

LOCATING THE BUTT OF RIDICULE: HUMOR AND SOCIAL CLASS IN EARLY
AMERICAN LITERATURE

by

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This project critiques the performance of class identity through the works of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century colonial and early national period authors using the lens of humor, primarily as posed by Elliot Oring and Henri Bergson's theories of laughter and the ridiculous. My argument is that under the guise of laughter these works conceal the underpinnings of an American class system which can be revealed through close reading and historical research.

In my dissertation, I examine the performance of each author in his or her own autobiography and the reflection of that performance within the larger frame of the development of American status structures. The characters in the texts of the authors I work with in this project demonstrate the use of the comic persona to, as scholar Robert Micklus states, "locate the butt of ridicule anywhere but in their own mirrors"; however, in my project I examine this within the context of class. Chapter I examines the work of

Madame Sarah Knight, *The Journal of Madame Knight*, and William Byrd II's *The Secret History of the Line*—both of whom use humor to disguise their class insecurities. In Chapter II, I examine the performance of class hierarchy, as seen through Franklin's *Autobiography* and John Robert Shaw's *John Robert Shaw: An Autobiography of Thirty Years, 1777-1807*. In Chapter III, I examine the complications of race involved in class relations, using John Marrant's autobiography, *A Narrative of the Life of John Marrant, a Free Black*. Chapter IV examines David Crockett's humorous performance of the middle landscape frontiersman as part of a valorized national identity in *The Narrative of David Crockett*.

The ideology that prompts the so-called invisibility of class in United States society today requires us to examine it under a critical lens; this project uses humor as that lens. In questioning the laughter of early American texts, we can see the class divides of early American society being created—an important step to realizing how these divides are maintained in our world today.

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To My Family—Past and Present

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Nil habet infelix paupertas durius in se,
Quam quod ridiculos hominus facit.

Or;

Unfortunate poverty has in itself nothing harder to bear
than that it makes men ridiculous.

—Juvenal, *Satires* 3.52-53 (qtd. in Sidney 952)

The idea of humor is universal—what is different across time, culture, generations, class, and individuals is what humor *is*. In this project, I examine instances of humor in early American autobiography that reflect the tastes and ideals of individuals who are also making statements about class through their particular use of humor. These life-writing texts reveal the performance of class displayed in the use of humor. The authors I will examine include Madame Sarah Kemble Knight, William Byrd II, John Marrant, John Robert Shaw, Benjamin Franklin and David Crockett, as well as comparator texts, such as the legends of Mike Fink and the memoir of Stephan Burroughs. In each chapter, I discuss the particular types of humor each author employs, as well as the performance involved in “playing” class. This project plans to critique the performance of class identity through the works of 18th and 19th century colonial and early national period authors. In this dissertation I am aiming to examine how the use of

the comic persona works within these texts to perform an act of class or classlessness—and hides that performance behind a comic mask.

In one apocryphal scene in Mark Twain's *Roughing It*, Twain describes a moment in his journey when he has to lessen his baggage load in order to take the stagecoach to Carson City, Nevada. Twain and his brother leave the stovepipe hats and patent-leather boots, but made sure to hang on to "six pounds of unabridged dictionary" (31). The retention of this dictionary is one of the props of civilization that, unlike clothes, Twain and his brother do not feel they can leave behind in their sojourn into the wilds of Nevada. They require a marker of civilization to help them perform their cultural background. In this case, that outside prop is the dictionary. As their coach approaches rougher country, it is this prop that begins to fly about the coach wildly: "Every time we avalanched from one end of the stage to the other, the unabridged dictionary would come too; and every time it came down it damaged somebody" (42). This dictionary, which Twain remarks "could be bought in San Francisco one day and received in Carson City the next" (31)—and was therefore not a necessary part of their luggage—is part of performing civilization that Twain humorously critiques throughout *Roughing It*. The dictionary is a physical, painful even, reminder of the props of civilization required of them (or that they require of themselves) to maintain their class identity.

Twain's humor in this scene is the perfect delivery system for a jab at such classist idealism. This scene of disarray and the dangerous flying dictionary comes from a legacy of humor that is an integral part of class performance in American literary history. In *Roughing It*, Twain brings together humor and class understanding that I identify as

coming from a line of similar understandings in early American literature. Obviously, the traditions of sarcasm, wit, humor, laughter, parody, et cetera, are a part of a longer literary tradition. In my project, however, I examine the integration of these types of humor¹ in the American social class system through the class performances of authors in their literary ventures.

In *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, Diana Taylor argues that “Cultural identity is highly performative. Recognition is predicated on embodied behaviors and speech acts: the languages we speak, the way we ‘do’ our gender and sexuality, the ways in which class and race are understandable and made visible, the degree of agency displayed by social actors” (121). Class, in my project, is made visible through markers beyond clothing and one’s monetary status. Thorstein Veblen’s *The Theory of the Leisure Class* is one of the seminal texts on American cultural mores in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Veblen writes, “Manners, we are told, are in part an elaboration of gesture, and in part they are symbolical and conventionalized survivals representing former acts of dominance or of personal service or of personal contact. In a large part they are an expression of the relation of status” (35). The acts of class performed in the texts in each chapter of this dissertation are performed through recognition of social norms and the pretense of “forgetting the acquisition” (Bourdieu 3) of culture, all the while reconstructing a class hierarchy with clear demarcations of who is in and who is out.

The myth of a classless nation still exists, despite all arguments to the contrary, and the performance of class is rarely subject to critique. Diana Taylor reminds us that

“Performances function as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated [behavior]” (2). The acts of mimicry performed by comic personae in early American texts are, thus, vital to the cultural memory of class creation and, in some cases, its undermining. In each instance, the efforts behind class construction and reproduction, especially social class as opposed to a strict monetary hierarchy, becomes more clearly a part of the culture of the United States of America. Through the examination of humor, I propose to add to what critiques of class performance does exist.

My idea of class performance is also based upon Judith Butler’s arguments regarding sexuality and performance. While Taylor focuses on the idea of performance in general as part of cultural identity, Butler’s arguments in regards to “replication” and “resignification” offer nuances to Taylor’s contention that I find necessary to my own arguments about class performance. In “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,” Judith Butler argues, “gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original” (722). Further, that “the parodic replication and resignification of heterosexual constructs within non-heterosexual frames brings into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called original, but it shows that heterosexuality only constitutes itself as the original through a convincing act of repetition” (724). In the same way, there is no original class structure. This so-called structure is a continuum of encounters in which differences can be exploited to create a (fictional) class structure. Thus, those who wish to be considered within a certain sphere of influence create a set of rules that must necessarily repeat itself

in order to be convincing and hegemonic. The “original” in this case can only constitute itself in contrast to what is “other.”

Pierre Bourdieu and Norbert Elias offer sociological research in the amorphous field of social class and mannerisms and both offer time as a strong component behind the acquisition of both: “Legitimate manners owe their value to the fact that they manifest the rarest conditions of acquisition, that is, a social power over time which is tacitly recognized as the supreme excellence [. . .] and applied by those who can take their time” (Bourdieu 71-72). It is the acquisition of mannerisms over the course of time, the transference of the performance of class over time, which marks the “legitimate” from the nouveau of each class congregation. Thorstein Veblen writes that “Refined tastes, manners, and habits of life are a useful evidence of gentility, because good breeding requires time, applications, and expense, and can therefore not be compassed by those whose time and energy are taken up with work” (36). In my project I focus mainly on the construction of the ideals of the middling classes, from the aping of the aristocrats mocked by William Byrd II to the snobbery of the frontiersman as *not* being one of the aristocracy, and the growing ideals of the people who lived in the social status between aristocrat and out-and-out poor in a country attempting to construct its own national identity and mores.

The subject of American class², especially in pre-industrial times, requires an understanding of the systems of class that were working in pre-Revolutionary America. Richard Slotkin offers one view:

Although there were class divisions sharply drawn in all the colonies, and class antagonisms in each, the points of contention between classes—and the nature,

numbers, and proportionate strength of the classes—did not correspond to English norms. Distinctions were drawn between ‘commonality’ and ‘men of note’ but ‘middling’ men were more numerous proportionately in New England than in old, and there was no landed aristocracy to check the rise of tradesmen and artisans to the highest social rank. [. . .] The English vocabulary of social values and distinctions was thus to a large extent inapplicable to the American situation.

- (*Regeneration Through Violence* 68)

Jennifer Goloboy adds to that reading in “The Early American Middle Class”: “The nature of the middle class was based not on its material situation [in the eighteenth-century], but on the set of values that gave it its sense of pride” (545). Each author in my dissertation finds him or her self in a place of confusion with what the set of values are that give his or her class “its sense of pride” and with how to define him or her self with, or against, this particular set of values.

Class is a difficult subject to tackle for many reasons—in this work the difficulty lies in the attempt at defining the middle class in a pre-industrial time. The vaguest, yet most apt, definition comes from Bourdieu: “a class or class fraction is identified not only by its position in the relation of production, as identified through indices such as occupation, income or even educational level, [. . .but] by a whole set of subsidiary characteristics which may function, in the form of tacit requirements, as real principles of selection or exclusion without ever being formally stated” (102). It is the “tacit requirements” in the writings of the authors upon which I focus in my dissertation.

I would like to note that my discussions of class may seem anachronistic, but these texts all spring from the European settling of the Americas, an imperialist act that foreshadows a more formal market capitalism that Marx tackles after the Industrial Revolution³. My discussions of class respond to theories of social class, such as that in

Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinctions*, rather than a strict monetary capitalism, like Marx. Thus, my use of the word may be pushing historical limits, but, even in *The Journal of Madame Knight*, written in 1704, I am justified in using class in both its social and economic senses.

