up, his unfortunate paramour is soon kicked out of the inn, and when Dorcasina learns of his mistake she is none too pleased, either. 'It did not enter into her imagination how he could have been so grossly deceived' (FQ, 35), and, already turned 'out of doors, in no very genteel manner', Dorcasina's doppelganger is turned out of the text with no less ceremony, dismissed as a 'worthless' creature (FQ, 36) in Chapter Six, and never referred to again. The unsuspecting Miss Violet, Scipio's 'favourite in the village' (FQ, 59), receives the same treatment in Chapter Nine. During the course of a nocturnal assignation in the Sheldon summerhouse, O'Connor mistakes Miss Violet for his own 'angelic mistress', drops 'on one knee', and pours forth 'a torrent of words in the usual style' (FQ, 53). 'Mortified and disappointed beyond measure' (FQ, 54) by this ignominious displacement, Dorcasina once again disposes of an unwitting rival by excising her from the rest of the book. The dedicatory letter informs us that Miss Sheldon herself has favoured the compiler 'with a minute account of her adventures' (FQ, 3); calling the narrative shots, then, determining what gets

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<sup>394</sup> *Female Quixote*, p. 31; p. 185.

<sup>395</sup> When Miss Stanly does return, her name too has changed, albeit subtly, from Harriet to Harriot. To avoid inconsistency, I use the original spelling throughout my discussion of the text.



told—and what doesn't—Dorcasina can ensure that the drama she relates has just the one leading lady.

Only once does Dorcasina claim kinship with the fictional counterparts from her books, in Chapter Twelve, when she declares that 'to find herself precisely in the situation of many sister heroines afforded her more consolation' than 'she could have derived from any other source' (FQ, 80). Her profession rings hollow, however: while the names of Arabella's 'sisters' resound like a proto-feminist mantra through *The Female Quixote*, Dorcasina's story names no names whatsoever; the very figures she has drawn upon to model her own idealised self have been erased from the text. Indeed, the very next chapter sees Dorcasina openly reject 'the books, in which she had formerly taken such delight', and ask instead for the letters of O'Connor, since '*they* may possibly afford me some consolation' (FQ, 93). Another fiction masquerading as biography—O'Connor's description of his life and professions of love are actually a pack of lies—and interspersed throughout the early chapters of *Female Quixotism*, O'Connor's correspondence has been collected by Dorcasina and closeted within her bureau. She has 'got them arranged in perfect order, tied with a silken string, and wrapped in a cover, upon which was written these words, *Letters from my dearest O'Connor before marriage*' (FQ, 93). Dorcasina plays a number of parts in relation to the *Collected Letters* of Patrick O'Connor: the compiler who has arranged the text in perfect order, the printer who has bound it in a silken string, and the publisher who has chosen its title; Dorcasina is also the enthusiastic reader who pores over the cherished work. Most importantly, of course, she is the heroine of the tale. Just as the *Letters* are a one-woman show, Dorcasina does her best to ensure that *Female Quixotism* is also hers alone. 'A very *singular* and extraordinary piece of biography' according to the dedication (FQ, 3; emphasis mine), it stands as the public recognition of one woman's life that Tabitha Gilman Tenney—another extraordinary woman—never saw.

Both Mr Sheldon and Mr Stanly do their best to keep Dorcasina in the home and out of the public eye, to 'bury' her adventures 'in silence and oblivion' (FQ, 150), keeping her person and her particulars within the 'very confined and

very limited bounds' that are both described and transgressed by Wood in her preface to *Julia and the Illuminated Baron*. While Captain Farrago's Westward trajectory permits him to re-invent himself as 'the governor' of a frontier town, and Updike Underhill's Eastbound voyage to Algiers enables him to make his name as both a doctor and a man of letters, Dorcasina is constrained to undertake her self-fashioning enterprise upon her doorstep and under her father's nose. Her journeys to the grove effectively expose the permeability of the private and the public spheres, as she crosses and re-crosses the so-called 'domestic line' in a most unconventional fashion. Although described as Mr Sheldon's grove, and situated 'behind her father's house', Dorcasina's 'retired' and 'sequestered grove' (FQ, 18; 32; 49) is peopled by a number of extra-familial characters during the course of the narrative. 'It was no uncommon thing', we are told, 'for the people in the vicinity to amuse themselves by walking in the grove', and as well as the various confidence men who lie in wait for Dorcasina there, we see the local street-walker, the village inn-keeper, and 'three or four of the village maidens' (FQ, 19; 100) enjoying the benefits of what would appear to be the local beauty spot. And although out of doors—well known for its 'cool breezes', and prone to dampness in the evening—the grove is simultaneously figured as an 'interior' space by Dorcasina, a 'sequestered scene', though one that the heroine nonetheless goes 'forward to explore' (FQ, 100; 25). Private property that resembles a public park, an out of doors location that characters nonetheless go *into*, a domestic space that demands to be explored, the grove blurs the boundaries between home and away, house and town, the known and the new.

Visited at dusk, and described by Sharon Harris as 'the grove-frontier',<sup>396</sup> the liminal grove becomes the creative locus and narrative centre of the text. Dorcasina meets her suitors in the arbour, finds her name scratched upon the trees, and posts her love letters in their branches. It is in the grove that her romantic notions are fuelled by the fictions of O'Connor and Smith/Philander, and carnivalesque cross-dressing abounds as she pushes against the boundaries of acceptable female identity and expected female propriety. Ever the lovelorn maid,

<sup>396</sup> Harris, 'Lost Boundaries', p. 220.

Dorcasina orders her female servant, Betty, to borrow Mr Sheldon's clothes and impersonate the absent O'Connor, while Puff the barber and Smith 'the mischief loving scholar' take it in turns to enter the grove in the guise of an 'enraged virago', masquerading as a female rival for Philander's love (FQ, 116; 115). Significantly, though, as the grove becomes for all the world a stage, and the 'sequestered scene' begins to bear an uncanny resemblance to the shape-shifting forests of Shakespearean comedy (even the respectable Mr Stanly has a walk-on part, crossing class lines rather than gender boundaries in his disguise as one of Montague's henchmen), Dorcasina alone remains in character, undisguised and untainted by dishonesty, true to the self she has worked so hard to construct.

Dorcasina's self-fashioning seldom goes unpunished, though, and her trips to the grove invariably lead to injury or imprisonment. Sheldon reprimands his daughter for 'hazarding her health, by staying so late in the grove' (FQ, 110), and twilight excursions see her repeatedly catching cold and being 'confined' (FQ, 19) to her chamber for extended periods. Moreover, as Dorcasina's intellectual 'vagaries' (FQ, 229) return with even greater force in Book II, her physical confinements become both longer and more pronounced. Abducted from the grove by Philander in Book I, she is detained for a matter of hours in a farmhouse a couple of miles from home. In Book II, a parallel adventure sees her kidnapped by Mr Stanly, who intends to separate her from the books 'which have deranged her ideas', and the lower-class lover who threatens to derange the social hierarchy by marrying 'the first lady' of the village (FQ, 277; 96). Once again she is snatched from the grove and carried to a farmhouse, but this time it is 'forty miles distant from L—, very obscurely situated in the interior of the country', and becomes her prison for 'a twelvemonth' period (FQ, 277). This sequestration in the Pennsylvanian 'interior' in turn threatens a more menacing incarceration when Dorcasina is courted by Seymore, who plans to 'gain her consent to become his wife', and 'afterwards keep her confined' in order to 'enjoy her property' (FQ, 298). The same grove that promises to fulfil her self-fashioning fantasies, then, simultaneously threatens her liberty, but Dorcasina is 'by no means displeased' with such events. Instead, she perceives 'something so charmingly romantic in

thus being carried off by force' (FQ, 131), that such abductions actually reinforce her idealised sense of self.

Dorcasina's two trips into the village, however, leave no room for such romantic interpretations. The 'disastrous termination' (FQ, 60) of these excursions into the public eye sees the heroine roundly punished for daring to cross the domestic line. The first transgression comes in Book I, where Dorcasina borrows Betty's clothes and visits a badly injured O'Connor in his rooms at a public house. Leaving the premises, she is almost raped by 'a shrewd Irish servant, possessed of as much impudence as his countryman, O'Connor' (FQ, 59). Foiled in his attempt, however, the 'unmannerly stranger' satisfies himself by setting a pack of schoolboys upon her, and a terrified Dorcasina is chased all the way to the Stanlys' front door, discovered 'in tatters' by Mrs Stanly, 'stript' of her clothes, and 'senseless upon the floor' (FQ, 60).

Her clandestine visit crosses the 'domestic line' in more than one sense. As well as venturing out of the home and into the public house, she has come to visit an Irish beau, 'a foreigner, whom nobody knows' (FQ, 76). Already contaminating the new republic with the degenerate Old World romances she devours, Dorcasina's romance with the unknown and un-American O'Connor is perceived to pose an even greater threat to the moral well-being of the nation. Harrison Gray Otis had already warned his compatriots against inviting 'hordes of Wild Irishmen' to 'come here with a view to distract our tranquility',<sup>397</sup> and the narrator of *Female Quixotism* likewise discourses upon the 'mischiefs' that 'have been occasioned to this country by its being an asylum to European convicts, fugitives from justice, and other worthless characters' (FQ, 17). Substantiating the anti-Alien sentiments of the Adams administration—and indeed of the author's Federalist husband—the incident invites alarmist readings: if unruly Europeans cannot gain America with her consent, they are prepared to take her by force; should this stratagem fail, they will stir up dissent and incite America's rising generation to ruin its own administration.

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<sup>397</sup> Quoted in Gary B. Nash, *The American People: Creating a Nation and a Society* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), p. 254.

Dorcasina's second spectacular clash with the village occurs in Book II, as an afternoon ride with John Brown takes an unexpected turn when her horse runs out of control. Unable 'to check his career', she gallops through the village, leaving behind her hat and her wig, and exposing for all to see 'her head undecked even by a single hair' (FQ, 256; 257). Echoing William Cowper's presumptuous John Gilpin, and anticipating the feverish ride of Washington Irving's headless horseman, Tenney's hairless horsewoman races right through the sleepy, Pennsylvanian hollow of L—:

The doors and windows were filled with women and children, as she passed, and all that saw her stood amazed at the singularity of the phenomenon. Some stared, some hallooed, and some were frightened. Some, more ignorant and superstitious than the rest, thought the appearance supernatural, and, having heard of witches riding through the air on broomsticks, concluded that this was one, who chose to be conveyed in a less elevated manner. (FQ, 257)

Like Arthur Mervyn before her, Dorcasina is another quixote who travels in a less than elevated manner. But unlike Arthur Mervyn, as she strives to assert both herself and her claims to social and geographical mobility, Dorcasina is divested of identity and volition. Unrecognised by the villagers, she is denied the deference her rank entitles her to, and the threefold cranial loss (head-dress, wig, hair) suggests that the first lady of L— is denuded of her reason as well as her womanhood and her 'elevated' social status. Appearing in public with a servant, transgressing the domestic line that sustains the upstairs/downstairs hierarchy, Dorcasina's punishment fits the crime, with a public humiliation that parodies her claims to mobility. Paraded through the village and propelled against her will back home, she is subjected to public scorn and deposited 'speechless' on the ground outside her house, a fallen heroine, placed squarely back in her proper place.

S. E. Farley's 'Domestic and Social Claims on Women' would maintain that 'St. Paul knew what was best for women when he advised them to be domestic [...] There is composure at home; there is something sedative in the duties which home involves. It affords security not only from the world, but from

delusions and errors of every kind'.<sup>398</sup> Read in isolation from the rest of the text, Dorcasina's disastrous forays into the outside world suggest that she, too, would have been better off staying at home. Read within a wider narrative context, however, their message is not so straightforward, for *Female Quixotism* makes it clear that reading in isolation is at the root of Dorcasina's romantic delusions. 'Born and educated in retirement', 'brought up in such retirement', 'educated in retirement and totally unacquainted with the ways of the world' (FQ, 47; 45; 6), Tenney's heroine is unprepared to read contextually, and ill-equipped to deal with designing subtexts. Unable to penetrate the double-edged words and actions of those more knowing than herself, Dorcasina's domestic retirement renders her an easy target for an 'impudent impostor' (FQ, 48) like O'Connor or a practical joker like Philander. Her father realises all too late that her 'retired manner of life, and almost total ignorance of the world' has led her to judge those she meets by the misleading standards of her 'own virtuous and unsuspecting heart' (FQ, 147).

### ***Bad Ends***

There is certainly a sense in which Tenney saves the most 'disastrous termination' of all for the end of the text, where 'the romantic spell' is 'all at once broken', and Dorcasina reflects, 'with extreme disgust, upon many parts of her past life' (FQ, 317). In her closing letter to Harriet Barry, she bitterly laments the single state in which she finds herself, whereby 'instead of being a matron, rendering a worthy man happy, surrounded by a train of amiable children, educated in virtuous principles, and formed by our mutual cares and examples to virtuous habits, and of promoting and participating in the happiness of the social circle, in which we might be placed, I am now, in the midst of the wide world, solitary, neglected, and despised' (FQ, 324). Unable to fulfil the domestic roles of republican wife and mother, Dorcasina is also denied cultural acceptance, excluded from the wider, 'social circle' that republican mothers enjoy. Indeed, the very structure of her complaint compounds the disparity between the 'matron' she could have been and

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<sup>398</sup> Quoted in Barbara Welter, 'The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860', *AQ*, 18 (1966), 151-74 (p. 162).

the ‘singular’ spinster she is. Standing proudly at the head of the sentence, the matron is followed first by the worthy husband, secondly by the train of amiable children, and thirdly by the welcoming social circle. Dorcasina’s ‘I’, meanwhile—almost lost ‘in the midst’ of the complex syntactical web that precedes it—is trailed by just three lonely adjectives. Dorcasina’s ‘fate is singular’ indeed, for ‘her dearest friends being separated from her by death or removal, she found herself alone, as it were, on the earth’ (FQ, 323; 322).