My interest in the particular intersections of class and humor was first piqued while reading Robert Micklus' article "Colonial Humor: Beginning with the Butt," which also investigates comic personae in a few early American texts; however, I have departed from his ideas and arguments in that while he focuses on asking, generally, "what did our earliest humorists, north and south, laugh at?" (140), I ask *why*. Micklus touches upon class and manner differences as a reason for some authors to laugh at others, including Madame Knight and William Byrd II, but I delve deeper into the reasons why these authors created a persona to mock class differences. I give credit to Micklus for asking important, but general, questions about comic personae. While Micklus is working to defend the earliest American humorists against British and European invective against their satiric ability, my dissertation will depart from Micklus by discussing why I understand their satire as a method for reworking class divisions in early America.

Each chapter takes on a different type of class difference and idea of humor. In my Chapter II, I look at the travel narratives of Madame Sarah Knight, *The Journal of Madam Knight*, and William Byrd II's *The Secret History of the Line*. In this instance, the laughter is prompted by regional biases and the lack of any real distinction between those who write and observe and those about whom they write. The laughter in this chapter is based on the idea of the corrective, in particular "the circular reinforcement

each group performs on itself [. . .] intensifying cultural practice if it is cultivated, discouraging it by indifference or hostility if it is not” (Bourdieu 105). The reinforcement performed by Knight and Byrd is an underpinning of their own ideas of culture and place as brought about by their fears of the commonality of the others who live around them.

In Chapter III, I examine John Marrant’s *A Narrative of John Marrant, a Black*, and the influence of the Great Awakening on class culture. The intersections of class and race in this chapter also bring the idea of the trickster into my argument. The trickster, a well known and well-established bearer of laughter, is used by Marrant to establish himself and those like him—the poor and oppressed—to a more respected place in the social realm of Northern America.

In Chapter IV, I examine Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography* and the *Autobiography* of John Robert Shaw. In this chapter, I use Henri Bergson’s theory of the “elastic” and “inelastic” in order to argue that Franklin and Shaw are elastic in character, in comparison to those around them, and that this elasticity helps them to survive and prompts mockery of the more inflexible of their contemporaries. This chapter allows me to introduce a reading of Franklin that illustrates his debasement of the boot-strap method of social mobility. Instead of giving access to the ways and means of the American Dream, Franklin closes this dream off to others who mechanically imitate him. In this chapter, I will argue that Franklin’s masks and picaresque figure are what Henri Bergson would call “elastic.” In his seminal text on humor, Bergson argues that “The laughable element [. . .] consists of a certain mechanical *inelasticity*, just where one would expect to

find the wide-awake adaptability and the living pliability of a human being” (Bergson 10). Franklin is, as aforementioned, elastic in his adaptability to class performance—the humor is in the inelasticity implied in the performance of others mentioned in the text. While Franklin is a fluid caricature of himself, he creates an automated system of representation for others—prompting him to laugh at those who are rigidly following his lead.

John Robert Shaw offers a performance of one who sees the acts of the middling class without understanding the rules behind such acts. Shaw’s performance directs that laughter back to himself because he understands that he must perform his class to those who will support him and expect certain mannerisms from him. Shaw saw that, if nothing else, self-made men “cannot have the familiar relation to culture which authorizes liberties and audacities of those who are linked to it by birth, that is, by nature and essence” (Bourdieu 331). Unlike Benjamin Franklin, John Robert Shaw had to make a living for himself out of nothing, in a post-Revolutionary era when poverty could not be overcome despite having a pliable skill.

The last chapter looks at a text published later in the history of the colonies, after the American Revolution, and the early intersections of politics and laughter: David Crockett’s *A Narrative in the Life of David Crockett of the State of Tennessee*. As a comparator text, I examine Crockett’s literary foe, the riverboatman Mike Fink. Crockett’s brand of humor is an introduction to the type of southern humor that became popular literature and even became a part of the political realm in the Jacksonian era. This final chapter looks at a combination of humor that involves the elastic and inelastic,

regional and corrective laughter and the trickster as part of a collective tradition that culminates, in part, with Mark Twain as a writer of a truly “American” laughter. David Crockett, in this last text authorized by him for public consumption, was a “divine culture hero” (Lofaro xxxiv-xxxv) who becomes part of the “origin myth” that is the foundation of United States nationalism.

While the idea of class differs in each chapter, what pulls them together, among other things, is the idea of the comic persona reaching out from the text to create a humorous scene. The comic characters in the texts of the authors I work with in this project will demonstrate the use of the comic persona to “locate the butt of ridicule anywhere but in their own mirrors” (Micklus 152) within the context of class. To relocate this ridicule, the authors use a comic persona to perform the role of jester. Comic masks are a part of the corrective humor process, whether undermining or supporting a status structure. Henri Bergson argues that “Laughter is, above all, a corrective. Being intended to humiliate, it must make a painful impression on the person against whom it is directed. By laughter, society avenges itself for the liberties taken with it. It would fail in its object if it bore the stamp of sympathy or kindness” (Bergson 197). Bergson also argues that “In laughter we always find an unavowed intention to humiliate, and consequently to correct our neighbor, if not in his will, at least in his deed” (136). All of the authors in my dissertation offer a method of corrective behavior through laughter—each author writes a persona into his or her narrative who performs laughter.

The comic persona in each text transmits cultural knowledge from one element of society into another (cf Taylor), creating an idea of a corrective that bridges worlds.

Henri Bergson reminds us that to “understand laughter, we must put it back into its natural environment, which is society, and above all we must determine the utility of its function, which is a social one” (7-8). It is humor that the persona in each text attempts to communicate—it is a sense of humor that is difficult to translate so many years after the texts were written. What we can understand from these attempts at humor is, however, that each author is performing laughter as part of a social function that he or she found important enough to write down. I agree with Michael A. Lofaro who writes, “A face to face confrontation with the brutality, chauvinistic humor, and comic stereotypes that many nineteenth-century [and, I argue, earlier] Americans regarded as funny is a disturbing experience. But rather than ignoring history, the reader should view the best and the worst elements of the stories together as a cultural whole” (xxxviii). The persona in each text offers a glimpse at the humor each author was attempting, as well as gives us a glimpse at the performance required by that persona to invoke the authors’ particular brand of humor.

Taylor argues that “recognizing performance as a valid focus of analysis contributes to our understanding of embodied practice as an episteme and a praxis, a way of knowing as well as a way of storing and transmitting cultural knowledge and identity” (Taylor 278). This knowledge is remembered by individuals, and in autobiography, remembered by themselves for themselves. Once published, this information is transmitted to historical memory. Robert F. Sayre reminds us that autobiography “may reveal as much about the author’s assumed audience as they do about him or her, and this is a further reason why they need to be read as *cultural documents*, not just personal

ones” (*American Lives* 13). The autobiographies I study in this dissertation open different worlds to those willing to read them. I am not reading intention into these texts; rather, I am working under the belief that “The autobiographer writes history; the reader - of autobiography finds history revealed” (Sayre, *American Lives* 7). The authors of these texts may or may not have shown their class biases intentionally, but, as Robert F. Sayre argues “American autobiography, as a whole, then, is a kind of vast national scrapbook preserving people’s pain and joy and perhaps otherwise-forgotten experiences” (7). The preservation of these ideas is located within the texts, beneath the words and buried in the sequence of events written by the author him or her self. Sayre also argues that autobiography “reveals those quirkier or more specific modes of behavior, styles, tastes, educations, and vocations which might be called ‘forms of identity’” (12). In the texts I examine, the tastes and behaviors of each writer reveals a glimpse into the creation of class development and humor in early American literary history—and, thus, into American history itself.

Mark Twain believed that “it was the American storytellers’ role to Americanize and localize the stories he told, making the humor American rather than British” (Dodge 4). It is the stories that Knight, Byrd, Marrant, Franklin, Shaw, and Crockett tell that created and maintained the American class structure—it is in the stories that they tell that we can see behind the humor and into the social construction of class in early American history. America developed early on an ideology of class and commerce that is reflected in the development of its humor. The ideology that prompts the so-called invisibility of class in our society today requires us to examine it under a critical lens; this project uses

humor as this lens. In regarding humor too lightly in critical literary studies, we miss the significance of the use of humor in the development of foundational American ideologies, especially class. Elliot Oring rightfully argues that “Humor could be considered trivial only from a perspective that holds humanity itself to be trivial” (x). Through a critical, literary, examination of the ways in which humor contributes to class divides, and undermines them, we come closer to recognizing the social functions of humor in American society.

Endnotes

¹ Although there are too many aspects of the category of “humor” to label it definitively, a book reviewer who signed his initials H.W. (1838) offers a meaning similar to that which initially guides my research and examination of American wit and humor: “The cause of laughter is the ascription to objects of qualities or the representations of objects or persons with qualities the opposite of their own:—Humor is this ascription or representation when impregnated with character, whether individual or national” (22). Wit is the attribution of unknown qualities; specifics associated with class and nation create humor. On a national level, in effect, that which is other, or seen as other, is humorous. What is important is that both wit and humor depend on an “other.” While wit and humor are not synonymous, the recognition of wit in the creation of an “American humor” is important in the context of the ideologies under which that humor operates, especially in class relations. As Cameron Nickels notes, New England humor “as humor” “expressed serious issues of the time and in laughter relieved the tensions those issues created” (12).

² The OED offers these definitions of class: 2.a. a division or order of society according to status; a rank or grade of society. 1656 Blount Glossogr., *Classe*. An order or distribution of people according to their several Degrees. 6. a. gen. A number of individuals (persons or things) possessing common attributes, and grouped together under a general or “class” name; a kind, sort, division. (Now the leading sense.) 1709 Steele *Tatler* No. 77 para. 2 “This class of modern Wits I shall reserve for a chapter by itself.”

³ Even further, my use of the word class is not historically inaccurate: “From 1C17 [the first part of the seventeenth century] the use of class as a general word for a group or division became more and more common [. . .] The earliest use that I know, which might be read in a modern sense, is Defoe’s ‘tis plain the dearness of wages forms our people into more classes than other nations can show’ (*Review*, 14 April 1705)” (Williams 60-61).

CHAPTER II
ATTENTION TO PRETENSION: TRAVEL NARRATIVES AND SOCIETAL
LADDERS

The comic characters in the texts of the authors I work with in this chapter, Madame Sarah Kemble Knight and William Byrd, II, will demonstrate the use of the comic persona to “locate the butt of ridicule anywhere but in their own mirrors” (Micklus 152) within the context of class. The idea of the ridiculous—usually via comparisons and juxtapositions to show incongruity—invokes the satirical method within the larger schema of wit and humor. In *Engaging Humor*, Elliot Oring writes that once the audience laughs, the incongruities that invoked laughter are generally considered to be resolved (2). However, as Oring argues and this chapter finds, although it is believed that the laughter dissolves the differences between the disjointed images by creating a connection through the humor itself, it does not.

Although I will discuss these incongruities in other chapters, it is through the eyes of early travelers like Knight and Byrd in their works, *The Journal of Madame Knight* and *The Secret History of the Line*, respectively, that we can see how these writers make these comparisons of people of different ranks and regions. For instance, the incongruities between Madame Knight, a Bostonian merchant, and the “bumpkins” she sees in New York City become a site of humor for her audience, even today. Robert F.

Sayre argues that Knight's *Journal* is "an early illustration of one of the most basic types of American humor, in which a cultivated outsider ridicules the grossness of country bumpkins. For a New England woman, perhaps for any New Englander, this is both a new self and a new way of expressing it. It is secular, partially comic, sophisticated, and dramatic" (*American Lives* 70). In laughing at the ridiculousness of these city-bumpkins, as opposed to the country-bumpkins we are used to reading about, we supposedly resolve the incongruity of the bumpkin image out of its proper location. Through our shared laughter, we understand that city-bumpkins are not really "city" bumpkins, but that they are country people out of their "natural" element. The incongruity that is resolved in incongruity-resolution theory—where "humor depends upon the perception of an incongruity that is resolved or made sense of"—is, Elliot Oring argues, in fact, not resolved (2). Calling this unresolved problem appropriate incongruity, Oring defines it as a place in laughter where the "incongruity remains, even though points of connection between the incongruous categories are discovered" (2). Our laughter at Knight's descriptions does not "solve" the incongruity; in fact, the incongruity between "us" and "them" remains. Laughter answers obvious differences, but the underlying cause for the laughter is left unresolved.

Robert Micklus argues that "our earliest humorists were understandably too insecure to enjoy any other than an infrequent laugh at their own expense. By laughing at the manners and beliefs of those who did not meet their standards, they were perhaps able to convince themselves that all was right in their own private worlds or, at least, in their own minds" (152). The residual humor—the "appropriate incongruity"—shows that it

would never really be “all right” even in the authors’ own minds. Richard Slotkin argues in *Regeneration Through Violence* that “In societies that are still in the process of achieving a sense of identity, the establishment of a nominative, characteristic image of the group’s character is a psychological necessity; and the simplest means of defining or expressing the sense of such a norm is by rejecting some other group whose character is deemed to be the opposite” (68). The humor in the texts I examine in my dissertation, especially in this chapter, invokes the incongruous, where the juxtaposition is never really resolved—there is no coming together between the comparisons because the authors are not convinced that the other belongs to their world at all.

Because both of these works are travel narratives, the works speak to the “otherness” of those outside of the comfortable social circles of both Sarah Knight and William Byrd. While Knight is a middle-class merchant and Byrd a Virginian land-owning aristocrat, they both have an understanding of their social places in society that are best revealed in their ruminations on their travels and the people that they meet on those travels. Their understanding of their places are challenged, however, because social status does not have fixed rules—instead, it is constantly fluid. In literature in which the “other” is usually gendered or racialized, these travel narratives in particular point out the *class* “otherness” of people whom they meet on their travels.

Although *The Journal of Madame Knight* is an example of what Sargent Bush, Jr. calls “an important contribution to the tradition of American humor” (70), we have yet to question the exact nature of this contribution and the problems of class (cf Introduction) in the text. Sarah Kemble Knight negotiates class differences in the *Journal*, through her

descriptions of the “dirty” and lower class people whom she meets along the road, in ways that Bush identifies as a “humorous satirical dimension in the work” (76). I want to propose that Knight’s use of humor is part of a larger class struggle in colonial New England. As there was no true English aristocracy in New England at this time (besides the Crown’s representatives, of course) the class struggle at this time had much more to do with the reshaping of the class hierarchy than between well-established class divisions. In perceiving in Knight’s humor more than just entertainment, we find within the laughter a tension that reflects Knight’s growing concern with her place in Boston’s society—a burgeoning middle-class social order occupied with status and displays of that status.

Born in 1666, Knight was part of a changing social and economic structure unfolding in New England, as well as part of the merchant class that fought for clear demarcations between it and the lower classes. She was further involved in this structure when she married “a shipmaster and London agent for an American company” (Martin 51). From a good family herself, Knight’s marriage represented a coming together of wealth and status. Perry D. Westbrook remarks that Knight was “addressed as Madame because she was a teacher [of penmanship], was the daughter of a Boston merchant and the wife of a sea captain” (“Qualities and Origins” 61). Because her husband was frequently away on business, and their capital was mainly invested in the cargo his ships carried, Knight undertook several ventures to supplement their income, including owning an inn and a shop and venturing in Indian trading and farming (Martin 51). Wendy Martin observes, “[Knight’s] business acumen was notable as, upon her death in 1727,

she left a formidable estate of 1,800 [British Pounds]” (51). Knight was not only a part of the growing middle class; she was inextricably linked to its successes in the heady days of early capitalist enterprise.

Her *Journal* offers modern readers a glimpse of what life for a woman of “middling economic and social standing” (Bush 72) was like during those days. As Edwin T. Perkins explains, the

exercise of political power by the merchant class was another unique characteristic of the mainland colonies. Elsewhere around the world in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, large landholders were the social and economic elite, and they held a firm grasp on virtually all government offices. [. . .] In England, merchants likewise ranked far below hereditary landowners, but upward social mobility was not completely restricted. (Perkins 137)

Thus, Perkins argues, “In the mainland colonies [like North America], which had no domineering landholding class, merchants enjoyed high status from the outset” (Perkins 137). In the colonies, according to Perkins, “given the absence of factory work in the colonial era, urban areas were commercial and handicraft centers, populated by merchants, artisans, mariners, and common laborers. The term ‘merchant’ was loosely applied to persons ranging from poor storekeepers on the frontier to wealthy shipowners in the major ports” (Perkins 115). Knight’s merchant title allowed her to be a part of the merchant elite, but also made her part of a loose collection of other types of merchants that made her susceptible to status confusion in the New England colonies. Knight added to this confusion herself when she took the journey that she writes about in her journal but through her *Journal* she attempts to correct any misconceptions about her particular place in middling class society.

Sarah Kemble Knight made an incredible journey for a woman of her class—for any woman—in the early eighteenth-century. In 1704, Knight traveled alone from Boston to New York, via New Haven Connecticut, a round-trip of five months and two-hundred miles (Martin 51). Except for the occasional friendly companion or paid guide, Knight journeyed alone. This trip is heralded by critics and feminists alike as proof of early American womanly strength, especially as “the route itself was [. . .] difficult and covered somewhat treacherous terrain” (51). The difficulties of that journey and the apparent ease at which she undertook it would have, however, cast doubt on her femininity¹ due to the strict class and gender codes in her own time period. In her work, *The Journal of Madame Knight* (hereafter referred to as the *Journal*), Knight purposefully reestablishes her femininity through reaffirming class norms. In the *Journal* she performs the role of a middling class woman for whom the long journey is a burden. How much within this work is a persona and how much is the “real” Knight is impossible to determine—but her narrative descriptions and humor offer an understanding of what was involved with her particular class performance in regards to this particular journey. During a journey that was out of character for any respectable middle-class woman to undertake alone, Knight persists in calling attention to class distinctions that will bolster her femininity and thus her status within the merchant class.

Like other early American women writers, Knight’s work was not printed for public consumption—the *Journal* was published well after her death. Instead, she circulated her work privately among ladies in a circle of her own rank (Michaelson fn21). The *Journal* was first published in 1825. As Westbrook points out, “Knight’s *Journal*

was not published until about a hundred years after her death. Very likely she wrote it for her own and perhaps her family's and friends' amusement. It might, indeed, have been deemed unsuitable for publication in the early eighteenth century, for it conveyed no message, religious or otherwise" (62). In fact, like William Byrd II's commonplace book, Knight's journal was a reminder for herself, and, one suspects, the women with whom she shared the text of her class position. Knight's *Journal* offers modern readers a "cultural document" from which we can read as much about "the author's assumed audience" as we can learn about Knight herself (Sayre, *American Lives* 13).