The letter that closes the narrative, however, is as double-edged as the dedicatory epistle at the start, and though the ‘termination’ of *Female Quixotism* is far from ‘romantic’, it need not be read as ‘disastrous’. Dorcasina’s narrative may not end with marriage banns, but at least it doesn’t end with an epitaph. In this respect it is most unlike *The Coquette*, and most unlike Cervantes’ own Part II, where the knight is unequivocally killed off in order to avoid any further bogus sequels. Preserving intact the most outrageous, and by far the oldest, literary heroine of early US fiction, the open-endedness of *Female Quixotism* undermines the potential for moral as well as narrative closure, precluding any graveside sermons by the moralistic compiler and leaving open the possibility that Dorcasina’s ‘old vagaries’ will return with a vengeance once again. Her initial lament concluded, Dorcas turns to her future plans, which she has ‘sketched out’ for herself ‘in order to avoid becoming a female cynic, or sinking into a state of total apathy’:

My income is considerable, and my expenses comparatively small [...] It is, therefore, my intention to seek out proper objects of charity, principally among those who, by misfortunes, and without any blameable misconduct of their own, have been reduced from opulent or easy circumstances to indigence; and to bestow on them what I have no occasion to use myself. (FQ, 324)

Economically independent and publicly minded, Tenney’s heroine once again reinvents herself, this time as a philanthropist, a role that will finally enable her to

go public with impunity.<sup>399</sup> As Margaret Morris Haviland has demonstrated, the first charitable organisations in Philadelphia (dating from the period 1790-1810) were operated entirely by unmarried women, who established benevolent societies at the same time as they ‘created a new role for themselves’, in the public eye, and ‘beyond women’s sphere’.<sup>400</sup> Even Dorcasina’s name reversal sees her wilfully move beyond a woman’s sphere. Addressing her married friend as ‘my dear Mrs. Barry’, Tenney’s heroine signs her own name ‘Dorcas Sheldon’ at the end of the text, dropping both the female title, ‘Miss’, and the feminine suffix, ‘-ina’, from her name (FQ, 326). What’s more, no longer a female quixote, she is determined at all costs ‘to avoid becoming a female cynic’, determined above all else to slough off the restrictive epithet of ‘female’ that proliferates on title pages in the early years of the nineteenth century. Read alongside *The Female Advocate* (1801) and *The Female American* (1767; first US publication 1800), *The Female Enthusiast* (1807) and *The Female Mariner* (1817), the title of her story is revealing. An abstract noun as opposed to a personification, ‘*Female Quixotism*’ separates the character trait from the character; it divides and distances the abstract noun from the actual protagonist, un-fixing the female character and enabling her to move beyond the limits of a pre-defined personality. This may be the story of Dorcasina’s quixotism, but Dorcas can and does change; she need not be forever ‘The Female Quixote’.

Dorcasina’s last minute awakening is half-hearted to say the least, however, and marks a significant break with traditions of quixotic literature. She

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<sup>399</sup> Very similar to Arthur Mervyn in some respects, Dorcasina Sheldon is another philanthropist from rural Pennsylvania who tells her tale in the parlours of Philadelphia and takes up her own story in the final pages of the book. In contrast with Dorcasina, however, the end of *Arthur Mervyn* sees Arthur’s virtue become increasingly private and inward-looking.

<sup>400</sup> ‘Beyond Women’s Sphere: Young Quaker Women and the Veil of Charity in Philadelphia, 1790-1810’, *WMQ*, 51 (1994), 419-446 (p. 419). For Samuel Miller, however, ‘Female Charitable Associations’ represent ‘a grand aera in the history of the female sex, and of mankind. When females are thus associated and thus employed, they are pre-eminently acting in character. They are moving in a sphere which is peculiarly their own’ (*Princeton Pulpit*, p. 26). Dorcasina’s philanthropic intentions, then, are characteristically ambiguous.



neither dies denouncing romance nor gets married off to a common-sensical husband, and the disillusionment she experiences is not so much with the books she reads as with the life she is expected to lead. She acknowledges the fictional status of the novels she adores, but continues to read them nonetheless, experiencing ‘the same relish, the same enthusiasm as ever’, and dividing her indictments pretty evenly between the ‘pernicious volumes’ that ‘inspire illusory expectations’ (FQ, 325) of American life, and the disappointing reality of a US republic that fails to fulfil the expectations it has instilled in its female citizens. The sense of loss in the closing letter is tangible. Dorcasina has had her dream snatched from her, and awoken to confront a dystopic and deeply unsatisfying way of life, one where ‘the most exemplary virtue will not secure its possessors from the common calamities of life’, and where people are expected to bear ‘with equanimity and resignation, the portion of evil which the wisdom of providence shall see fit to allot them’. ‘Ideas of happiness [...] can never be realized’, Dorcas concludes, ‘particularly in the connubial state’ (FQ, 325). Believe the republican propaganda, and marriage is the doorway to motherhood and self-fulfilment; witness the experiences of a Harriet Barry—another of Tenney’s ‘middling’ American women—and the home is a precarious place to be. Who can blame Dorcasina for wanting to linger a little longer in the grove?

In choosing Don Quixote for her literary model, Tenney had deployed the most contested of literary figures. Ultimately, then, *Female Quixotism*’s most disruptive potential lies in its own propensity to be misread. The dedication may have introduced the text as a satire on ‘the unrestrained perusal of Novels and Romances’, but there were clearly those who did, as the compiler feared they would, suspect it to ‘be a mere romance’, written in the mould of, and in thrall to, the self-same genre it professed to despise (FQ, 3). There are certainly several moments when ‘the compiler’ seems to be a willing accessory to Dorcasina’s romantic fantasies. It is the narrator, and not Dorcasina, who extravagantly styles the first of the suitors ‘Lysander’, and the presence of free-indirect discourse—‘at length the setting-sun admonished her that it was time to retire, though she was surprised when she observed that luminary sinking into the lap of Thetis’ (FQ, 7;

27)—likewise blurs the boundary between the satirist and her subject, as the narrator herself appears to romanticise the twilight scene. Elizabeth Dow Leonard, while claiming not to have read the text herself, recalls in *A Few Reminiscences of My Exeter Life* that ‘those who did read it pronounced it superlatively silly’. Indeed, Leonard’s claim that Tenney herself ‘tried in after years to recall it without success’,<sup>401</sup> is a sign, perhaps, that *Female Quixotism* was not being read in the way that Tenney had publicly intended, that it was being read as far less than—or indeed more than—the republican critique of romance reading that it claimed to be. For where Elizabeth Leonard’s Exeter acquaintances saw an embarrassed author and a ‘superlatively silly’ piece of fiction, the *Monthly Anthology* saw a ‘respectable tome’ and an ‘ingenious author’, a Cervantes for the new republic, who had ‘almost out-quixoted Don Quixote’.<sup>402</sup> I would prefer to read Samuel Tenney’s exemplary wife as the ‘respectable author’ of an ‘ingenious tome’, a tome with a subtext that designedly and assuredly outs the quixotic ideals and inappropriate expectations peddled to women at the turn of the new Jeffersonian century.

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<sup>401</sup> *A Few Reminiscences*, p. 48.

<sup>402</sup> *Monthly Anthology* (1808), p. 498.

## **7. The Underwhelming History of America's Overbearing Fathers: *A History of New York, From the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty***

TRUE, my friends, no children of his loins lifted their little arms and raised their suffused eyes around his dying bed, to catch a father's last blessing; but WASHINGTON was not childless; he was the father of his country, the parent of millions; and who is there so mean among you, that is not of the happy number?

Royall Tyler, 'An Oration on the Death of George Washington' (1800)

In Book VII of *A History of New York*, Dutch governor and military quixote, Peter Stuyvesant, travels through New England to a hero's welcome, riding high upon a 'foundered Narraganset pacer' and accompanied by his loyal squire and 'lusty' trumpeter, Anthony Van Corlear (HNY, 688). Diedrich Knickerbocker slyly remarks upon 'the joy which many strapping wenches betrayed, at beholding the jovial Van Corlear, who had whilome delighted them so much with his trumpet' on a previous journey through the region. Kissing them all 'with infinite loving kindness', Corlear is 'right pleased to see a crew of little trumpeters crowding around him for his blessing; each of whom he patted on the head, bade him be a good boy, and gave him a penny to buy molasses candy' (HNY, 688). Antony's illegitimate brood is anomalous within the context of Knickerbocker's ageing Dutch colony. As in Tabitha Tenney's *Female Quixotism*, children barely figure in Washington Irving's early work, and when they do appear they bring with them awkward questions about the nature of their patrimonial inheritance.

When we trace the professional career of Antony Van Corlear, the figure that emerges is a model of deference: here is a squire who demands no rights,

voices no opinions, and remains loyal to his betters. Antony the Trumpeter is every Federalist's dream in a Jeffersonian world where social hierarchies are crumbling, the balance of power is shifting, and the educated elite are finding themselves surplus to requirement, unwanted and out of work. Antony is passed down from William the Testy to Peter the Headstrong, dismissed from public duty by the latter and re-hired in a personal capacity as the governor's 'chief favourite, confidential envoy and trusty squire' (HNY, 570). Seamlessly transferring his obedience from one governor to the next, the unquestioning Corlear is loyal to authority above all else. He is another 'trumpeter of the Order',<sup>403</sup> and one who eschews the loquacity of the Sancho Panza stereotype, for when the introductions are over, this 'short hand speaker' (HNY, 645) barely utters a word. His trumpet sounds repeatedly, but behind the brass stands a silent side-kick, one who blows when he's told and goes where he's told. Peter the Headstrong enters into battle with 'his faithful squire Van Corlear, trudging valiantly at his heels'—most unlike Farrago's unruly side-kick, Teague O'Regan—and he describes Corlear as 'his faithful dog—the sole companion of his lonely journeying, who had shared his solitary meal, who had so often licked his hand in humble gratitude, who had lain in his bosom, and been unto him as a child'.<sup>404</sup>

When we look beyond Corlear's profession, and focus upon his private life instead, a rather different figure emerges. Here we see a self-reliant and libidinous trumpeter who is himself a father, surrounded by his own crew of adoring little sons. Antony's unconventional brand of fatherhood, however, unashamedly flies in the face of republican ideology. In 1807, John Adams had defined the Bible as 'the most republican book in the world', and declared its 'curses against fornication and adultery, and the prohibition of every wanton glance or libidinous ogle at a woman [...] to be the only system that ever did or ever will preserve a republic in the world'; the 'virtuous union' of marriage was

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<sup>403</sup> This was the accusation that Thomas Paine had levelled at Edmund Burke in his *Rights of Man* (p. 20).

<sup>404</sup> HNY, 649; 709. Paul Auster configures the Sancho-Quixote relationship as that of a dog and his master in *Timbuktu*, with the figures of Mr Bones and his owner, Willy G. Christmas.

sanctioned by numerous articles and anecdotes in conduct books and newspapers across the continent, and Jan Lewis has described the husband-wife partnership as ‘the very pattern from which the cloth of republican society was to be cut’;<sup>405</sup> yet in Antony the Trumpeter we see the playful approbation of an absentee father who has avoided marriage and evaded responsibility for his sons. Within the context of Knickerbocker’s New Amsterdam, Antony’s progeny are equally controversial: engendered by a series of Anglo-Dutch alliances—the squire from New Amsterdam has ‘bundled’ his way across New England—the children represent transgressions of the national boundaries and cultural divisions so carefully guarded by the Dutch colonists. Offering readers a creative alternative to the anti-Yankee purism of the Dutch and initiating a transnational vision of North America’s future, the fecundity of the squire provides a suggestive contrast with the childless world of Irving’s superannuated quixotes.<sup>406</sup>

Although he would come to be known as the ‘Father of American Literature’, Washington Irving—born in 1783 and named for General George Washington—was himself a member of the early republic’s rising generation. Indeed, one of Irving’s earliest and most enduring memories involved a filial encounter with his namesake, on the streets of New York town:

When walking with me in Broadway, [my nurse] espied him in a shop,  
she seized my hand and darting in, exclaimed in her bland Scotch:—

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<sup>405</sup> Adams, from a letter to Benjamin Rush (2 February, 1807), in *Spur of Fame*, p. 76; *The Columbian Magazine*, 1 (1787), 244, quoted in Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims*, p. 127; Lewis, p. 689.

<sup>406</sup> Irving’s quixotic characters are usually confirmed bachelors, though *Salmagundi*’s Christopher Cockloft is an exception. Launcelot Langstaff informs his readers that ‘the fertility of the Cocklofts is proverbial’, and the ‘family hive’ has produced ‘many a redundant swarm’ (S, 263). But Irving has an uncanny talent for delivering the darkest of tales in the lightest of tones: Christopher Cockloft’s ‘family is small, having lost most of his children when young, by the excessive care he took to bring them up like vegetables [...] The consequence was, the poor little souls died one after the other’, and those who have survived their childhood are, not surprisingly, ‘a trio of as odd, *runty*, mummy looking originals as ever Hogarth fancied in his most happy moments’ (S, 128-29).