The scholarship on manuscript circulation is beginning to tackle the difficult work of women's manuscript circulation in colonial America. Knight's circle of friends could be equated to a salon. However, as Karin A. Wulf historicizes, the circulation of manuscripts in colonial America

proceeded at a slower pace [than Europe]. Although evidence suggests that by the early nineteenth century American women became interested in emulating some aspects of the French model, throughout the pre-Revolutionary era American literary culture was more loosely organized and less explicitly political. [. . .] Organized groups of readers were less common, less formal, and less political than the French salon model. (24-25)

As Anne M. Ousterhout discusses in her work on Elizabeth Graeme Fergusson's texts, "[p]reserved in the respective commonplace books, Elizabeth Graeme Fergusson's travel journal and companion odes together represent women's aesthetic preference for manuscripts at a time when printed texts were proliferating during the eighteenth century" (4). Sarah Knight was not writing a journal in order to become published—women's work was sometimes published and considered publishable, but women did not necessarily want to share their private journals with an unknown crowd of readers (King

174). Her circle of friends was made up of those she could trust with her accounts and to keep them within the circle of the parlor room.

In writing a journal teeming with class references, Knight could regale her friends with both adventures from her trip *and* her expertise of the feminine mannerisms that would have been important for her to demonstrate as a good middle-class woman. As Henri Bergson reminds us, “society holds suspended over each individual member, if not the threat of correction, at all events the prospect of a snubbing, which although it is slight, is none the less dreaded. Such must be the function of laughter” (135). Her *Journal* supports what Daniel T. O’Hara notes in his essay on “Class,” that “[p]rior to the nineteenth century, the sense of class distinctions appeared embodied in literature via the principle of decorum; how one spoke [and, arguably, how one wrote] marked one’s social and even moral status” (407 fn1). In sharing her journal with influential women, Knight lobbied for a continued place in a status structure that accepted only those who conformed to appropriate social codes.

Through her reinforcement of normative behavior for the merchant class in her *Journal*, Knight reinscribes herself into Boston’s genteel set and endorses her own position in eighteenth-century middle-class society. As a merchant, Knight was not one of the Boston elite². Her position in the emerging merchant class meant that she was part of a group that mimicked the rule of the elite classes but celebrated their own lack of blood-born aristocracy that would too closely connect them to the papist royal family. Knight contrasts manners of others with her own familiarity of middle-class behaviors to draw attention to her knowledge of these middle class rules. If Knight had failed to show

her knowledge of class status symbols, middle class Boston would have rejected her much as she rejects lower class women in her *Journal*. Her business ventures present a possible danger to those who insist on a rigid social hierarchy—as a merchant *woman*, she has little to distinguish herself from the common women who ran the local inns or worked in the shops. Despite Lyle Koehler’s assertion that Knight’s mercantilism was “influenced by changes in the options available to woman in the late century,” including “a societal mood which subtly legitimized more assertive activity on the part of good Puritan women” (436), Koehler also concedes that “most women who did things which were considered ‘masculine,’ or who acted non-deferentially, ended up facing censure instead of acclaim” (190). The censure is not that a woman should not do business, but that middle class women specifically didn’t “do” business.

Knight’s most public “masculine” undertaking is the trip described in her *Journal*. Julia Stern relates that “in pre-Revolutionary America, ‘ladies’ do not undertake journeys without escort; they do not frequent towns and ordinaries; and to transact personal business far from home is unthinkable” (3). As a merchant traveling on her own to help a widowed cousin settle the articles of her inheritance, Knight shows herself to be a fairly “suspect” lady. Stern hypothesizes that being involved in these “unladylike” exertions is perhaps “why Knight is mistaken for a prostitute at the first inn in which she stops [the Billing’s Inn at old Dorchester, now Sharon, Mass. (Bush 90 Fn6)]. That a woman of her social rank would be on the road late at night in fine clothes could be understood in no other way in rural Connecticut of 1704” (Stern 3). In addition to her other public-sphere activities, her journey places Knight outside of established gender roles. As a lady, her

duty is to the hearth and homestead—her capitalist enterprise was to keep it economically sound, and working within the home, not working in “outside” the masculine realm of market capitalism.

Even the task of weaving, traditionally a masculine industry (Ulrich 37) became part of the home economy because in New England the men were “farmers, lumberers, and mariners; because the flax they grew kept their daughters employed; because the ships that carried their fish and lumber to the West Indies brought back cotton as well as sugar; and because the rough land they cleared was suitable for sheep” (Ulrich 38-39). Although the women weavers, as an example, had an impact on the larger colonial economy, their production took place at home. Because she left her home to pursue business transactions, and in order to maintain her genteel status, Knight has to prove she knows the proper social codes.

Knight shows her knowledge of these status symbols in her description of manners and cleanliness, signs of being “civilized.” As Norbert Elias notes about early sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth century France and England, “with the spread of civilization [...] the varieties or nuances of civilized conduct are increased” (386). Civilization is about conduct and distinction. Knight cannot merely be civil; she must show that she is part of the civilizing community. She cannot merely be mannerly, she also has to emphasize her knowledge of the reasons these manners are used. People relegated to middling status realized, in the years leading up to the Industrial Revolution and the eighteenth century, that their gains in “social power and self-confidence” increased “social contrasts and tensions between themselves and the social strata beneath

them” (Elias 430). This reinforcement of social divides created a tension that made “the code of behavior [for the middle classes] [. . .] stricter” (Elias 69). Thus, Knight was required to prove herself to her social peers using her knowledge of these nuanced rules. I would argue that she used laughter in her *Journal* as a way to show her understanding of those codes.

This humor shows up in Knight’s descriptions of an innkeeper’s daughter she meets the first night after she leaves her home in Boston. The innkeeper’s daughter “sett herself just before me, showing the way to Reding, that I might see her Ornaments, perhaps to gain the more respect. But her Granam’s new Rung sow, had it appeared, would [have] affected me as much” (54). In this brief encounter, Knight reveals that she finds the innkeeper’s daughter vulgar. Knight implies that ostentatious displays of wealth, or what one thinks of as wealth, are counter to middle class sensibilities. Knight conveys her ridicule for this display by giving her audience even more damaging evidence of the innkeeper’s daughter’s pretension: “Miss star’d awhile, drew a chair, bid me sitt, And then run up stairs and putts on two or three Rings [. . .] and returning, sett herself before me” (54). Not only is the girl flashy, she is, by Knight’s standards, deliberately so.

In this excerpt, Knight takes the opportunity to reify class distinctions by making a mockery of the innkeeper’s daughter. Bergson argues, “Laughter is, above all, a corrective. Being intended to humiliate, it must make a painful impression on the person against whom it is directed. By laughter, society avenges itself for the liberties taken with it. It would fail in its object if it bore the stamp of sympathy or kindness” (Bergson

197). The innkeeper's daughter is the comic character in this text—Knight is here masking any other character traits in order to show the innkeeper's daughter in the worst sort of light. A modern reader cannot know whether the innkeeper's daughter is in fact vulgarly showing-off her jewelry; perhaps Knight reads these class differences in this interaction as an opportunity to show her audience her knowledge of genteel taste. And, as Pierre Bourdieu reminds us “[m]iddle-brow culture is resolutely against vulgarity” (326). Knight relates this encounter in her *Journal* to show her own “middle-brow” sensibilities using the innkeeper's daughter's manners as a contrast in order to exhibit hers. Regardless of the girl's true status, Knight's representation of her serves Knight's own ends.

In Knight's interaction with the innkeeper's daughter, she creates a comparison between a commoner's jewelry and a pig in order to create an incongruity that provokes laughter. The comparison evokes a sense of the ridiculous; one imagines a dirty pig snuffling at the feet of an over-ornate woman in a dirty inn, which can only result in laughter. The comparison may indicate a divide between rural and city folk, foreshadowing frontier humor or the humor found in Brother Jonathon jokes and Yankee tales. In this type of comedy, Jonathon and the Yankee serve as a foil to the city-dweller, usually to Jonathan's disadvantage. However, in this case, as Knight was also involved in farming, she may have actually preferred the pig more than she appreciates the innkeeper's daughter's apparent insistence on being noticed.

Why does Knight pick on the innkeeper's daughter? Because there is no visible difference between Knight's own method of commerce and the innkeeper's daughter's.

Knight herself has owned an inn, so the innkeeper's daughter's wealth and the way in which Knight has earned hers are quite similar. However, Knight comes from a well-known, although not aristocratic, family of some status in Boston circles; thus, she feels herself to be different from the upstart innkeeper's daughter, whose apparent lack of manners reveals her lower standing in society. By running upstairs to put her jewelry on, the innkeeper's daughter was obviously trying to convey to Knight that she was not an ordinary girl, but one of some value. For Knight, this gesture only serves to underline the girl's tastelessness. Knight is both criticizing the girl's apparent aspirations of equality to her, a woman of middle-class standing, and making Knight herself look more genteel.

Knight suggests that the innkeeper's daughter, besides being offensive, also has little sense of how to entertain guests or visitors of Knight's class in this situation. She knows, Knight says, to inquire after her journey, but, Knight relates, that she also "asked silly questions, without asking me to sit down" (54). In fact, the innkeeper's daughter, "[i]nterrogate[s]" her in a way that makes Knight stand "aghast" (54). To rebuke her, Knight writes that "I told her shee treated me very Rudely, and I did not think it my duty to answer her unmannerly Questions" (54). Knight puts the girl in her place by instructing her on how to treat a guest, albeit a paying one. In reprimanding the girl, Knight is telling her that there is, in fact, a difference between them. Knight exposes herself here because as a customer she isn't a guest, but a traveler—a mere merchant. In creating a situation in which the innkeeper's daughter is made fun of for her lack of manners—her "silly questions"—Knight can deflect attention from herself. By putting

the innkeeper's daughter in her place, Knight is setting a line of demarcation—with Knight firmly established within the confines of the middle class.

The performance of Knight's status is also reflected in an encounter with a different sort of innkeeper she boards with in Narragansett—an innkeeper who knows her place. Knight makes a point to describe this woman's servility: "I was very civilly Received, and courteously entertained, in a clean comfortable House; and the Good woman was very active in helping off my Riding clothes, and then ask'd what I would eat" (57). As there is no servant, and as Knight does not name her as she does the upper class women she boards with, one infers that this innkeeper is of a lower class, like the first innkeeper's daughter. Knight delivers this experience in a simple narrative style, without the jibes at the innkeeper, his home, or his wife, that she delivers in the previous scenario. This episode reveals that Knight is able to write about people of lower status without humor, but only if they show that they know their place and acknowledge hers.

Knight is not always, nor only, critical of the women she meets on her journey, proving to some extent that Knight is not merely being cruel to those of her gender in a pique of female hostility. As she depends on class roles to establish her womanhood, she criticizes all working-class people that offer her the opportunity to reestablish her within her "proper" gender role. Stern writes that

Perhaps uneasy with having ventured out of the purview of female domesticity, Knight refocuses the anxiety she feels for having transgressed eighteenth-century gender codes by projecting hostility back onto the female bodies of unknown others. (6)

To the degree that Knight does critique women in her *Journal*, Stern's observations are valid. But what Stern does not address is that Knight's hostility focuses on working class

women *and* men. Even more, as shown in the example of the “Good woman” of the “neat and handsome” inn, Knight is willing to give praise if this will underscore to her community her understanding of domestic conduct. When she finds a clean domicile, she readily praises the women of that house for their abilities as working-class women. In the aforementioned example, praising the woman for her cleanliness works as well to assert Knight’s own domestic capabilities as being critical would have done.

As an enterprising woman, Knight would have been suspect in her limited society because of her ability and desire to traffic in what was considered to be a masculine marketplace outside of the home; her own class could reject her, through a strict application of gendered social codes, as a potentially unfeminine woman, and, as such, an ultimate danger to their own status. Consequently, in order to bolster her status as a “real” woman within the social hierarchy, Knight would have to reestablish herself as an expert on civilizing techniques, including on domestic matters. In New York, Knight comments that as an experienced shopkeeper she

Observe[d] here the great necessity and bennifitt both of Education and Conversation; for these people [country folk who have moved to the city] have as Large a portion of mother witt, and sometimes a Larger, than those who have been brought up in Citties; But for want to emprovements, Render themselves almost Ridiculos [. . .]. I should be glad if they would leave such follies [such as standing speechless in stores in awe] and am sure all that Love Clean Houses (at least) would be glad on’t too. (66)

Knight postulates that women of her class, those that “Love Clean Houses,” would agree that the education of the lower class is the only way to make them less “Ridiculos.”

As a middle class woman Knight has a responsibility to help “civilize” the lower classes. Thus she uses this opportunity to emphasize (and offer a solution to) the “follies”

and uncleanliness of those of lower status. However, Knight did not perceive education as a civilizing process. As Pierre Bourdieu and Sharon O'Dair, among others, inform us, education creates and enforces normativity and is not necessarily a path toward egalitarianism. Civilization in the way of education and conversation would make these bumpkins less disgraceful, Knight seems to argue. But the education Knight values would teach them to be more like the innkeeper's wife in Narragansett and less like the innkeeper's daughter outside of Boston—that is, less laughable and more respectful of women of Knight's station.

Cleanliness, which is, of course, next to godliness, is a social marker of those who can afford to stop working long enough to be clean enough—in other words, to paraphrase Knight, *not* those living as a working class citizen. Notions of cleanliness surface throughout the *Journal*. For instance, in the beginning stages of her journey (when she reaches Kingstown, Rhode Island [Bush 94 fn22]) Knight states that one of her lodges was “a clean comfortable House” (57). Because of the cleanliness of this house, Knight feels well-disposed to remark that she was quite comfortable in this place, especially as the “Good woman” of the house kept it “neet and handsome” (57-58). Everyone in that house is “clean,” to Knight's “satisfaction” and, thus, Knight writes that she was treated “courteously” and “civilly” (57). The women of the house are not her equals, but Knight deigns to notice that they are satisfactory working class people—a condescension only a woman of her class (or higher) could “grant” to another.

Critics tend to conscript Knight's work to the realm of humor in American literature because of her wit, but they do this despite her degradation of the lower classes.

Scott Michaelson, who emphasizes the class issues in the text, asserts that “linking hatred and narrative wit, [Knight’s *Journal*] quite simply makes class racisms [classism] fun.” The narrative wit in the text is a method of controlling laughter—the last laugh is the one that gets the upper hand. In Knight’s *Journal*, wit is part of the civilizing process in that she uses it (after the fact and for an audience) to punish transgressions of societal boundaries. In creating a space through writing and sharing her *Journal*, a space in which she and her peers can laugh at those under them in the social hierarchy, Knight is reaffirming class distinctions as well as planting herself firmly within the barriers of middle class status behaviors. By creating a place for laughter in the parlors where she shared her manuscript, Knight controls the humor of her journey and shows her social peers that she is a useful part of the middle-class community. Knight directs the impulse to laugh *away* from potential ridicule of her *towards* those who violate middle class codes.

Not only does Knight criticize and praise others and their housekeeping in her effort to reaffirm her femininity, she also uses Christian virtues to help bolster her womanhood. Knight is a complex character who realizes her tenuous position in her strictly coded world and she makes sure that her assertion of superiority over other classes is not deemed as a cruel, or, worse, un-Christian-like, attitude. She does stress her class superiority over the working-classes, as I have shown, but she also knows that she must show signs of mercy and charity in order to further fulfill her role as a good Christian woman. Knight’s Puritan background would have also informed her “to not identify with the poor and downtrodden, to fail to attend to their needs, was to suffer the

pain of being disinherited [from the Kingdom of God]" (hooks 39). However, the charity Knight does show is not directed toward any of the common innkeepers or other working class people she meets on the road. Knight chooses to display her womanly sympathy to a poor family (who lived near the Paukataug River in Rhode Island [Bush 97 Figure 2.4]) that, despite their poverty, nonetheless exhibits an "Inhabitation" that is "very clean and tydee; to the crossing of the Old Proverb, that bare walls make giddy hows-wifes" (60). Knight praises their cleanliness and shows her charitable side in acknowledging them at all in order to reflect her warm and nurturing (in other words, her feminine) nature.

It is in this part of Knight's narrative that she reflects on her own circumstances: "I Blest myselfe that I was not one of this miserable crew" (60). Further, she composes a little poem in which she counts her blessings. In this poem Knight intones that when she thinks about how poor and "Misirable" the people by the river are, "my late fatigues do seem / Only a notion or a forgotten Dream" (60). Knight gives thanks to the God whom she, unlike her predecessor Rowlandson, virtually ignores throughout the *Journal*. As Julia Stern discerns, "Unlike the Puritan women who write about their wilderness trials in the form of the captivity narrative [. . .] Knight traverses the frontier as an economic agent rather than as a soul driven by divine injunction" (1-2). In order to counter possible arguments that her masculinity is ungodly, Knight acknowledges, in giving her thanks to God for her own health and economic status, that she is aware of God's graciousness toward her. Knight's reflection places her in a feminine tradition of "divine" travel in the wilderness, as well as shows her humble nature before the Puritan (and masculine) God.

Despite Knight's poetic refutation of her complaints about her "late fatigues," Knight does grumble from the beginning to the end of the *Journal* about her aches and pains. Throughout her journey she remarks that she has to lie down to "Strech[] my tired Limbs" (54), complains because "my poor bones complained bitterly not being used to such Lodgings" (67) or rests because she is "poor weary" (59). It is not only her bodily pains upon which Knight reflects, but she also writes that she has a delicate stomach. Throughout the *Journal* Knight comments that her meals are poor; in one instance, she and her companion did not eat "our Dinners, wch was only smell" (62). Once, when she is feeling a little ill and wants dinner, she records,

They had nothing but milk in the house, wch they Boild, and to make it better sweetened wth molasses, which I not knowing or thinking oft till it was down and coming up agen wch it did in so plentifull a manner that my host was soon paid double for his portion, and that in specia. (71)

This last incident took place in a house in which the woman who opened the door to Knight was "a surly old shee Creature, not worthy the name of woman" (70). She stops at this house in "East Chester" on the way to "New Rochell," and Boston (Knight 71). The house was not only dirty, but also, in giving her an inedible meal, inhospitable. This anecdote also serves Knight well in that it makes her look comparatively delicate. Ostensibly, the poor woman who added molasses to the milk was able to drink this concoction and had found it palatable enough herself to feel comfortable serving it to a guest.

The comparison Knight infers in this example works to further "other" the working class from Knight and to reinscribe Knight into a more lady-like position than she is in as a lone female wanderer in the wilderness. Stern elucidates that

[Knight's] account vividly catalogues every ache, pain, chill, bad meal, and sleepless night of her own suffered on the road. Such a litany testifies to the difficulty of the journey and suggests by contrast that Knight is not accustomed to the physical strain of the traveler's life, that she is, under ordinary circumstances, sedentary, domestic, and the frequent object of attentive service. (3)

While she may have, indeed, suffered on her journey, when one remembers that Knight's audience was a group of sedentary, middle-class ladies, the listing of aches and pains also does much to give the *impression* of a "sedentary, domestic" woman of the non-laboring class that Knight struggles to impart throughout the *Journal*. Her complaints are part of her performance.