“Please, your Excellency, here’s a bairn that’s called after ye!” General Washington then turned his benevolent face full upon me, smiled, laid his hand upon my head, and gave me his blessing, which [...] I have reason to believe, has attended me through life. I was but five years old, yet I can feel that hand upon my head even now.<sup>407</sup>

Irving’s self-affirmative recollection of the childhood encounter was a testimony both to the General’s fatherly good will and to the author’s life-long gratitude, and would not have seemed out of place in Mason Locke Weems’s best-selling biography of Washington, a folksy, anecdotal, and shamelessly apocryphal, panegyric of Washington the private man.<sup>408</sup> Though the anecdote itself found no place in Irving’s own, more formal history of the *Life of George Washington* (1855-59), its tone of filial esteem nonetheless pervaded the work, as exemplified in Irving’s concluding remarks:

The fame of Washington stands apart from every other in history; shining with a truer lustre and a more benignant glory. With us his memory remains a national property, where all sympathies throughout our widely-extended and diversified empire meet in unison. Under all dissensions and amid all the storms of party, his precepts and example speak to us from the grave with a paternal appeal; and his name—by all revered—forms a universal tie of brotherhood—a watchword of our Union.<sup>409</sup>

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<sup>407</sup> Evert A. Duyckinck, ‘Memoranda of the Literary Career of Washington Irving’, in *Irvingiana: A Memorial of Washington Irving* (New York: Richardson, 1860), pp. 5-22 (p. 5). The anecdote had previously appeared in the *Buffalo Courier* in 1853. With Irving’s nurse standing in for his mother, and George Washington assuming the role of a surrogate father, the real Mr and Mrs Irving are conspicuously absent from this scene of republican parenthood.

<sup>408</sup> The opening chapter of Weems’s *The Life of Washington* (1800) asserts that ‘it is not then in the glare of *public*, but in the shade of *private life*, that we are to look for the man. Private life is always *real life*’ (ed. by Marcus Cunliffe [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962], p. 2). In contrast, Irving’s preface to his *Life of George Washington* stated that ‘Washington, in fact, had very little private life, but was eminently a public character’ (*Life of Washington* [vols 1 and 2], ed. by Allen Guttman and James A. Sappenfield [Boston: Twayne, 1982], in *The Complete Works of Washington Irving*, XIX, 2).

<sup>409</sup> *Life of George Washington* (vols 4 and 5), ed. by Allen Guttman and James A. Sappenfield (Boston: Twayne, 1982), in *The Complete Works of Washington Irving*, XXI, 475.

Written by an ailing biographer, and evincing a sentimental attachment to a long-gone American past, Irving's *Life of George Washington* was content to repeat the clichéd myth of the patriarchal president, the Father of his Nation, whose very name was a 'watchword' for unity, and whose exemplary history was strong enough to silence sectarian squabbles from beyond the grave. And we wonder to what extent the aged Irving felt a more than nominal kinship with Washington: neither man had children but both were symbolic patriarchs, one the father of American independence, the other by now the grand old daddy of American fiction. Half a century earlier, however, in the *magnum opus* of a younger, more irreverent Irving, the fictional patriarchs were not so revered, and nor were the filial heads so blessed.

### ***Founding Histories and Irving's Bloated Tale***

In 1789, Thomas Jefferson had assured James Madison that 'no society can make a perpetual constitution, or even a perpetual law. The earth belongs always to the living generation'.<sup>410</sup> In the opening decades of the nineteenth century, however, the living generation seemed extremely anxious to hear what the dead had to say. Frederick Beasley's *American Dialogues of the Dead* (1814) even purported to relay advice from beyond the grave from founding figures such as Alexander Hamilton, George Washington, and Fisher Ames. The life of George Washington and the history of the Revolution were the favourite subjects of historians; Mercy Otis Warren published her *History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the American Revolution* in 1805, and Benjamin Trumbull published his *General History of the United States of America* in 1810. Following the death of Washington and the close of the Revolutionary century, historiography played a crucial part in shoring up the young republic. Re-interpreting the events of the Revolution to accord with the concept of republican virtue, historians sought to construct an official and definitive history of the nation, to situate American independence within a greater Providential order, and to re-cement an already fractured Union, all the while instructing America's rising generation in the

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<sup>410</sup> Letter to Madison (6 September, 1789), in *Writings*, p. 963.

republican precepts of its founding fathers. These are the loudly-vaunted and oft-repeated historiographical objectives that Irving's *History* sets out to burlesque.<sup>411</sup>

In 1806, Stephen Carpenter's *Monthly Register, Magazine, and Review of the United States* serialised a detailed 'Retrospective History' of the American Revolution. Having declared the founding of the United States to be a 'glorious monument of the virtue, the patriotism, and the wisdom' of Americans, the 'Retrospective History' earnestly averred that the 'business' of history was 'to record truth', its 'object' to 'convey instruction', and that 'to put the event upon the solid footing of undeniable historical truth, to develope [sic] the means, and to perpetuate the memory of those by whom it was effected, is the duty of the chronicler of the present day, and is the purpose of the present attempt'.<sup>412</sup> As good as its word, the 'Retrospective History' made use of 'indubitable evidence' from both sides of the Atlantic and comprehensively worked its way through the detailed ins and outs of colonial conventions and cabinet re-shuffles. By the end of the year, however, it had only got as far as 1774, and the history was 'entirely dropped' from succeeding volumes, due to 'the very few pages, which can be devoted to it, once a month'.<sup>413</sup>

*A History of New York* would enjoy poking fun at grand designs like this, elaborately conceived structures (whether historiographical, architectural, or philosophical) that never made it to completion; it would also go out of its way to discredit the possibility of 'undeniable historical truth'. Its indefinite title acknowledged the possibility of other histories, other New Yorks, at a time when the majority of histories were resolutely definite in their articles and their

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<sup>411</sup> Edward Watts has also suggested that *A History* 'thoroughly satirizes the first generation of American historians', though he has argued that 'Irving's targets were the American practitioners of Enlightenment historiography', who failed to recognise that 'Enlightenment history could not account for the newness of the country or its difference from European models' (p. 167; p. 148).

<sup>412</sup> 'Retrospective History', *The Monthly Register, Magazine, and Review of the United States*, 1, Part I (1806), 1-21; 49-69; 89-104; 129-150; 161-176; 208-222; 241-253; 265-281; 289-306; 313-330; 337-351; 361-375 (p. 21; p. 1).

<sup>413</sup> 'Preface to the Second Volume of the Register', *Monthly Register*, 2 (1807), iii-iv (p. iv).



pedagogic aims.<sup>414</sup> From *The History of the Prodigal Son* (1813) to *The History of Mother Twaddle* (1809), *The History of the American Revolution* (1805) to *The History of a Pin* (1802), a determinate ‘the’ brought with it an air of authority, authenticity and exactitude.<sup>415</sup> Denying its audience a solid footing, Irving’s mischievous title seems determined to mislead the reader, for the narrative that follows does not relate a history of New York at all, but a history of New Amsterdam. Indeed, the arrival of the new name, and the British army that accompanies it, actually signals the close of *A History*; it puts an end to the virtual ‘terra incognita’ of Dutch-America,<sup>416</sup> and marks the beginning of the official, documented and knowable history of the new British colony.

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<sup>414</sup> Notable exceptions include Benjamin Trumbull’s *A General History of the United States of America* (1810), and the first four editions of Weems’s biography of Washington, all called *A History, of the Life and Death, Virtues, and Exploits, of General George Washington* (1800). The fifth edition of 1806, however, saw the work reissued as *The Life of Washington the Great*, and the sixth edition (1808) was published as *The Life of George Washington*.

<sup>415</sup> The polysemous potential of the letter ‘A’ would be realised again in the custom house of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, where the character is exhumed from the ‘rubbish’ of history (p. 29) and embodied in the ‘rag of scarlet cloth’ (p. 31). Stirring the imagination and compelling the writer to move beyond the ‘authorized’ and ‘authenticated’ document of Surveyor Pue (p. 32), the scarlet letter works against the official history of Salem, defiantly flouting the iron-fisted authority of Puritan New England. Perceived as a ‘riddle’ with ‘some deep meaning in it’, a ‘mystic symbol’ that evades ‘analysis’ (p. 31), the scarlet letter invites interpretation, precludes definition, and flies in the face of exactitude. Faced with this evocative letter, Hawthorne would—like Irving before him—reject ‘dull and commonplace’ historiography for an alternative kind of history (p. 37), one composed of shadows and suggestions, of ambiguities and occlusions.

<sup>416</sup> *A History of New York*, ed. by Michael L. Black and Nancy B. Black (Boston: Twayne, 1984), in *The Complete Works of Washington Irving*, VII, 3. This edition reproduces the 1848 edition of *A History*, which saw the first appearance of ‘The Author’s Apology’ and the insertion of 1809 advertisements for the book. Irving remained reluctant to settle his New York account, revising, re-writing and updating the text in 1812, 1819, 1824, 1829, and 1848. His attempts to keep contemporary allusions as timely as possible suggests that *A History* was always as much about New York present as New York past.

William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy* (1789), the first novel to have been both written and published in America, instructed its readers to 'habituate your mind to remark the difference between truth and fiction', with an end to seeing through 'the meretricious *dress* of a pleasing tale'.<sup>417</sup> For this particular storyteller, then, it was not fiction *per se* that was the threat, but fiction masquerading as truth, the conflation of story and history. Stephen Carpenter had evidently considered this particular danger, too, for the first volume of his *Monthly Register* is divided into two, separately paginated halves, with the first composing a 'Retrospective History' of the American Revolution and a 'History of the Passing Times', and the second containing book reviews, poetry extracts, fictional fragments, and other literary miscellanies. Just as the story of the virtuous captive was carefully segregated from the history of her degenerate captors in the *History of the Captivity and Sufferings of Maria Martin*, so here are fact and fiction scrupulously confined to their respective spheres, isolated from each other for the benefit of the reader's moral well being. Cautioning against those false historians who 'dazzle the imagination with a gaudy display of bloated sentiments', the 'true historian' of a 'Retrospective History' warns his readers that 'when the rein is once given to the fancy, it is hard to restrain its career, and the very best writers, in the warmth of composition, are often, imperceptibly, allured away from the strict line of truth, by the eager pursuit of meretricious finery; of a flowing period, a lofty climax, or a pointed, striking antithesis'.<sup>418</sup>

Diedrich Knickerbocker's own sartorial metaphor may not contain the heightened sexual charge of Carpenter's warning, but it too cautions those who read 'obscure histories' to guard against the seductive wiles of fiction masquerading as fact:

In such case [*sic*] how much has the reader to depend upon the honour and probity of his author, lest like a cunning antiquarian, he either impose upon him some spurious fabrication of his own, for a precious relique from antiquity—or else dress up the dismembered fragment, with

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<sup>417</sup> *The Power of Sympathy*, p. 53.

<sup>418</sup> 'Retrospective History', p. 2.

such false trappings, that it is scarcely possible to distinguish the truth from the fiction with which it is enveloped. (HNY, 502)

The vocabulary may be distinctly republican—honour, probity and truth versus the cunning and spurious fabrication of fiction—but the sentiment is shamelessly disingenuous: while Diedrich condemns the ‘romantic effusions’ of his ‘fellow historians’, whose works are ‘tricked out in the meretricious gauds of fable’, his own narrative is definitely dressed to impress, gloriously ‘enveloped’ in the beguiling trappings of figurative language (HNY, 502). For despite his claim that metaphor is ‘a fault in historic writing which I particularly eschew’ (HNY, 581), Diedrich deploys a whole host of metaphors to define his own narrative, which becomes in turn a ‘treasure’, a ‘crazy vessel’, a ‘perilous enterprize’ and ‘the scanty fruit of a long and laborious life’ (HNY, 375; 381; 412; 728). While Samuel Latham Mitchill, author of *The Picture of New-York* (1807), produces what he hopes will be the first of many ‘faithful statistical manuals’ of US cities, Knickerbocker’s caricature of New York history wilfully elides the distinction between truth and fiction, freely combining made-up tales with found-out facts and mischievously refusing to differentiate between the two.<sup>419</sup> Chapter Two of the opening book, then, rolls out ‘*a multitude of excellent Theories, by which the Creation of a World is shewn to be no such difficult Matter as common Folks would imagine*’. A ballooning chapter, wherein the possible origins of the world are legion, it presents us with ‘a thousand contradictory accounts’ (HNY, 391) of global genesis.<sup>420</sup> Interpretations proliferate, as every theory has its say, the crazy

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<sup>419</sup> *The Picture of New-York; or, The Traveller’s Guide through the Commercial Metropolis of the United States* (New York: Riley, 1807), p. viii.

<sup>420</sup> Knickerbocker’s pseudo-scholarship and extravagant genealogy find an engaging American precedent in Alexander Hamilton’s *The History of the Ancient and Honorable Tuesday Club*, which was written between 1745-1756 and remained unpublished until 1990. The Annapolis gentleman’s club met for the first time on 14 May, 1745, but the opening chapters of Hamilton’s burlesque stretch far back in time, writing ‘Of History and Historians’, ‘Of Antiquity, its dignity and Importance’, and ‘Of Clubs in general, and their antiquity’. In Chapter Three, Hamilton’s pseudonymous historian, Scribble, remarks that ‘should I affirm, that Cain, by building a City in the land of Nod, was the first erector of Clubs, because, it is in towns and Cities, that those

along with the sane, all on a level footing, and all tainted with absurdity. ‘Some’, we are told, affirm ‘that the world was made by the hands of angels’, others that ‘the earth was hatched from the great egg of night [...] which is found to bear a miraculous resemblance to that of a *goose*!’ (HNY, 393). This second theory of creation raises a ludicrous possibility with one breath only to deflate it in the next, suggesting that the theory is a nonsense and the reader on a wild goose chase, seeking the impossible, hunting down the unknowable.<sup>421</sup>

Precisely how and where to begin the history of his nation and the story of his book prove perplexing questions for this particular Dutch procrastinator. Does American history begin with the Constitution or does it go back to the Declaration of Independence? Perhaps it begins with the arrival of the Mayflower and the Pilgrim Fathers, or does it begin even earlier with the arrival of European discoverers such as Henrick Hudson? And what about native Americans, inhabiting the continent even earlier than this? Could a divinely sanctioned American history be seen to originate here, with a people that had been exploited and systematically slaughtered by European settlers? In Book I, Irving confronts the vexed issue of colonial beginnings and territorial struggles head on. Having exposed the injustice of a colonial project that rests solely upon the incendiary ‘RIGHT BY GUNPOWDER’, the tried and tested ‘RIGHT BY EXTERMINATION’, Knickerbocker concludes with irony that ‘thus have I clearly proved, and I hope strikingly illustrated, the right of the early colonists to the possession of this country—and thus is this gigantic question, completely knocked in the head’ (HNY, 419; 424). ‘Knocked in the head’ was a colloquial phrase for describing

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Societies are commonly held, I might in the opinion of many Superficial Critics, talk very plausibly, but to cut the matter short, and clear away all Rubs, Stumbling blocks and cavils, I will venture to say that Clubs and Clubbing, began as soon as the first men were created, and therefore are certainly as ancient as mankind & very nigh as ancient as the Globe it self’ (ed. by Robert Micklus, 3 vols [Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1990], I, 37).

<sup>421</sup> Irving’s footnotes are a delight in this chapter. While the theories in the body of the text stretch on and on, the footnotes are abbreviated beyond intelligible limits. One particularly unfathomable footnote refers us to ‘Mosheim in Cudw. lib. i. cap. 4. Tim. de anim. mund. ap. Plat. lib. 3. Mem. de l’acad. des Belles Lettr. t. 32. p. 19. et alii’ (HNY, 392).

someone who had been tomahawk'd: the controversial question, then, is not nailed down but rather smashed wide open by Diedrich's debate. Descended from Dutch colonials, who were themselves ousted from power by the British in 1664, Knickerbocker knows what it's like to be on the losing side of history. His own version of the past blows apart historiography's claims to objectivity and truth, pointing to 'the misrepresentations of the crafty historians of New England', and in particular to the false claims of one 'Mr. Benjamin Trumbull', who 'arrogantly declares that "the Dutch were always mere intruders"' (HNY, 503). Irving's text re-enacts the difficulty of finding a definitive starting point. Does *A History* properly begin in Book II, when it finally turns its attention to New York, or in Book I, when it discusses the creation of the world? Or perhaps it begins with Knickerbocker's prefatory address 'To the Public', though what then of Seth Handaside's initial 'Account of the Author'? It could even be argued that *A History of New York* begins in the town's own *Evening Post*, on 26 October, 1809, with the publication of Irving's first hoax letter, advertising the 'distressing' disappearance of one Diedrich Knickerbocker.<sup>422</sup>

Outlandish speculations concerning the origins of the planet were a notoriously Jeffersonian foible, and critics have consistently remarked upon the Federalist perspective of Diedrich Knickerbocker. The Dutchman's chapters of philosophical extravagance, however, would appear to be more than just a parody of Jeffersonian speculation. The evident relish that Irving takes in piling page upon page of competing creation myths would seem to endorse rather than decry the proliferation of crazy theories. It goes far beyond the satirical, revelling in its own absurdity, gleefully disgorging extravagant hypotheses, building them up, pulling them down, and generally leading the reader a merry dance. Moreover, while his text suggests that the finding and fixing of definitive origins may not be an achievable—or a desirable—goal, the wild goose chase is a fruitful one nonetheless, for what it does deliver is the promise of new literary and imaginative horizons. Circling around unreachable truths, floundering indefinitely

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<sup>422</sup> Irving's 1848 edition of *A History* would include these hoax letters in the text, inserting them after 'The Author's Apology'.

‘in the smooth ocean of glorious uncertainty’ (S, 349), Knickerbocker’s narrative paves the way for an ambiguous and speculative kind of writing, one where the absence of sure fact enables the fertile imagination to run riot.<sup>423</sup> Purporting to discuss the conception and creation of the world, then, what this chapter actually does is to explore the fecundity of the literary imagination and the possibility of creating an indigenous imaginative literature.

Not surprisingly, Knickerbocker’s unstable and self-contradictory voice is the first to deny such a programme of imaginative expansionism:

The subject of the present chapter is merely the Island, on which is built the goodly city of New York,—a very honest and substantial Island, which I do not expect to find in the sun, or moon; as I am no land speculator, but a plain matter of fact historian. I therefore renounce all lunatic, or solaric excursions, and confine myself to the limits of this terrene or earthly globe. (HNY, 387)

In the one rhetorical stroke, Diedrich has conflated and renounced financial and fictional speculation, practices which were both perceived as crimes against republican America, inexorable symptoms of Old World luxury and undisciplined excess.<sup>424</sup> The disclaimer is ironic, of course, for the speculative mind of Knickerbocker, always looking to colonise new imaginative territory, takes its own, lengthy lunatic excursion later on in the same book, as the narrative pursues a chain ‘of very curious, profound and unprofitable speculations’ regarding the plausibility of ‘philosophers from the moon’ coming down to civilise the earth (HNY, 421). *A History*’s elaborate tissue of tall tales and half truths pays only lip

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<sup>423</sup> Irving may have revelled in the ‘glorious uncertainty’ of his work, but English publishers of *A History* left their readers in no doubt as to its fictional status. The first English edition of *A History*, based upon Irving’s revised edition of 1812, was most unambiguously titled *A Humorous History of New York* (London: Murray, 1820).

<sup>424</sup> In a sketch first published in 1840, Irving would later descant upon the dangers of economic speculation, whereby the ‘stock-jobber’ was transformed into a ‘magician’, the merchant metamorphosed into a ‘commercial Quixotte’, and the whole air castle of credit in danger of collapsing at any time (‘A Time of Unexampled Prosperity’, in *Wolfert’s Roost*, ed. by Roberta Rosenberg [Boston: Twayne, 1979], in *The Complete Works of Washington Irving*, XXVII, 95-119 [p. 96]).

service to matters of fact as the fast-talking Dutchman speculates upon the apocryphal past of Old New York. Trading on the knowledge that New Amsterdam is still ‘a terra incognita in history’, Diedrich tries to sell his 1809 audience a golden age that never was, a historical paradise that bears no more resemblance to reality than the ‘thriving city of Eden’ would bear to the ‘hideous swamp’ sold to Dickens’s Martin Chuzzlewit thirty five years down the line.<sup>425</sup>

Like any canny speculator, Knickerbocker presents potential buyers with a range of alternative plots. The dubiety surrounding William the Testy’s ‘mysterious exit’, for example, brings on a rash of speculations, including the fables of the ‘early provincial poets’, who claimed he was ‘translated to the skies’, ‘the assertion of an ancient and rather apocryphal historian’, who alleged that Kieft ‘was annihilated by the blowing down of one of his windmills’, and the ‘very obscure tradition’, which holds that the choleric governor underwent ‘a kind of animal combustion’ (HNY, 558-59). Knickerbocker himself is careful to provide no guarantee for the apocryphal plots he peddles: attributing the speculations to other sources, he is able simultaneously to discredit and indulge in the ‘pleasing fantasies’ of ‘dreaming varlets’ (HNY, 558). Inviting readers to join him in his speculations, to people the landscape of American history with a panoply of fabulous events and fictional people, Diedrich encourages us to share in the exhilaration of untrammelled imaginative speculation, though, characteristically, he also delights in pulling the rug from beneath us: according to his own de-mystification of ‘the whole art and mystery of book making’, the industry only uses conjecture, doubt and self-contradiction in order ‘to fill the pages of books, the pockets of booksellers, and the hungry stomachs of authors’ (HNY, 512). Diedrich welcomes us into ‘his pleasing land of drowsy head’ only

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<sup>425</sup> *A History of New York*, 1984, p. 3; Dickens, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, ed. by Margaret Cardwell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 309; p. 325.

to hijack our romantic daydreams and emphasise the acquisitive and very material rationale that underpins his book making enterprise.<sup>426</sup>

In 1810, Benjamin Trumbull published his *General History of the United States of America; From the Discovery in 1492, to 1792: or, Sketches of the Divine Agency, in their Settlement, Growth, and Protection; and especially in the late Memorable Revolution*.<sup>427</sup> Imposing a tidy temporal frame of three centuries, and positing an overarching Providential design, Trumbull's subtitles offered the reassurance of chronological containment and the sanction of divine order, welcome words as Americans sought to make sense of the memorable but bloody Revolution they had fought. *A History of New York's* own subtitle, '*From the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty*', sends out very different signals. The extravagance of its starting point and the eccentric choice of end point—few New Yorkers 'were aware that New York had ever been called New Amsterdam [...] or cared a straw about their ancient Dutch progenitors', according to Irving in 1848—sends up the ordering propensities of contemporary historiography and signals *A History's* defiance of narrative logic and its suspicion of overarching plans, divine or otherwise.<sup>428</sup> Pulling in opposing directions, stretched and torn apart by contradictory impulses, *A History of New York* repeatedly evokes historiographical structures only to work against them, turning logic on its head at every turn. For what Irving constructs is a mis-shapen hybrid of a text, a 'crazy vessel' that repeatedly loses its way, a 'dismembered fragment' that has distended beyond control (HNY, 381; 502). Knickerbocker himself acknowledges the grotesque nature of his narrative towards the end of Book III:

BY THIS TIME my readers must fully perceive, what an arduous task I have undertaken—collecting and collating with painful minuteness, the

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<sup>426</sup> 'The Legend of Sleepy Hollow', in *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*, in *History, Tales and Sketches*, ed. by James W. Tuttleton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 731-1091 (p. 1058).

<sup>427</sup> Trumbull, 3 vols (Boston: Farrand and Mallory, 1810), I, title page.

<sup>428</sup> *A History of New York*, 1984, p. 3.



chronicles of past times, whose events almost defy the powers of research—raking in a little kind of Herculaneum of history, which had lain nearly for ages, buried under the rubbish of years, and almost totally forgotten—raking up the limbs and fragments of disjointed facts, and endeavouring to put them scrupulously together, so as to restore them to their original form and connection—now lugging forth the character of an almost forgotten hero, like a mutilated statue—now decyphering a half defaced inscription, and now lighting upon a mouldering manuscript, which after painful study, scarce pays the trouble of perusal. (HNY, 502)

Looking back to Egyptian myths of Osiris, Knickerbocker's image is one of exhumation and re-memberment, as he digs deep 'under the rubbish of years', 'raking up' and 'lugging forth' old facts and forgotten faces in order to reconstruct a history of his native town. The monstrous text that he 'extracts'—a mish-mash of 'disjointed facts' and 'mutilated' heroes—simultaneously throws a sideways glance toward the literal remnants of monsters, or unclassified creatures to be more exact, that were being unearthed at paleological sites across the continent in the post-Revolutionary years. The indefatigable Charles Willson Peale, professional artist, museum curator and enthusiastic paleologist, commemorated his own 'fondness for finding the treasure contained in the bowels of the earth' in an 1806 painting entitled *The Exhumation of the Mastodon*.<sup>429</sup> Whereas Knickerbocker's exhumation is figured as an exhausting and Herculean task, a lonely and impossible exercise in thankless manual labour, Peale's *Exhumation* figures a large team of workers being watched by an admiring audience as they use the latest in Enlightenment technology to retrieve the ancient bones. Unrolled with confidence to the right of the scene, a prominent scroll depicts the skeletal leg of the mastodon, anticipating a straightforward reconstruction of the creature's 'original form'. In contrast, Knickerbocker's history wilfully resists re-construction; despite his putative attempts at painstaking restoration, the body of his text remains out of shape and incomplete, distinguished by its combination of pointed silences and labyrinthine digressions.

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<sup>429</sup> Peale, quoted in Robert Hughes, *American Visions: The Epic History of Art in America* (London: Harvill, 1997), p. 99. *The Exhumation of the Mastodon* is reprinted in *American Visions*, p. 101.

A glance at the three old fossils who form the backbone of *A History* suggests that Diedrich's re-membling has only been partial, at best—the sedentary Walter is all arse, the fiery William all testosterone, and the obstinate Peter all head—while the narrative itself is distinctly top-heavy, with the reign of Peter the Headstrong swelling disproportionately to encompass the final three books of the work.