Knight also places her (feminine) suffering in contrast to the men she meets on the road, including one of her first guides, John. John "entertained me with the Adventures he had passed by late Rideing, and eminent Dangers he had escaped" (53). Later in the evening, "wee come into a thick swamp, wch. by Reason of a great fogg, very much started mee, it being now very Dark. But nothing dismay'd John: Hee had encountered a thousand and a thousand such Swamps" (53). In telling these tales, the guide is trying to scare the lady traveler—and Knight is, given her tone of voice, not afraid as long as she has John, her "Prince disguis'd" (53), to help her. Knight contrasts her delicateness to John's "manly" ability to travel at late hours in precarious places. With her sensitive constitution and nervous condition, Knight has proven, superficially at least, that she is a delicate, yet brave, and again, in her coded society, feminine, woman.

Later in the narrative, Knight becomes separated from her guides. Knight describes that she was in "the dolesome woods, my Company next to none, Going I knew not whither, and encompassed wth Terrifying darkness" (56). This she says, "was enough

to startle a more Masculine courage” (56). This courage, she writes, is not one with which she is endowed; however, she describes how she was shortly thereafter greeted by the “the friendly Appearance of the Kind Conductress of the night” (56). The light of the moon, Knight notes, gave her the courage to continue on her journey. The descriptions of this particular experience are effective in two distinct ways. First, Knight makes the obvious connections to being lost in the wilderness and being a sinner on a dark path that only God's grace can illuminate. This is yet another way that Knight links herself to her journaling female predecessors. The second connection she calls attention to a little later, when she writes that the moon “fill’s” her imagination.

For Knight, the moon, “especially wñ the moon glar’d light through the branches, fill’d my Imagination wth the pleasant delusion of a Sumptuous city, fill’d wth famous Buildings and churches, wth their spiring steeples, Balconies, Galleries and I know not what” (57). These inspiring thoughts, which entertained her “agreeably [. . .] without a thou’t of any thing but thoughts themselves” (57) also place her firmly back into polite society. As we will see later with William Byrd II, Knight is able to carry the city with her by bringing the marks of her gentility with her. The country folk she sees in New York City carry the country into the city with them—a mark of the lack of civilization. Although she is traveling in the wilderness, Knight asserts that she belongs in a higher society and culture. “Seen as crazy and strange [the backwoods folks’] was an outlaw culture,” hooks argues, “a culture without tidy rules of middle-class mannerisms, a culture on the edge” (19). Knight does not belong among the poorer, dirtier, or uneducated classes who live in the woods or even those who are “backwoods” within the

confines of the city. Her sensibilities, as *she* avers in the *Journal*, are not on the edge, but firmly grounded in middle-class culture. Knight, a woman of class and some femininity, establishes herself in the respectableness of the city and the safe-sphere of home and domesticity, and, thus, a part of a civilizing influence within a powerful class structure.

Knight was part of a culture of an increased capitalist ethic that influenced the small neighborhoods and growing cities of New England. At the same time this ethic was increasing, the populations of New England grew and people began to move west, creating a complex social and economic network outside of the central city of Boston (Greene, *Imperatives* 79). Thus, even though ministers, such as Cotton Mather, were still an integral part of the religious and governmental systems of New England, these systems had less influence on outlying communities. With 7,000 people in Boston, the clergy even struggled to maintain its control within city limits. And, as Puritan control waned, the Puritan social structure also diminished. Other arrangements formed to take the place of the religious one—particularly a secular social system founded on wealth, manners, and education that required what we might call, thanks to the work of Michael Foucault, self-regulation. While Puritan communities relied on a centrally located power such as the pulpit, the emerging societies proceeding this community can be equated to the changes in social tensions Norbert Elias discusses in his argument about the conflict between court aristocracy and a rising bourgeois strata: “inner tension [. . .] constitute[d] one of the most powerful driving forces of [. . .] social control that every member [of a particular class] exert[ed] over himself and other people in his circle” (Elias 424). Elias continues, “the constant pressure from below and the fear it induces above are, in short,

one of the strongest driving forces—though not the only one—of that specifically civilized refinement which distinguishes the people of this upper class from others and finally becomes second nature to them” (Elias 424). Simply put, those people who wished to be distinguished from the lower classes, and even those of lower status within the merchant class itself, had to define themselves through a strict self-control of manners.

As Knight’s incident with the innkeeper’s daughter shows us, this refinement may be the only tangible dissimilarity available to that class to differentiate themselves from those they see as belonging to a lower sphere. “Old [European] attitudes toward social status remained intact, but in economic terms the distance between the bottom and the top of society was relatively slight” (Hawke 2). With the spread of a capitalist market economy and increased mobility, more people like the innkeeper’s daughter would attempt to “pass” in the middle class merchanting culture guarded by people like Sarah Kemble Knight. The humorous situations Knight describes in her *Journal* reflect her particular method of distinguishing her class—with herself, of course, deeply embedded within it—from the people she encounters on the road.

While Michaelson finds that Knight’s *Journal* “concerns the triumph of a funny, early modern woman (a business-woman—as shop owner, trader, and expert on estates) exceeding the religious, pietistic, and gender boundaries that ensnared many other Puritan women,” Knight is a woman very much “ensnared” in the ideological rules guiding the boundaries that held her contemporaries. Knight is not simply or steadily within those boundaries: she is desperately fighting to reestablish herself within them. As Pierre

Bourdieu states, “there are as many ways of realizing femininity as there are classes and class fractions [. . .] both in [labor] practices and representations, in the different social classes” (107-08). Knight realizes her femininity through class and class differences. Through her depiction of her delicateness and by critiquing the domestic lives of men and women she meets on the road (both markers of femininity for Knight), Knight rewrites herself into the bounded definition of femininity extolled by the middle-class and takes her place in the hegemonic structure of eighteenth-century colonial America. Through her *Journal*'s depiction of the humor of the ridiculous, Knight labors to situate herself within the status-laden realm of early middle-class American society.

Unlike Knight, William Byrd II did not have to assert his gender—instead, he had to struggle with his own doubts about his place in the class structure of mother-England—the structure is one from which, in London, he was soundly rejected, and he was, in Virginia, wholly accepted. In Byrd's *The Secret History of the Line*, he illustrates his part in the surveying of the Virginia and North Carolina as both important and lighthearted. This depiction contrasts to the official *History of the Line* (published in 1841); in *The Secret History* (published in 1929), Byrd, as the character “Steddy,” describes the foibles of his fellow committee members, mocks the Carolinians' penchant for pork, and, in general, makes fun of most of the people he meets along the road. Byrd is very ready to laugh at himself—but only when it generates more laughter toward others. In making everyone else look ridiculous, he shows why those he works with on this project are, despite their surface qualifications and aspirations, not gentleman.

William Byrd II spent the early part of his life, from about ages 7-23, in London, being educated in the ways of “true” Englishmen. According to his biographers, and himself via his diaries and commonplace book, he failed. Unfortunately, he also failed to feel at home in Virginia. He was, however, a Virginian aristocrat—a position he tolerated once he realized that he would always be regarded as a colonial. Kenneth Lockridge, in his study of Byrd’s diary argues that, “[w]hen he laughs at the clowns from North Carolina he laughed as well at himself. Byrd’s *Secret History* is ultimately a modest, and almost a self-mocking celebration of the Virginia ‘breeding’ he had decided to accept” (*Diary* 135). I will argue that Byrd did not in fact “accept” this breeding, but became more private in his disparagement of it when he finally settled in Virginia. The *Secret History*, much like Knight’s *Journal*, reflects his insecurities about his place in the society he was trained for—using humor, the pretensions of the middle class, and unmannered gentlemen to bolster his understanding of himself as an upperclass English gentleman.

After finishing his schooling and resettling in Virginia, Byrd was asked to serve as a commissioner for a group measuring the dividing line between Virginia and North Carolina. Lockridge writes that

It was under [William] Gooch, in December of 1727, that Byrd was appointed with the approval of the Burgesses and Council as one of Virginia’s boundary commissioners to run the line between their colony and North Carolina. This was a distinction and an opportunity for adventure which was to change Byrd’s life. It would give him a new genre and a new vision of Virginia’s future. But most immediately it enabled him to do something [former Governor] Spotswood had done, to gain glory by leading an expedition to the west. So some of the widely distributed power in this indigenous political system devolved very quickly back on councilor Byrd in the form of glory. That seems to have reconciled him to his

place in the local system of power fully as much as did Gooch's diffidence.
(*Diary* 126)

Byrd's writings make it clear that he aspired to the governorship of Virginia. The few colonials who reached that position were still colonials; however, they were also accepted into the upper echelons of London society. Historians who have studied Byrd express certainty that Byrd would never have reached the position of governor, though, despite his political maneuverings and English education. Perhaps in recognition of his own certainty of this fact, in *The Secret History of the Line* Byrd shows exactly how reluctant a Virginian he was: throughout the text Byrd differentiates himself from the other colonial Virginians to show his true Englishman-ness. Lockridge argues further that,

There was of course a continuing struggle in Virginia politics, as there had been within William Byrd himself, between the raw arrogance of a nouveau riche planter class stiff with imitative gentility, rather defensively imposing a rigid model of its role on itself and on its inferiors, and the growing effort to temper this vulnerable brittleness with a tradition of political service appropriate to Virginia's wide constituency of enfranchised yeomanry. (*Diary* 163)

By letting the yeomanry in as part of its politics, the Virginian gentility made itself permeable. Harvey Wish argues that “[a]mong the white population, the frontier did indeed act as a strong leveling force against permanent class distinctions of a feudal nature. Many an aristocratic ‘burgess’ in the Virginia legislature had once been an indentured servant, and the long-faded English gentry and parvenu tradesmen rose to the highest peaks of gentility in Virginia” (Wish 70). In reference to my quote of Edwin Perkins earlier in this chapter, Byrd inherited his aristocratic status from his English-born father and maintained this status through his landholdings—Sarah Knight, in contrast, was embedded in the merchant status of New England, clearly a step below the Virginia

aristocrats. However, it is through humor and a very little self-deprecation that Byrd attempts to show himself as a true gentleman in comparison to the “slobs” he travels with and the underclass yeomanry he meets along the road.