In an article on *The Algerine Captive*, Larry R. Dennis has discussed the 'special status' of historians in the early republic, pointing out that the Puritans also 'had placed special emphasis upon the historian, whose task was not merely to record the incidents and events of a given time, but to divine their significance and relate them to a coherent framework of destiny'.<sup>430</sup> As nineteenth-century America continued to pull in different directions—North versus South, Federalist versus Republican, East versus West, Anglophile versus Francophile, to name just a few of the breaches which echo the Square heads and Platter breeches of New Amsterdam—national histories had a crucial role to play in re-consolidating the Union, re-telling the collective struggles of the past in order to establish a sense of purpose and identity for the present. Published to great acclaim in 1805, Mercy Otis Warren's *History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the American Revolution* opened with a call for unity:

Providence has clearly pointed out the duties of the present generation, particularly the paths which Americans ought to tread. The United States form a young republic, a confederacy which ought ever to be cemented by a union of interests and affection, under the influence of those principles which obtained their independence. These have indeed, at certain periods, appeared to be in the wane; but let them never be eradicated, by the jarring interests of parties, jealousies of the sister states, or the ambition of individuals.<sup>431</sup>

Assuming the mantle of republican mother, using her 'concern for the welfare of society' to explain her entry into the masculine world of print, Warren was committed to 'transmitting' the deeds of the patriots and the 'principles of the

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<sup>430</sup> 'Legitimizing the Novel: Royall Tyler's *The Algerine Captive*', *EAL*, 9 (1974), 71-80 (p. 74).

<sup>431</sup> *Rise, Progress and Termination*, 3 vols (Boston: Larkin, 1805), I, vii.

times' to 'the rising youth of [her] country', treating history as an ideal educational tool for reinforcing the lessons already pointed out by Providence.<sup>432</sup>

For men such as Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Rush, education was the lynchpin of republican progress. The moral of the lesson, however, would depend upon the outlook of the pedagogue. For Jeffersonian Republicans, the value of history lay in its ability to warn against the Old World errors of monarchy and luxury, of despotism and decadence; for high Federalists, historical events such as the French Revolution only went to prove the unworkability of republican government. In 1805, for example, Fisher Ames delivered an address which was ominously titled 'The Dangers of Liberty'. In it, he declared that 'all history lies open for our warning,—open like a churchyard, all whose lessons are solemn, and chiselled for eternity in the hard stone,—lessons that whisper, O! that they could thunder to republics, "Your passions and vices forbid you to be free"'.<sup>433</sup> Even the fictional histories of sentimental literature could fulfil a pedagogic function, inculcating virtue and cautioning against degeneration in the private, domestic sphere. The front cover of William Hill Brown's posthumously published *Ira and Isabella; or, The Natural Children* (1807) gave centre page to the justificatory words of Scottish moralist, Hugh Blair:

Fictitious histories might be employed for very useful purposes: They furnish one of the best channels for conveying instruction; for painting human life and manners; for shewing the errors into which we are betrayed by our passions; for rendering virtue amiable, and vice odious.<sup>434</sup>

The extent to which Washington Irving's 'fictitious history' works to fulfil the pedagogic desiderata of early republic histories is arguable. *A History* could plausibly be read as a cautionary tale, or 'warning', in the words of Fisher Ames, reminding a New York audience on the brink of war with Great Britain, that a city so easily captured by the British in 1664—and indeed in 1776—must take care

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<sup>432</sup> *Rise, Progress and Termination*, I, iv.

<sup>433</sup> Ames, in *American Political Writing*, II, 1306-07.

<sup>434</sup> *Ira and Isabella*, title page.

lest history repeat itself once more, and vain-glorious New Yorkers again be exposed as cowardly pushovers. Knickerbocker himself, however, professes an acute dislike of pedagogy, and Handaside reports that when his wife proposed to let the Dutchman ‘live scot-free, if he would teach the children their letters’, the ‘old gentleman took it in such dudgeon, and seemed so affronted at being taken for a school-master, that she never dared speak on the subject again’ (HNY, 375). Nor is this the only time that pedagogues fall foul of Knickerbocker’s displeasure: in Book I, the narrative quite literally pours cold water over the cosmological theories of one Professor Von Poddingcoft, ‘or Puddinghead as the name may be rendered into English’, when a mischievous student sends a bucket of water sluicing down ‘upon the philosophic head of the instructor of youth’ (HNY, 388). And when Knickerbocker reappears a decade later to narrate ‘The Legend of Sleepy Hollow’, the country teacher Ichabod Crane endures a darker, more deeply disturbing, humiliation. Pelted with a pumpkin-head, ‘tumbled headlong into the dust’, and run out of town by local prankster, Brom Bones, his is a victimisation to trump even Updike Underhill’s traumatic experiences as a rural school master.<sup>435</sup>

There are certainly moments when *A History*’s representation of education appears to voice conservative fears of democratic excess in the new republic. Defensive Federalists were convinced that universal education was the route to social and political anarchy, and in Book IV of *A History*, ‘education among the people’ is blamed for the ‘mob’ that runs riot in Kieft’s mis-managed colony, providing ‘the one thing wanting to complete his confusion’ (HNY, 544-45). Conversely, though, the drenched cranium of Professor Puddinghead could be read as part of a more through-going campaign against an established authority and an educated elite. One thing is certain as Diedrich Knickerbocker shoots off his mouth and his criticisms ‘in all directions’—like ‘a true Dutch blunderbuss’, in the words of Stanley Williams—his indiscriminate and relentless irony works

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<sup>435</sup> Irving, *Sketch Book*, p. 1085.

against effective pedagogy.<sup>436</sup> It discourages gravity and prohibits serious interaction with the text, leading one contemporaneous reviewer to concede defeat and declare that it was ‘in vain to attempt to analyse a work of this kind’.<sup>437</sup> *A History* invites readers to suspect insincerity and satire at all turns, to smile at everything and believe nothing. In short, it demolishes the authority of the text, substituting narrative certainty with semiotic free-fall, and plunging readers into a vertiginous descent through intangible ironies, with only ‘a distended bladder’ (HNY, 720) to break the fall.

Carpenter’s *Monthly Register* had genuinely prided itself on being a history ‘authenticated by indubitable evidence’;<sup>438</sup> Diedrich Knickerbocker mouths the same historiographical platitudes when he insists that the ‘chief merit’ of his history is its ‘faithful veracity’, and he jealously maintains the front of a serious historian as he claims to uphold the ‘fidelity, gravity and dignity, which should ever distinguish the historian’ (HNY, 379). But Knickerbocker’s high-minded assertions move from the sublime to the ridiculous when they are placed alongside his flagrant disregard for authenticity. Diedrich declares that Hercules himself would be unable ‘to write a genuine American history’ (HNY, 406), and the ludicrous claim of the title page, to be ‘the only Authentic History of the Times that ever hath been, or ever will be Published’, parodies the early republic’s professed respect for authenticity. Abounding with conversations that never passed, historical figures that never existed, and colonial events that never occurred, the ‘Authentic History’ that follows draws attention to its fakery, celebrating the belligerent inauthenticity that makes this particular American history so unexpectedly original.

Following a dubious military victory for the Dutch, in Book IV, the narrative gleefully parades its fraudulence for all to see. According to

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<sup>436</sup> Stanley T. Williams, *The Life of Washington Irving*, 2 vols (New York: Oxford University Press, 1935), I, 116.

<sup>437</sup> Anon., ‘Knickerbocker’s History’, *The Monthly Anthology and Boston Review*, 8 (Jan-June, 1810), 123-28 (p. 124).

<sup>438</sup> ‘Retrospective History’, p. 21.

Knickerbocker, the triumphant procession held in honour of General Brinckerhoff is flanked by ‘three notorious counterfeiters of Manhattan notes’ (HNY, 530). A footnote is quick to point out the mistake:

This is one of those trivial anachronisms, that now and then occur in the course of this otherwise authentic history. How could Manhattan notes be counterfeited, when as yet Banks were unknown in this country—and our simple progenitors had not even dreamt of those inexhaustible mines of *paper opulence*. *Print. Dev.* (HNY, 530)

Pulling down the authority of the text by mischievously playing up its factual error, the unauthorised ‘printer’s devil’, or apprentice typesetter, corrects the narrative and transfers the crime of counterfeiting from the Dutch captives to Diedrich Knickerbocker, suggesting multiple layers of falsehood with his image of counterfeited counterfeiters. While the captives are accused of counterfeiting ‘Manhattan notes’, Diedrich’s own notes on the isle of Manhattan turn out to be false, but it takes another unauthorised note, this time at the bottom of the page, to set the record straight. What’s more, the deployment of a ‘printer’s devil’ as annotator is itself a device plagiarised from eighteenth-century British letters; its use here, then, brings another twist to the spiralling inauthenticity of the facts and the imitative status of the text. With a final turn of the screw, the typesetter’s arch allusion to the ‘inexhaustible mines of *paper opulence*’ aligns the devalued paper currency that plagues American states at this time with the proliferation of printed material and the rapid growth of the continental book trade. Once again, the commercial and the intellectual find themselves on common ground: both narratives and bank notes enjoy wide circulation, both are potentially fraudulent, and both run the risk of humiliating deflation, ending up as waste paper, or worse, being used for a most ‘unseemly purpose’, and arriving at the same ‘shameful end’ as William the Testy’s ‘warlike proclamation’ (HNY, 519).

### ***Aged Founders and Irving’s Broken Heads***

*A History of New York* was remarkable for the way in which it crawled under the skin and cut to the quick of contemporary historiography. It didn’t simply satirise

the self-justifying desiderata of early-republic histories, it also recognised and parodied the hollowness of their claims; Mercy Warren and her peers may have used their prefaces to profess the moral rectitude and historical exactitude of their work, but the Revolutionary histories they wrote were among the most compelling romances of their time. Writing to John Adams in 1805, Benjamin Rush had remarked upon ‘the immense difference between what I saw and heard of men and things during our Revolution and the histories that have been given of them’, concluding that he was ‘disposed to believe with Sir R. Walpole that all history (that which is contained in the Bible excepted) is a romance, and romance the only true history’.<sup>439</sup> Referring to representations of Washington in particular, Rush was angered by the way in which ‘our wise men and women look back to the administration of Washington as the golden age of our country, without recollecting that the seeds of all the disputes which now divide our citizens, and of the controversy with France, were sown in it’.<sup>440</sup> In Rush’s opinion, the idealising tendencies of historical panegyrics on Washington had created an illusory romance of the past, and histories of the Revolution read like books of chivalry, full of improbable action and false sentiment. Read one way, Irving uses his own *History* to burlesque sentimental historians and satirise the notion of an American golden age, assuming the aspect of Cervantes-as-satirist as he debunks the romantic delusions of his literary peers. Read another way, however—and in a process exactly equivalent to that which surrounded the ambivalent readings of Cervantes and his *Don Quixote*—Irving is a man of the most ‘enthusiastic temperament’, and his *History* is an elegy for those chivalric values which no longer inspire the nation.<sup>441</sup>

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<sup>439</sup> Letter to John Adams (14 August, 1805), in *Letters*, II, 902.

<sup>440</sup> Letter to John Adams (27 June, 1812), in *Letters*, II, 1145. In contrast, John Adams was infuriated by the lack of column inches his own Revolutionary role had merited in Mercy Warren’s *History of the American Revolution* (‘Correspondence between John Adams and Mercy Warren relating to her *History of the American Revolution*, July-August, 1807’, *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 5<sup>th</sup> ser., 4 (1878), 315-511).

<sup>441</sup> Hazlitt, *Lectures*, p. 108.

*A History of New York* articulates a deep-rooted anxiety towards the new republic's strategies for collective memory. A repeated predicament in New Amsterdam is *how* to remember events, with commemorative attempts failing to build any lasting monuments, and the possibility of leaving a name and a history to posterity being repeatedly undermined. Monuments to significant events and deeds are usually half-hearted, makeshift, and 'frail memorials', such as the 'magnificent shingle monument' erected in honour of Jan Jansen Alpendam, the much vaunted—and entirely ineffectual—admiral of the fleet. Designed 'to immortalize his name', the monument 'lasted three whole years; when it fell to pieces, and was burnt for fire-wood' (HNY, 538). At least his monument is built, though. When Stoffel Brinckerhoff returns victorious from Oyster Island, William the Testy remembers that 'it was customary among the ancients to honour their victorious generals with public statues', and he passes 'a gracious decree' permitting every tavern keeper 'to paint the head of the intrepid Stoffel on his sign' (HNY, 531).

Testy's tight-fisted reluctance to invest in lasting monuments bore comparison with a Jeffersonian government that was obsessed with 'economy', an administration that balked at paying vast sums of public money for commemorative statues, and saw the president bargaining with the world's most eminent statuary, Jean-Antoine Houdon, in the hope of 'getting two Houdon Washingtons, equestrian and pedestrian, for the price of one'.<sup>442</sup> For in spite of the resounding acclaim for his achievements, how to commemorate the life of George Washington was the subject of a heated and protracted debate, as various committees and politicians haggled for almost a century over the price and design of the monument.<sup>443</sup> Commemorating the deeds of the founding fathers was fraught with difficulty for Irving and his generation, posing a dilemma articulated by David Lowenthal, in *The Past is a Foreign Country*:

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<sup>442</sup> Hughes, *American Visions*, p. 126. In *Salmagundi*, the letters of Tripolitan captive, Mustapha Rub-a-Dub Keli Khan, return time and again to 'ECONOMY', which the slave describes as 'the watch-word of this nation' (S, 113).

<sup>443</sup> An obelisk was eventually built, situated in Washington DC, and not completed until 1885.



Taught to disdain inherited precepts, succeeding generations were then torn between antipathy toward authority and obligations to revere and defend the legacy of the Founding Fathers. To emulate them, they should throw off the shackles of the past; to safeguard their inheritance they must preserve, not create anew. These ideals were incompatible.<sup>444</sup>

Playing out these incompatible ideals, *A History* oscillates between reverent hero-worship one moment and a sneering sense of superiority the next; it juxtaposes a longing to venerate with an irrepressible desire to humiliate the patriarchs and their legacy. The contested figure of Don Quixote would prove extremely useful for Irving's double-talking text. Making use of the knight and his squire, the history of Dutch dominion and defeat could be lamented as the loss of an earlier Golden Age even as it lambasted the bungling incompetence of 'the patriarchs' (HNY, 461) and, by extension, satirised the shortcomings of more recent political heads of state.

Joseph Harkey overlooked the obvious when he described Antony the Trumpeter as 'Irving's one Sancho', for Walter the Doubter is a pure Sancho Panza of a governor, an easy-going idler who sleeps, smokes, and eats away his days in power.<sup>445</sup> Writers of the early republic were repeatedly drawn to Sancho's short-lived governorship of Barrataria. With social deference on the wane and political participation on the rise, the story of the squire turned master, the servant turned governor, assumed particular significance for a generation divided on the question of extending democracy and upending social hierarchies. Brackenridge's bog-trotter may have posed a threat to the future of the Union with his quest for individual glory, but Irving's Van Twiller is on one level the avatar of a happier past, and his reign leads Martin Roth to describe *A History of New York* as 'the story of a sacred community, represented at its highest moment by the "Golden Age" of Wouter Van Twiller'.<sup>446</sup>

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<sup>444</sup> *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. xxi.

<sup>445</sup> 'Don Quixote and American Fiction Through Mark Twain', p. 147.

<sup>446</sup> *Comedy and America: The Lost World of Washington Irving* (Port Washington and London: Kennikat, 1976), p. 156.

In 1766, Henry Brooke had praised the disinterested ‘judgements’ and ‘institutions’ of Sancho Panza, describing the squire as ‘a dunce for a man, but an angel for a governor’;<sup>447</sup> Knickerbocker adopts the same attitude towards Van Twiller in the opening chapter of Book III, when he tells us that ‘the very outset of the career of this excellent magistrate, like that of Solomon, or to speak more appropriately, like that of the illustrious governor of Barataria, was distinguished by an example of legal acumen, that gave flattering presage of a wise and equitable administration’ (HNY, 466). When Wandle Schoonhoven lodges a complaint against Barent Bleecker, because ‘he fraudulently refused to come to a settlement of accounts’ (HNY, 466), both men are called upon to bring their ledgers before the court. Finding that ‘one was just as thick and as heavy as the other’, Walter declares the said accounts to be ‘equally balanced’, and peremptorily dismisses the case (HNY, 467). To his credit, the decision puts an end to petty law suits in the colony, and establishes Walter—like Sancho before him—as the unexpected voice of common sense and sound judgement. At the same time, however, Walter’s laissez-faire approach to matters of justice effectively sanctions the fraudulent and exploitative business conduct of greedy Dutch traders. Purchasing their furs ‘by weight’ from ‘the simple Indians’, these burghers insist that ‘the hand of a dutchman weighed one pound, and his foot two pounds’. Needless to say, whatever the real weight of the wares, ‘the bundle was sure to kick the beam’, and a package of furs was never ‘known to weigh more than two pounds, in the market of Communipaw’ (HNY, 439-40). In spite of Diedrich’s putative attempts to eulogise the history of his Dutch progenitors, his narrative reveals a colony where the appetite for food is matched by an avaricious commercialism, and William Hedges has persuasively argued that ‘*Knickerbocker* exposes, as no American book had dared to before and not many others did for a long time afterwards, the gross, overdeveloped appetites—for land, wealth, food, drink, sex, pleasure generally’.<sup>448</sup>

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<sup>447</sup> *Fool of Quality*, I, 154.

<sup>448</sup> William Hedges, ‘Washington Irving: Nonsense, the Fat of the Land and the Dream of Insolence’, in *The Chief Glory of Every People: Essays on Classic American Writers*, ed. by

Just as Brackenridge had exploited current preconceptions of Irish immigrants with the figure of Teague O'Regan, so would Irving exploit Anglo-American stereotypes of the Dutch with his cast of old New Yorkers. On the domestic stage, the Dutch were the lumbering and ineffectual losers of American history; belonging to a far away past, their political control had been usurped and their arcane customs were threatened with extinction. On an international stage, however, the Dutch had a very different reputation. As Daniel Defoe explained in *A Plan of the English Commerce* (1728), 'the *Dutch* must be understood to be as they really are, the *Carriers of the World*, the middle Persons in Trade, the Factors and Brokers of *Europe* [...] they *buy* to *sell* again, *take* in to *send* out; and the greatest Part of their vast Commerce consists in being supply'd from All Parts of the World, that they may supply all the World again'.<sup>449</sup> Evoking the commercial instincts of a global economy even as they embody the mythical concept of a golden age, the Dutch have one foot in the bygone island of Mannahata and another on the bustling quaysides of the new republic's foremost international crossroads. Though the period of Dutch control saw severe food shortages, a lack of livestock, and the slowest population growth of all the American colonies, Diedrich's 'Manna-hata' is nonetheless 'a land flowing with milk and honey', a 'delectable city', blessed with a 'superabundance of good things' (HNY, 446; 474). While the Dutch are in control, 'unheard of quantities of gin' arrive at the port, obesity is a mark of individual success, and the only military fatalities are caused by over-indulging in 'fat salmon' (HNY, 457; 521). But food in the colony does not just satisfy bodily needs, it feeds the materialistic and acquisitive desires of the Dutchmen, so that the 'honest burghers' listen with 'silent gratulation to the clucking of their hens, the cackling of their geese, or the sonorous gruntings of their swine; that combination of farm-yard melody, which may truly be said to have a silver sound, inasmuch as it conveys a certain

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Matthew J. Bruccoli (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973), pp. 141-60 (pp. 147-8).

<sup>449</sup> *A Plan*, in *Political and Economic Writings of Daniel Defoe*, ed. by W. R. Owens and P. N. Furbank, 8 vols (London, Pickering and Chatto, 2000), VII, 115-341 (p. 225).

assurance of profitable marketing' (HNY, 473). Nor is Walter the only governor guilty of over-eating. Peter Stuyvesant prefers 'to fight upon a full stomach', and is likened to 'a mighty alderman', who, when faced with turtle soup 'redoubles his vigorous attacks upon the tureen, while his voracious eyes, projecting from his head, roll greedily round devouring every thing at table' (HNY, 647; 642).

Diedrich's insatiable patriarchs take on a particularly grotesque appearance in the context of an 1809 New York, where trade remained crippled by the Embargo Act of 1807, and the city was struggling through its worst depression since the Revolution. When war broke out between France and Britain, in 1803, the United States struggled to maintain its neutral stance. In 1805, Britain began to seize American ships and impress American sailors, and in 1806, French Emperor, Napoleon Bonaparte likewise declared that neutral vessels carrying British goods were liable to be seized. Jefferson hoped that grounding US ships would protect American sailors from impressment and deprive the warring powers of necessary provisions, ultimately compelling them to respect the neutrality of American shipping. Instead, the Embargo Act was widely ignored, smuggling was rife, and in August, 1808, Jefferson had to dispatch a federal army to New York in order to enforce his legislation. *Gotham: A History of New York to 1898* has spelt out the consequences of Jefferson's controversial Embargo:

In a single stroke, moreover, the embargo brought a decade of unprecedented American prosperity to a dead stop. Exports tumbled 80 percent in 1808. Imports fell 60 percent [...] By the spring of 1808, some 120 firms had already gone out of business, the sheriff held a record twelve hundred debtors in custody (five hundred owing sums less than ten dollars), and a pandemic of unemployment was savaging the city's laboring population. Over the winter of 1807-8 the tally of destitute persons was said to have grown tenfold. Residents grimly spoke of the crisis as "O Grab Me"—"embargo" spelled backward.<sup>450</sup>

Irving's New Amsterdam is not solely, as Roth has argued, 'an attempt to return to that myth of the past in which the lost values of contemporary civilization may

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<sup>450</sup> Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York to 1898* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 411-2.

be found’;<sup>451</sup> on the contrary, it sows the seeds of the moral declension and political corruption bewailed by New Yorkers in the first decade of the nineteenth century, for during ‘the golden reign of Wouter Van Twiller’, ‘the ancient magistrates’ enjoyed the same ‘prerogative and privilege’ as their nineteenth-century counterparts, and ‘were equally famous with their more modern successors’ for their over-indulgence at orgiastic ‘public gormandizings’ (HNY, 461; 469). Read within the context of economic recession and material deprivation, Irving’s old New York is more smug complacency than ‘sweet tranquility’, more gluttonous age than golden age, implicated and entangled in the economic crises and political debauchery of New York present. On December 10, 1809, just four days after the publication of Irving’s *History*, the bicentennial of Henry Hudson’s pioneering voyage to the region provided the ideal opportunity for just such an Epicurean orgy. Members of the New York Historical Society celebrated Hudson’s achievement by listening to Samuel Mitchill’s testimonial ‘Discourse on the Discovery of New York’ and indulging in a lavish banquet at the respectable City Hotel—a far cry from Seth Handaside’s downtown hotel, where the poverty-stricken Knickerbocker pens his *History*.<sup>452</sup> And while Knickerbocker’s own indulgent eye may not dwell too long upon the voluptuous excesses of his Dutch ancestors, the hungry eyes of 1809 New Yorkers would surely not have been so blind.

In William Kieft, the second of Knickerbocker’s governors and the subject of Book IV of *A History*, readers could see their forefather’s foibles unveiled in the most unflattering light. A monomaniacal meddler, buttressed with an army of windmills and flanked by Antony the Trumpeter, Testy is a pompous and ineffectual quixote, the foremost satirical butt of *A History*. His parsimonious economy and windy inaction, his ‘scientific vagaries’ and his ‘tall raw boned charger’ (HNY, 527; 517) all come under fire from Knickerbocker, whose plaudits are never more barbed, and whose irony is never more loaded, than when

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<sup>451</sup> *Comedy and America*, p. 145.

<sup>452</sup> Mitchill’s *Picture of New-York* had come from same upmarket hotel: its title page announces that the book is to be ‘SOLD BY BRISBAN AND BRANNAN, CITY-HOTEL, BROADWAY’.

he deals with this particular governor. Knickerbocker's accusations are similar to those levelled at Jefferson by the Federalist press, who railed at the President's underfunding of the US navy and derided his ineffectual 'proclamations', scorning his interest in natural philosophy and mocking his habit of travelling by horseback to official appointments.<sup>453</sup> Yet Diedrich Knickerbocker is no straightforward Federalist critic, and Washington Irving is not, as William C. Dowling has recently suggested, an 'heir apparent' to literary Federalist, Joseph Dennie.<sup>454</sup> Instead, the Federalist/Republican polarity is collapsed in *A History of New York*, as political differences are subordinated to age. In the eyes of a young and ambitious Irving, an old Federalist is very much the same as an old Jeffersonian, and despite the sting of Knickerbocker's satire, we see a clear affinity between the aged 'little governor' of New Amsterdam and the aged '*little P*' who tells his tale (HNY, 527; 381).

Just as Diedrich describes Kieft as 'a brisk, waspish, little old gentleman', with 'an old fashioned cocked hat stuck on the back of his head', Seth Handaside describes Knickerbocker as 'a small brisk looking old gentleman', also wearing 'a small cocked hat' (HNY, 513; 373). Both are impulsive and passionate little Dutchmen with big ideas and bigger egos; both are incorrigible meddlers, with Knickerbocker 'continually poking about town, hearing all the news and prying into every thing that was going on', and William the Testy 'stumping briskly about the streets' of New Amsterdam, introducing '*a multitude of good-for-nothing laws*' (HNY, 374; 513; 539); both make a 'mysterious exit' (HNY, 558), with Knickerbocker vanishing from the Independent Columbian Hotel and William the Testy probably—but only probably—undergoing spontaneous combustion. Above all else, both are compulsive philosophers, theorists, and

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<sup>453</sup> For a fuller discussion of Irving's political satire and his 'particularized parallel between the President and William Kieft', see Stanley T. Williams, *The Life of Washington Irving*, 2 vols (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1935), I, 117-18 (p. 117). Similarly, on a physical level at least, Walter Van Twiller could be read as a caricature of John Adams, the generously-proportioned president who was labelled 'His Rotundity' by detractors.

<sup>454</sup> *Literary Federalism in the Age of Jefferson: Joseph Dennie and 'The Port Folio', 1801-1812* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), p. 86.

incontinent word-mongers who place complete faith, and take an absolute delight, in the act of writing—‘tremendous’ proclamations in the case of Kieft, and a ‘treasure’ of a manuscript in the case of Diedrich. A parody of Thomas Jefferson’s 1801 inaugural speech, Kieft’s opening address to his council is summed up by Diedrich as ‘highly classic, profoundly erudite, and nothing at all to the purpose, being nothing more than a pompous account of all the governments of ancient Greece, and the wars of Rome and Carthage’ (HNY, 516). But such a pompous manner of proceeding resembles nobody more than Diedrich himself, another avid reader of classical authors, who opens his own text with a disquisition that is ‘very learned, sagacious, and nothing at all to the purpose’, and who brings that text to a close with a gratuitous catalogue of ‘*the decline and fall of empires*’ (HNY, 383; 718).