Making the distinction between upstarts and plantation owners had a history in Virginia. Lockridge writes that Virginia gentlemen’s

social credentials had been in question ever since Nathaniel Bacon and his ruffian followers had exposed the presumed gentry’s vile extractions, low education, and grasping greed. Now, a generation later, a few of the younger planters had acquired brief local pedigrees, older wealth, and English manners. But there were still not enough of this sort to prevent one English governor, in 1711, from calling the members of the House of Burgesses a ‘mean’ [. . .] lot. (*Rage* 92)

Thus, Byrd is not only writing to assert himself into English gentility, he is trying to also distinguish himself from the “mean” Virginians with whom he is constantly forced into comparison and society.

William Byrd wrote the *Secret History* in the 1730s as a parallel text to his *History of the Dividing Line*, the official account of his journey and work with the task-force sent out to measure the proper state line between Virginia and North Carolina. It is commonplace to understand the *Secret History* as the humorous account of the journey, with accounts of drinking, intrigue, and sex that were purposely omitted from the more staid, natural history, account of the *History* (Martin 80). While neither were published during Byrd’s lifetime, both were circulated in manuscript form among friends, with the *Secret History* only making it to the closest of friends (Berland et al. 40). Thus, like Knight, Byrd’s account shows his own understanding of himself amongst his Virginian peers in a manner that reflects the attitudes of himself and his audience. As Berland, Gilliam, and Lockridge note,

Byrd's characters [in the *Secret History*] followed the traditional English form, either in the negative mode, casting telling characteristics of people he knew in a satirical light, or in the positive mode, praising one distinctive virtuous quality to form a eulogistic sketch. The moral and social standards by which the objects of these sketches are measured are perfectly consistent with the normative principles of Byrd's era. (39)

As a trained Englishman, Byrd is well aware of the normative principles of the mother country. As Ralph Bauer finds, "like their contemporaries in other parts of the colonial Americas, elite Creoles in Virginia such as Byrd clung to the notion that they were 'gentlemen' of European stock who had more in common with the aristocratic classes of Europe than with what they perceived to be the low-class 'rabble'" (183). Byrd could cling to his sense of himself as a gentleman precisely because he had the wit and English education to see himself in a different light from his so-called peers.

Byrd takes the position of one who is able to correct others because he is of the proper station to look down upon his lesser neighbors. As Ralph Bauer notes, "Creoles such as Byrd had to prove that they were in fact what they could not assume to be: English gentlemen. The very Enlightenment education that they paraded to this end led to profound insecurities about their own identities after having imbibed its Eurocentrism" (184). Thus Byrd is almost compelled to "articulate his wise observations" in his *Secret History* in order to place "himself well above folly" (Berland et al. 39) or the crassness of the underclass. Bergson argues that "In laughter we always find an unavowed intention to humiliate, and consequently to correct our neighbor, if not in his will, at least in his deed" (Bergson 136). And Byrd's *Secret History* is funny. As Berland notes of Byrd's commonplace book, "His satirical characters belong to the comic enterprise of laughing

folly and vice out of existence” (39). Byrd’s text laughs long and loudly at those he finds ridiculous.

Despite the humor of the text, the same type of problems arise in understanding Byrd’s *Secret History* as arise in Knight’s *Journal*: We tend to laugh at the descriptions of the dirty, grumpy, wretched souls without noticing the class implications of the humor. Like Knight’s work, the laughter we experience in Byrd’s text is a laughter that has been transmitted through history. As Roger B. Henkle argues, “It is important to keep in mind that comic treatment of an issue does not mean that the artist considers it a matter lacking importance and serious implications. Rather, he makes a strategic choice to present serious concerns in a way that transmits the effect obliquely or ambivalently” (8-9). Byrd’s concerns are such that to present them seriously would invite mockery—and reveal a class nervousness unbecoming to a gentleman.

In *The Commonplace Book of William Byrd II of Westover*, Berland, Gilliam and Lockridge write,

At the time Byrd received his training as a gentleman, English society was still rigidly structured and hierarchical, though expansion and redefinition of certain social categories were starting to be discernable. Birth, family, land, wealth, and leisure time made a gentleman; education prepared him for public life, especially for his primary task of governing and exercising authority over the public weal. (13)

Byrd’s education and experience of adulthood prepared him to be aristocratic and to attain gentry status in England. What he was not prepared for was the constant rejection that that preparation got in England itself—and, given his English education, he rejected Virginia as a place where one had any “real” status. Byrd, however, knew that to be a true English gentleman he needed to show it in his actions rather than merely disdain all

others. Through better manners, better education, and better plantation management than his peers, Byrd knew that the contrast would make his point for him.

As well, Byrd also knew, vanity was a giveaway of one's anxiety of the lower classes. As Byrd himself wrote in his commonplace book, "Of all the Flatterers in the world, said Thales, be sure to avoid Him that is the most dangerous & difficult to guard against, Your Self" (Berland et al. 146). This quote comes from Byrd's commonplace book, a type of book that "offered compilers like Byrd a place where the self should be expressed, consoled, and reconstructed" (79). Further, as Berland et al. note,

From their earliest beginnings, commonplace books existed on the borderline between the private and the public and in the gray area triangulated by print, writing, and oral performance. Gathered in private readings of publicly available printed sources or in conversation based on or paralleling these sources and written down in private for personal development, commonplace books also had from the beginning clear overtones of rehearsal for public oral performances. Initially little more than schoolboy exercises, they became instruments of genteel self-creation for adults as well. (79)

Byrd's commonplace book gave him a place to remind himself of what it meant to be a gentleman. Like other Englishmen of the time, many of these reminders are to support modesty, clear thinking, and communication. Byrd's one constant struggle seemed to be vanity—and the commonplace book is replete with reminders to avoid vanity. This book read alongside Byrd's *Secret History* reveals the larger picture of Byrd's ideas about gentlemanly behavior.

As Berland et al. argue, "the commonplace book, intended for Byrd's own benefit, demonstrates that he was by no means as confident of his ability to keep clear of the vices of those around him. Once more, we can see these entries as reminders Byrd issued to himself as he wavered between urges toward libertine life and aspiration to

virtue and equanimity” (87). Byrd had to work to maintain his composure and dignity—his constant reminders to himself in his commonplace book and diary add to our knowledge of his hard work to create a certain version of himself. As part of this work of being less vain and more mannered, Byrd could not publicly “call out” his fellow Virginians as ungentlemanly. “Steddy” is Byrd’s persona here—the man of wit and witticisms who openly mocks those around him. Byrd can perform the disparagement he feels towards his fellow commissioners as “Steddy” because it was not dignified to do so in the flesh. In understanding the subtleties of being a gentleman, Byrd would not compare himself to other men publicly, as, we shall see, his fellow commissioner “Firebrand” does.

His writings in the *Secret History*, however, betray his vanities. Byrd was not content with being a Virginian; he wanted to be considered an Englishman, an aristocratic Englishman at that. As Lockridge notes, from reading Byrd’s diaries, “[t]he dilemma was always that, despite his longing, England never accepted him enough to give him the place or marriage he aspired to, while Virginia never seemed to offer the scope he felt his English education and ambitions deserved” (*Diary* 31). Further, after reading his commonplace book, Lockridge writes that

our William Byrd II wasn’t very successful either with women or as a patriarch. His lifelong ambition to be made Royal governor of Virginia, or at least lieutenant governor, and so to attain unequivocal status as an English gentleman of rank, led him repeatedly into inappropriate courtships of English women far above him in standing and in some cases wealth. Already in his early years in London, from 1690 to 1705, he experiences rejections which were often crushing. (*Rage* 21)

Years of rejection made him understand that his particular wish to be a colonial governor or an accepted English aristocrat would never happen, yet it did not prevent him from

writing down, especially in the *Secret History*, what made him more of a “natural” Englishman than his fellow Virginians could ever be.

As “Steddy,” Byrd’s name for himself in the *Secret History*, Byrd is always the gentleman, even in the wilds of and around the Dismal Swamp. Byrd writes,

I encampt in his Pasture with the Men, tho’ the other Commissioners endulg’d themselves so far as to ly in the House. But it seems they broke the Rules of Hospitality, by several gross Freedoms they offer’d to take with our Landlord’s Sister. She was indeed a pretty Girl, and therefore it was prudent to send her out of harm’s Way. I was the more concern’d at this unhandsome Behaviour, because the People were extremely Civil to us, & much deserv’d a better Treatment. (95)

Here, Byrd gives us both a subtle and obvious account of his superiority. By camping with his men, Byrd shows a degree of responsibility to his men that the other Commissioners don’t seem to have. This responsibility, as leaders and gentlemen, far outweighs comfortable lodgings. In this account, Byrd

offered a portrait of himself as ‘Steddy,’ a model for a calm, cheerful, persistent and almost Spartan gentleman. This sort of gentleman, he seemed to say, deeply responsive to the needs of those around him and persistent in his duty, was suitable for and indeed desperately needed in the New World. True American woodsmen did not need to be patronized, let alone browbeaten, and they respected a leader who shared their hardships while showing them how to overcome the literal and social wilderness of the New World. (Lockridge, *Diary* 160-61)

Byrd is not desperate—as Firebrand seems to be—to prove his delicate sensibilities, especially at the expense of his dignity or his responsibility to his men.