Books V to VII of *A History* dwell with much pleasure, and at great length, upon ‘the Chivalric Achievements of PETER THE HEADSTRONG’, the colony’s third and final governor, and the hero that *A History of New York* has decidedly lacked so far (HNY, 363). In the eyes of Diedrich, at least, Peter Stuyvesant is ‘a hero of chivalry’ and a ‘miracle’ of ‘noble and generous hardihood’ (HNY, 581), an inspirational—if despotic—governor, who ‘proceeded in a manner which would have redounded to his credit, even if he had studied for years, in the library of Don Quixote himself’ (HNY, 582). On one level, Peter Stuyvesant is the romanticised, military quixote who defeats the Swedes at Fort Christina, fights to keep Dutch territory free from Yankees, and in 1664, defends ‘*the city of New Amsterdam for several days, by dint of the strength of his head*’ (HNY, 712). Eager to situate himself on the same chivalric axis as Peter the Headstrong, Knickerbocker persuades his readers that ‘the writer of a history may, in some respects, be likened unto an adventurous knight, who having undertaken a perilous enterprize, by way of establishing his fame, feels bound in honour and chivalry, to turn back for no difficulty nor hardship, and never to shrink or quail whatever enemy he may encounter’ (HNY, 412). And barely mentioning the ‘pitiful’ ‘skirmishes’ of Yankee intruders along the eastern frontier, Diedrich justifies the omission by vaingloriously declaring that ‘like that

mirror of chivalry, the sage and valourous [*sic*] Don Quixote, I leave these petty contests for some future Sancho Panza of an historian, while I reserve my prowess and my pen for achievements of higher dignity' (HNY, 579).

Aligned with Stuyvesant as well as Kieft, with the military quixote as well as the political quixote, Diedrich Knickerbocker turns out to be the shiftiest Dutchman of them all, containing within himself all the contradictoriness of the early republic quixote. He also suggests the extent to which the fictional quixotes of the time owed as much to the eighteenth-century quixotes of British letters as they did to Cervantes' original Spanish Don. 'Dressed in a rusty black coat' (HNY, 373), Diedrich recalls *Salmagundi's* 'Little Man in Black', who in turn resembles Oliver Goldsmith's 'Man in Black'; as a vocal philosopher, he recalls Sterne's Walter Shandy, though his sprawling narrative echoes Tristram's own *magnus opus*, and his partiality for pipes matches that of another military quixote, Uncle Toby; as an old-fangled bachelor commenting on the degeneration of the present day he recalls *Salmagundi's* Launcelot Langstaff, the *Port Folio's* Oliver Oldschool, and an army of other conservative old men, wedged into elbow-chairs and descended from the *Spectator's* Sir Roger de Coverley. An irascible Knickerbocker, a fiery-tempered Kieft, and a stubborn-as-a-mule Stuyvesant: all three are represented as quixotic in one way or another; significantly, though, none of them share the good-natured amiability that distinguishes their eighteenth-century Old World counterparts. On the contrary, Irving's quixotic Dutchmen appear distinctly uptight as they shrilly and ineffectually struggle to maintain their tenuous hold on power.

They have good reason to be concerned: in *A History's* world of topsy-turvy humour, the patriarchal heads fall like Henrick Hudson's ninepins, and the larger the head, the more likely it is to take a pounding. When Stuyvesant's catapulted 'fragment of a rock' encounters 'the huge head' of Swedish General Risingh, in the climactic Holland vs Sweden confrontation of Book VI, the outcome is inevitable: 'the ponderous pericranium of General Jan Risingh sunk upon his breast', defeated, while Stuyvesant's victorious backside is protected by 'a cushion softer than velvet', which 'Minerva, or St. Nicholas, or some kindly



cow, had benevolently prepared for his reception' (HNY, 656-57). Backsides often break the fall in quixotic fiction, but the head invariably bears the brunt of the injuries.<sup>455</sup> Dorcasina's wigs are repeatedly dislodged, Arthur Mervyn is shot and punched in the head, and Captain Farrago receives a cranial 'contusion', their collection of bruised and battered heads suggesting a gleeful opposition to Enlightenment reason and a recognition of the precariousness of heads—even heads of state—in a revolutionary climate. In Irving's *History*, even Peter the Headstrong, the most revered of colonial heads, topples in the end, deserted by his subjects and compelled to surrender the colony. In political terms, the fall of this most domineering and chivalric of governors evokes the US republic's more recent rejection of hierarchical Federalism; for Stuyvesant himself, the fall is a personal tragedy, and one which makes for 'the most melancholy book' in *A History*,<sup>456</sup> the saddest tale to be told in Irving's irreverent romp of a tome.

Knickerbocker does, on one level at least, mourn the end of a long-past Dutch beginning; writing in the wake of George Washington's death and the subsequent hardening of factional lines, he may also be mourning the end of another, more recent, beginning. Indeed, in his 'Author's Apology', prefixed to *A History of New York* in 1848, Irving belatedly suggests that the narrative had always been intended as a patriotic exercise, designed to bind the hearts of diasporous Americans to their new and unstoried country, and to elicit a sense of belonging at a time of disaffection and disunity:

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<sup>455</sup> This is also the case in John Dos Passos's little-read quixotic fiction, *Rosinante to the Road Again*, where the climax recalls the unfortunate fate of Irving's Professor Puddinghead. The dreamy protagonist, Telemachus, has spent the entire narrative on a quest for 'the essence, the gesture' of Castille. In the closing paragraphs of the book this is precisely what he finds, though the gesture he encounters is not quite what had in mind: wandering down a dark alley one night, he looks up to see a girl 'leaning from the window, shaken with laughter, taking aim with a bucket she swung with both hands'. A moment later, 'a column of cold water struck his head, knocked his breath out, drenched him'. The street is 'filled with uncontrollable shrieking laughter', and the narrative stops right here ([New York: Doran, 1922], p. 230; p. 245).

<sup>456</sup> 'Don Quixote', *The New-York Mirror*, 13 (1836), 379 (p. 379).

The main object of my work, in fact, had a bearing wide from the sober aim of history; but one which, I trust, will meet with some indulgence from poetic minds. It was to embody the traditions of our city in an amusing form; to illustrate its local humors, customs and peculiarities; to clothe home scenes and places and familiar names with those imaginative and whimsical associations so seldom met with in our new country, but which live like charms and spells about the cities of the old world, binding the heart of the native inhabitant to his home.<sup>457</sup>

Written in 1848, at the height of mid-century American romanticism, Irving's 'Apology' does no justice to the unapologetic complexities of *A History*'s first edition. Instead, it merely coats the earlier narrative with a veneer of de-politicised and de-historicised nostalgia, re-casting incendiary political factions as harmless 'local humors'. It overlooks the fact that, in 1809, Washington Irving had not simply painted a mythical picture, he had defaced it, too. He had not exhumed the past in order to put it on a pedestal, but in order to perform a rigorous and often unpleasant post-mortem.

There are moments when the tone softens, and Knickerbocker the 'sentimental historian' evinces a genuine admiration and 'filial piety' for his 'venerable Dutch ancestors', the 'revered figures' from 'the halcyon days' of his 'native land' (HNY, 453-54); for the most part, though, governors and burghers alike, with their clownish behaviour, caricatured personalities and pipes and pumpkins for comic props, become a laughing stock, ridiculous heroes of a risible history. Even the noble Stuyvesant, an authoritarian drunkard in reality,<sup>458</sup> but a 'hero of chivalry' for Knickerbocker, is ignominiously foisted from office and consigned to celebrate his sole military triumph on April Fool's Day. Whereas the 1848 'Apology' indulges in nostalgia towards an old New York, and towards the

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<sup>457</sup> *A History of New York*, 1984, p. 4.

<sup>458</sup> At least according to the damning testimony of Adriaen Van der Donck and his allies, disaffected inhabitants of Stuyvesant's New Amsterdam, who wrote to the Dutch government to complain about the lamentable state of affairs. 'The Director is utterly insufferable in word and deed', they wrote. 'What shall we say of a man whose head is troubled, and has a screw loose, especially when, as often happens, he has been drinking' ('The Representation of New Netherland, 1650', in *Narratives of New Netherland, 1609-1664*, ed. by J. Franklin Jameson [New York: Scribner, 1909], pp. 293-354 [p. 340]).

early publication that had launched Irving's literary career, the 1809 edition of *A History* lays bare the processes of nostalgia; it emphasises the inauthenticity of sentimental responses to the past and exposes 'filial piety' as a sham. According to Knickerbocker, then, the responsibility of remembering—or rather misremembering—great men, falls to the writer, and the grief that writers profess for 'the most glorious and praise-worthy hero' (HNY, 564) is as artificial as the poems, songs or stories that they write:

The world, to tell the private truth, cares but little for their loss, and if left to itself would soon forget to grieve; and though a nation has often been figuratively drowned in tears on the death of a great man, yet it is ten chances to one if an individual tear has been shed on the melancholy occasion, excepting from the forlorn pen of some hungry author. It is the historian, the biographer, and the poet, who have the whole burden of grief to sustain; who—unhappy varlets!—like undertakers in England, act the part of chief mourners—who inflate a nation with sighs it never heaved, and deluge it with tears, it never dreamed of shedding. (HNY, 563)

Diedrich's cynical delineation of a world that soon forgets to grieve for its great men must have been a refreshing antidote for post-heroic Americans, for a rising generation of sons afraid that they could only ever be a pale imitation of the fathers who had secured their freedom. And while didactic histories, novels, plays, and paintings of the period repeatedly conjure up the ghost of the Revolution to instruct the rising generation in the ways of republicanism, Knickerbocker's *History* stubbornly refuses to remember the event, occluding overt references to the War and effectively initiating an unspoken and devious strategy of selective amnesia.<sup>459</sup> Knickerbocker quite literally overlooks the War of Independence, rescuing long-forgotten figures from the 'insatiable maw of oblivion' (HNY, 381), while newer, fresher memories, bleeding still like unhealed

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<sup>459</sup> For Phillip Lopate, 'Irving's central theme' is 'American amnesia; his work is a reproach to it', though according to Lopate, 'the paradox is that Irving on the one hand champions historical remembrance, and on the other, portrays the Dutch colonial past as a prelapsarian Eden dozing in ahistorical stasis' ('The Days of the Patriarchs: Washington Irving's *A History of New York*', *Boulevard*, 12:2 [1997], 204-222 [pp. 209-10]).

wounds, go unacknowledged in his text. In this respect, Diedrich anticipates the father of American amnesia, Rip Van Winkle, another upstate New Yorker who seemingly sleeps through the Revolution and takes up his place in the community as ‘a chronicle of the old times “before the war”’.<sup>460</sup>

When occasional references to the Revolution do crop up in Irving’s *History*, they are invariably oblique and belittling. The Independent Columbian Hotel, where Diedrich writes his narrative, is one such example. It may proclaim American independence, but the nationalistic grandeur of its name belies a rather shabbier reality. Seth Handaside’s establishment is such ‘a very small house’ that he is ‘a little puzzled’ where to put his guest; it is a down town hotel that offers no sanctuary from the unpleasant landmarks of an overcrowded and under-sanitised city. Commanding ‘a very pleasant view of the new grounds on the Collect, together with the rear of the Poor house and Bridewell and the full front of the Hospital’ (HNY, 373), the Independent Columbian Hotel is situated in Mulberry Street, an address that was part of the ‘Five Points’ neighbourhood, and notorious for its squalor at the turn of the nineteenth century. According to Edwin Burrows and Mike Wallace, the streets of ‘Five Points’ were ‘little better than foul, muddy lanes blocked by refuse-choked pools of slime and silt’, while ‘some houses were half buried by erosion’, and ‘many back yards were perpetually covered with green, stinking muck’.<sup>461</sup> The outlook for the newly independent America—from Knickerbocker’s window at least—was not so promising.

Allusions to 1776, when they do appear, are marked by an uneasy ambivalence in the text. Peter the Headstrong, for example, is described by Diedrich as a ‘lion hearted, generous spirited, obstinate, old “seventy six” of a governor’ (HNY, 567). Drawing our attention to the ‘quotedness’ of the term, the

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<sup>460</sup> *Sketch Book*, p. 783. Rip is called upon to perform the same amnesiac function at the end of the Civil War, when Henry Llewelyn Williams, writing his own *Rip Van Winkle; or, The Sleep of Twenty Years* pushes Irving’s tale even further back into the past. Omitting any allusion to either the barely finished Civil War, or the more distant Revolution, Williams’s Rip lives during the time of Dutch occupation, sleeps through the British invasion of 1664, and awakes in 1665 (New York: DeWitt, [c1866]).

<sup>461</sup> *Gotham*, p. 391.

inverted commas raise a sceptical eyebrow at the figure of speech that has become a cliché, an uncritical approbation of figures from the founding era. Diedrich is usually more than happy to omit inverted commas in order to ventriloquise the words and ideas of others, but both here in Book V and again in Book VI, he deploys inverted commas in order to de-mythologise Revolutionary leaders and distance himself from a simplified hero-worship of the founding fathers:

Nor must I neglect to mention a number of superannuated, wrong headed old burghers, who had come over when boys, in the crew of the *Goede Vrouw*, and were held up as infallible oracles by the enlightened mob. To suppose a man who had helped to discover a country, did not know how it ought to be governed was preposterous in the extreme. It would have been deemed as much a heresy, as at the present day to question the political talents, and universal infallibility of our old “heroes of ’76”—and to doubt that he who had fought for a government, however stupid he might naturally be, was not competent to fill any station under it. (HNY, 670)

Also published in 1809, Joel Barlow’s July the Fourth ‘Oration’ discoursed upon the merits of ‘the illustrious relics’ who had fought for American independence, declaring that those ‘whitened locks that still wave among us are titles to our veneration’.<sup>462</sup> Washington Irving was not so sure. His acerbic indictment of the old ““heroes of ’76”” voices an increasing sense of resentment as Revolutionary leaders continued to cling tenaciously to power in the nineteenth century. According to Jefferson’s characteristically precise calculations, the tenure of a generation lasted only for nineteen years, a duration that would see the patriots of ’76 stepping aside as early as 1795.<sup>463</sup> But even as Irving was writing *A History of New York*, James Madison was elected to the presidency, and another father, this time the so-called ‘Father of the Constitution’, was continuing where Jefferson had left off. On one level, at least, *A History of New York* dared to suggest that the founding fathers had lived too long and were exerting a stifling grip upon the

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<sup>462</sup> *The Works of Joel Barlow*, ed. by William K. Bottorff and Arthur L. Ford, 2 vols (Gainesville, FL: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1970), I, 525-36 (p. 526).

<sup>463</sup> Letter to John Wayles Eppes (24 June, 1813), in *Writings*, p. 1281; letter to Madison (6 September, 1789), in *Writings*, p. 961.

present. Turn of the century New York was a phenomenally young city. Statistics from Mitchill's *Picture of New-York* reveal that more than forty per cent of its male population was under sixteen years of age, but in Irving's *History*, children are virtually invisible, and while New Amsterdam itself is described as an 'infant city', it is fathers that preponderate in the text.<sup>464</sup> Knickerbocker's chapter on 'Peopling America' concludes that 'the people of this country' have 'a *variety of fathers*' (HNY, 411), the golden age of Dutch dominion is repeatedly referred to as 'the days of the patriarchs' (HNY, 453), Diedrich's ancestral 'forefathers' loom before his imagination, and even disastrous William Kieft is declared 'the father of his country' once he is dead (HNY, 564). Federalist or Democrat, it ultimately makes no difference in Knickerbocker's narrative, where the governors are 'patriarchs' above all else.

As though fed up with the prevalence of the patriarchs and the false sentiment surrounding them in American letters, *A History of New York* systematically kills off its patriarchs one by one. The end of Book III sees Walter the Doubter extinguished by one pipe too many, and the end of Book IV sees William the Testy likewise snuffed out in the middle of his gubernatorial reign. The parricidal spree continues in Book VII with the '*mortal surrender*' of Stuyvesant, the patriarch to end all patriarchs, whose death sees a wave of nostalgia sweep across the colonists, as the 'sterling qualities' of 'their good old governor' rush 'in full tide upon their recollections, while the memory of his foibles, and his faults, had expired with him' (HNY, 723; 726). Yet within New Amsterdam itself, there appears to be surprisingly little eulogising upon his death and it is possible to discern a note of relief, as one grieving burgher, the only voice other than Knickerbocker's to comment on the demise of the Governor, mutters to himself, 'Well den—Hard-koppig Piet ben gone at last' (HNY, 727). For the diligent reader who has accompanied Stuyvesant through all three of the

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<sup>464</sup> *Picture of New-York*, p. 34.

books devoted to his reign, Emerson's words in his 'Uses of Great Men' seem appropriate here: 'every hero becomes a bore at last'.<sup>465</sup>

Self-styled as the 'progenitor, prototype and precursor' of New York historians, Diedrich Knickerbocker is the final patriarch to be hurried off to sleep 'with his fathers' (HNY, 381; 507), as he perceives his steps 'insensibly and irresistibly hastening' towards the tomb, and 'time—relentless time!—shaking with palsied hand, his almost exhausted hour glass' (HNY, 627). The closing sentence of *A History* sees Knickerbocker effectively conducting his own interment and funeral sermon, transforming himself into a 'frail compound of dust', which he hopes will 'form a humble sod of the valley, from whence shall spring many a sweet wild flower, to adorn my beloved island of Manna-hata!' (HNY, 729). The figurative death is fake, of course: an extended 'Account of the Author', added to the 1812 edition, reveals that Diedrich lived long enough to conduct further research within the Hudson Valley and to write 'innumerable essays, and smart things' for the New York press.<sup>466</sup> Nor will this be the last fake death that Washington Irving engineers. In *Abu Hassan* (1823), a short play written in collaboration with John Howard Payne, the penniless hero and his young bride each fake their own death in a bid to obtain mourning expenses from their wealthy patrons. The plot is discovered, but their ingenuity is applauded, and the couple are presented with a thousand gold coins. Abu congratulates himself on his success:

Am I not the shrewdest of all dead men? The simple folks let themselves be laid upon the Bier without any future object; but I knew well what I was about—I had not the slightest inclination to remain dead, but only died—to gain a living!<sup>467</sup>

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<sup>465</sup> *Representative Men*, in *Essays and Lectures*, ed. by Joel Porte (New York: Literary Classics of the United States; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 611-761 (p. 627).

<sup>466</sup> *A History of New York*, 1984, p. 14.

<sup>467</sup> *Miscellaneous Writings, 1803-1859, Volume I*, ed. by Wayne R. Kime (Boston: Twayne, 1981), in *The Complete Works of Washington Irving*, XXVIII, 192-227 (p. 227).

Haunted by 'the direful spectrum' of his 'landlord's bill', hovering 'like a carrion crow' around his 'slow expiring history' (HNY, 721), it is ultimately a want of cash that impels Irving's penurious historian to finally end his narrative and yield up his life's work to the literary market place. He is banking on his 'invaluable little work' being a financial as well an historical 'treasure', for Seth Handaside's 'Account of the Author' is clearly a balance of accounts, an enumeration of Diedrich's debts rather than a disinterested description of his guest. Allegedly expiring as he inscribes the final words of his tome, Knickerbocker leaves behind *A History* to absolve him from his debts.

For Washington Irving, meanwhile, the shrewdest of American authors, the return on Diedrich's 'death' is far more spectacular. Transforming *A History of New York* into Knickerbocker's poignant epitaph, Irving gains both a living and a literary reputation: as soon as the little Dutchman is killed off in print, he gains a second lease of life, this time as a mythical figure of Old New York and a lucrative object of local, then national, nostalgia, with *A History* continuing to show good profits throughout the author's life. The extent to which 'Knickerbocker' has become a successful brand name is evident in 'The Author's Apology', where Irving finds it 'used to give the home stamp to every thing recommended for popular acceptance, such as Knickerbocker societies; Knickerbocker insurance companies; Knickerbocker steamboats; Knickerbocker bread and Knickerbocker ice'.<sup>468</sup> That Washington Irving's own name had likewise become a bankable commodity was evidenced by the creation of the Irving Trust Company, a New York bank founded in 1851, that traded on the author's trusted name and familiar face. It is, perhaps, an indicative twist in this tale of prodigal son turned literary father that the self-styled counterfeiter of *A History of New York* should ultimately find his head on a Manhattan bank note.

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<sup>468</sup> *A History of New York*, 1984, p. 5.



## Postscript

On holiday in Warm Springs, Virginia, in the autumn of 1784, Hugh Henry Brackenridge ‘fell in with Washington at a public house’. As James Kirke Paulding tells it, in his *Life of Washington* (1835), the two men might have ‘supped at the same table’, but they didn’t appear to share the same sense of humour:

Mr. Breckenridge [*sic*] essayed all his powers of humour to divert the general; but in vain. He seemed aware of his purpose, and listened without a smile. However, it so happened that the chambers of Washington and Breckenridge adjoined, and were only separated from each other by a thin partition of pine boards. The general had retired first, and when the judge entered his own room, he was delighted to hear Washington, who was already in bed, laughing to himself with infinite glee, no doubt at the recollection of his stories.<sup>469</sup>

With its public house location, its after-dinner stories, and its mis-matched sleeping companions, Paulding’s wayside tale reads like an episode straight out of *Don Quixote*. Not surprisingly, then, it remains unclear just where the humour lies and who the quixote is. At the dinner table, General Washington maintains the ‘ludicrous solemnity’ of a Don Quixote (DQ, 19), sitting po-faced while his garrulous companion delivers one punchline after the next, to no avail. In his bedroom, however, a very different Washington can be heard, as the public face crumples and austerity dissolves into laughter. Significantly, though, we never do

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<sup>469</sup> Paulding, *A Life of Washington*, 2 vols (New York: Harper, 1835), II, 194-95.

know what makes the General laugh.<sup>470</sup> While Brackenridge is in ‘no doubt’ that his own comedic patter has filled the General with ‘infinite glee’, his confidence appears misplaced and self-delusory: perhaps Washington *was* laughing into his nightcap at the Judge’s stories, but it seems more likely he was laughing up his sleeve at the storyteller, the ‘inimitable humorist’ and quixotic Westerner whose jokes kept falling flat.<sup>471</sup> Viewed in this light, Brackenridge is no witty satirist; instead he is the laughable stand-up comic who has himself become the butt of the General’s own, more private, joke.

The incident does make one thing very clear, though: if comic writers in the United States were going to forge a republic of letters, they would need to find a republic of readers, too; the General’s public hostility towards the Judge’s funny stories suggests that the quest for an audience might prove particularly difficult in the ideologically defensive and self-consciously sober environment of the new republic. But Brackenridge would not be the only quixotic American author to ply his trade in a public house, to appreciate the ideological and financial rewards to be gained by courting a popular reading public. Farrago in Philadelphia, Updike in New England, Arthur Mervyn in rural Pennsylvania, Dorcasina in the village of L—, and most pointedly, Diedrich Knickerbocker in New York: all of these fictional quixotes, at some point in their travels, head for the local public house, and all of their fictions, at some level of the narrative, seek a reading public for their tale. What’s more, daring readers to laugh out loud, challenging them to get the joke, to acknowledge the disparity between the extravagant rhetoric of republicanism and the more mundane realities of the new republic, quixotic fictions recognise the discourse of republicanism to be the most widely circulated—and well digested—fiction of them all.

On 17 April, 1826, in the last of his letters to Thomas Jefferson, an ailing John Adams concluded that ‘Our American Chivalry is the worst in the World. It

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<sup>470</sup> There is no reference to the incident in *The Diaries of George Washington*; in fact, the General doesn’t mention Brackenridge at all during his stay at the Virginian resort (*Diaries*, ed. by John C. Fitzpatrick, 4 vols [Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1925], II, 279-85).

<sup>471</sup> Paulding, *Life of Washington*, II, 194.

has no Laws, no bounds, no definitions; it seems to be all a Caprice'.<sup>472</sup> Quixotic fictions in the early republic are very much the same. Fearless and lawless, they defy narrative unity and resist generic purity; they embrace creative cross-fertilization and they weave ideological discontinuities into the fabric of their work. Like the self-fashioning heroes they represent, these fictions make things up as they go along, stretching the facts in the case of Irving's *History*, an elaborate tissue of tall tales and half truths, and stretching the narrative in the case of *Modern Chivalry*, an improvisation that was three decades in the making. Riven through with contradictions, and unashamedly pulling in opposite directions, they are uncontainable, sprawling and expansive; they are very much like America, only funnier.

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<sup>472</sup> This is the penultimate sentence from Adams's final letter to Thomas Jefferson (17 April, 1826). In particular, Adams is referring to the charges of corruption levelled at the John Quincy Adams administration by George McDuffie, a congressman 'swallowed up in chivalry', in the eyes of Adams senior (*The Adams-Jefferson Letters: The Complete Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams*, ed. by Lester J. Cappon, 2 vols [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959], II, 614).

## Appendix

*Arthur Mervyn; or, Memoirs of the Year 1793*, was published in 1799, with a second part following in 1800. An amalgam of gothic tale, historical romance and picaresque adventure, its plot is notoriously complex but goes something like this: Arthur Mervyn, struck by yellow fever on the streets of Philadelphia, is taken in by the benevolent Dr Stevens. When Mervyn is later accused of being an accomplice to embezzler, Thomas Welbeck, he tells his life story to Stevens in order to clear his name: according to the tale he tells, Arthur is a country youth who was driven from home by a cruel stepmother, fleeced of his slender fortune on the road to Philadelphia and robbed of his belongings on arrival. Deciding that city life was not for him, he determined to return to the countryside, but before he had a chance to leave, was offered shelter by Welbeck, a wealthy and mysterious stranger, who lived with his daughter, Clemenza, and took Arthur into his service as a copyist. Realising that Clemenza was in fact Welbeck's unfortunate mistress, and Welbeck himself an embezzler, forger and murderer, Arthur relates how he left for the country, took work on the Hadwin farm and fell in love with young Eliza Hadwin. Returning to plague-stricken Philadelphia purely to ascertain the fate of Hadwin's beloved nephew, Arthur took ill himself, and was found in this state by Stevens.

Part II of the text sees Arthur exonerated from suspicion, restored to health, and returning to the Hadwin farm, where he finds Eliza is the sole survivor of the plague. After several false starts, he successfully deposits her in a safe-house, rescues Clemenza from the brothel where Welbeck has left her, then sets about redressing Welbeck's other wrongs. His tireless philanthropy earns him the

love and respect of affluent widow, Ascha Fielding, and their marriage is imminent at the end of the novel. It need only be added that Arthur's version of events does not always tally with the evidence, Arthur himself would appear to benefit most from his own benevolent activities, and many readers find his meteoric rise to success suspicious to say the least.

## Works Consulted

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During the course of the thesis I refer to a number of editions of *Don Quixote*. Since these editions use different translations and contain a variety of illustrations and prefatory materials, they appear below in full and are listed in chronological order.

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