Further, Byrd’s sense of responsibility places him outside with his men, while the other commissioners attempt to seduce, or worse, rape, the landlord’s daughter. According to Byrd, this is a gross indiscretion that any gentlemen who has read Homer—as Byrd would have with his English education—would understand. The attack of Troy was ostensibly provoked by Paris’ seduction of Helen from her husband, Menelaus, while

Paris was being hosted by Menelaus. A knowledge of the Greek tale would be a sure sign of at least a basic education; the other Commissioners' flagrant breaking of the rule of hospitality clearly shows their lack of education, or at least their lack of understanding of the mores transferred by their education. Byrd's reaction to this gross violation reflects his reading and his gentlemanly manners. As Byrd wrote in his commonplace book, "It was particularly important for a gentleman to be in full control of his passions" (Berland et al. 16-17). Clearly, Firebrand and his fellow commissioners were not.

Through the *Secret History*, Byrd sets up his fellow Commissioners as laughable for their lack of dignity, even in situations that are not terribly humorous to us now. Byrd shows the others as laughable because of their pretensions and their lack of social substance. Like Knight, Byrd does not mock people who are properly in their place; the poor are not funny unless they have pretensions. Lockridge argues that Byrd "had stretched English gentry culture as it was known in Virginia beyond its old limits by finding in the journey of a wilderness surveying party the subtle epic which would express the virtue of cheerful gentlemen amidst the potential democratic chaos of America" (*Diary* 153). In this, Byrd also establishes himself as a gentleman: a patriarch to the last, he protects those who are clearly under him socially and monetarily and mocks those who attempt to attain the same status through pretension and performance rather than fulfilling their actual obligations.

As Perry Miller asserts in *Errand into the Wilderness*, "The first philosophy of Virginia, in short, accepted inequality of rank and birth as a fact, not merely of experience but of eternal decree; democracy was as abhorrent to the founders as to King

James, and if anything of their doings subsequently worked out to the advantage of the democratic idea, this was entirely beside their intention” (134). Byrd’s camaraderie with his men should not be read as an act of egalitarianism—instead, like Knight defending her genteel class status, Byrd is fiercely defending class status and his role in the aristocracy through his sense of *noblesse oblige*:

William Byrd stands out, not only for his written works, but because

William Byrd was fixed by his birth both to his native soil in Virginia and to the culture of early eighteenth-century Britain. He was educated as a gentleman in England and for many years considered himself a Londoner, yet repeatedly he encountered scornful treatment from those who considered his origins and status as a propertied gentleman to be peripheral or suspect. These conditions appear to have created in him a degree of conflict that undercut his sense of himself as a gentleman. (Berland et al. 79)

This conflicted position, as mentioned before, can be heard in his *Diary* and commonplace book. As a close reading of the *Secret History* demonstrates, Byrd uses humor to bolster his own sense of his Englishness.

In an early confrontation with Firebrand and the North Carolina commissioners, Byrd relates that the other commissioners failed to meet him at a specific time and place, as they had agreed upon, thus slowing up the surveying party. Byrd writes that once the other commissioners had caught up with him, “Meanwell was so Civil as to Excuse his not meeting Steddy at Mr Allens as had been agreed; but Firebrand was too big for Apology” (89). In the above episode, Firebrand puts his pretensions before his manners and refuses to apologize for his lateness and inconsiderateness to Steddy. Steddy expects the apology as a matter of manners; Firebrand refuses, as it may seem like an acknowledgment that he owes Steddy something in the way of obeisance. However, as

Byrd illustrates through the *Secret History*, Firebrand's lack of manners and pretensions to greatness affect more than his fellow commissioners.

In one account, Byrd writes that "Our good Landlord entertain'd Steddy, and the Chaplain at Dinner, but Firebrand refused, because he was not sent to in due form" (90). Since Firebrand was not given enough time between his invitation and the dinner [to sit at a country meal] he refuses to sit at the meal at all. Steddy understands that the manners one would expect at home (on plantations and in the city) cannot be expected from poor, simple, landlords and farmers far away from home. Firebrand, however, has a façade of gentlemanliness that tecters when he is away from his props of civilization. An eighteenth-century belief was that "Gentility, or 'Good Breeding,' was not simply a matter of birth; rather, it was a social quality marked by appropriate conduct in all situations" (Berland et al. 14). It was also thought that

Although the manner, deportment, and learning of a gentleman could be acquired with time, practice, and money, it was by no means an open field. The gentry were confident that interlopers would give themselves away. Indeed, gentlemen were convinced that they differed from commoners in their fundamental nature, thoughts, and makeup. They knew they were important to society. They were the ones who made events happen, who gave orders to others who were supposed to bring their community of dependents economic and social stability. (Berland et al. 13-14)

Firebrand's pretensions, as we read via Byrd's accounts, give himself away. Rather than adapting to his surroundings and maintaining his "natural" aristocracy, as Byrd does, Firebrand is lost when he is not in his milieu.

Another instance of Firebrand's lowliness in comparison to Byrd is an instance when after a long march past the Dismal Swamp, "Firebrand chose rather to litter the Floor, than lye with the Parson, since he cou'd not have the best Bed, he sullenly wou'd

have none at all. However, it broil'd upon his Stomach so much, that he swore enough in the Night, to bring the Devil into the Room had not the Chaplain been there" (99).

Sullenness, temper-tantrums, and swearing because he has not gotten his way—a definite sign for Steddy and the reader that Firebrand is the wrong kind of gentleman. In Byrd's commonplace book, we can see that he wanted to remember that "The best way for a man to be easy, and preserve his good humour & his Quiet, is, not to set his heart upon the perishable Things of this life, which will be sure to leave him in the lurch, said Democritus" (Berland et al. 294). Firebrand, in insisting on a bed—the best bed—has set his heart "upon the perishable Things of this life" which leave him in a bad temper when he does not get them. Begrudging a chaplain the best bed left him in a lurch—and, according to Byrd's own maxims, in a position to accept his lot or to resent it. The wrong kind of man, like Firebrand, resents it.

As the first part of the surveyors' work was ending, and summer was setting in, Steddy found that Firebrand was attempting political maneuvering in order to counter Steddy's accounts of him in Steddy's official logs of the journey. Firebrand realizes that his fellow commissioners, and the men working under them, felt disgusted by his behavior and that he would have to go elsewhere for affirmation of his superiority.

According to Byrd,

Firebrand despairing of a good Word from his Virginia Collegues, with great Industry procured a Testimonial from his Carolina Flatterers, as well for himself as his Favorite Orion. And because the Complement might appear too gross if addrest to himself it was contriv'd that the Gentlemen abovemention'd shou'd join in a Letter to the Commissary (with whom by the way they had never before corresponded) wherein without Rhyme or Reason, they took care to celebrate Firebrand's civility, and Orion's Mathematicks.

This Certificate was soon produced by the good Commissary to our Governour, who cou'd not but see thro' the Shallow Contrivance. (117)

Byrd labors to flatter the governor, the embodiment of English gentility; as an appointed representative of the Crown, the governor of the English colony was the touchstone of English aristocratic mannerisms in the colonies. The fact that the governor can read through Firebrand's schemes, as Byrd did, only affirms Byrd's judgments of Firebrand. The governor, after this incident, made Byrd—at Byrd's request—the lead commissioner for the rest of the survey project. Firebrand, in compelling a false letter of recommendation, sunk himself lower in the opinions of the “real” gentility—Byrd and the Governor. In this instance, Firebrand actually assists Byrd in his aspirations—the governor and Byrd are of one mind about Firebrand, making Byrd a close ally of the English governor.

After this incident, Firebrand was reluctant to join the surveyors for the rest of the journey, but found that he would be more disgraced by dropping out early. As Byrd notes in his commonplace book “Envious persons are doubly miserable, when ill happens to themselves, & when good happens to other people” (Berland et al. 127). Firebrand seems to be quite miserable indeed. After losing the first commissioner position to Byrd, Firebrand, rather than lose face in front of the men and his fellow Virginian and Carolinian commissioners,

instructed one of the 3 Men which he listed on the Publick Service to call him Master, thereby endeavoring to pass him on the Carolina Commissioners for his Servant, that he might seem to have as many Servants as Steddy, but care was taken to undeceive them in this matter & expose his Vanity. (126)

In order to be understood as much a gentleman as Steddy, Firebrand uses visible markers of class to manipulate the idea of what a gentlemen is by using public servants. By this account, Firebrand, unlike Byrd, requires outside aid to support his pretensions to aristocracy.

In an anecdote about a dinner outside of the Dismal Swamp, Byrd further shows his graciousness in comparison to a man like Firebrand. Although Byrd finds the dinner less than satisfactory, he puts the responsibility of a gentleman ahead of his appetite. Byrd emphasizes his graciousness in order to show Byrd's ability to take the ungentle conditions of his travels in a slightly more mannered way than his fellow travelers do. Byrd relates that "My Landlord's Daughter Rachel offer'd her Service to wash my Linnen, and regal'd me with a Mess of Hominy toss't up with Rank Butter & Glyster Sugar. This I was forc't to eat, to shew that nothing from so fair a hand cou'd be disagreeable" (101). His sense of humor and gallantry show that Byrd was gentleman enough to remember his manners, even when "regal'd" with food that was impossible to swallow. Byrd writes, "Our Landlord had not the good Fortune to please Firebrand with our Dinner, but surely when People do their best, a reasonable Man wou'd be satisfy'd, But he endeavor'd to mend his Entertainment by making hot Love to honest Ruth, who wou'd by no means be charm'd either with his Perswasion, or his Person" (106-07). Thus, when Firebrand was not pleased with his meal he attacked the virtue of a woman in the innkeeper's household—another blatant disregard for another's hospitality.

Firebrand is attempting his "hot Love" in the wrong sort of way to woo a woman but, as Byrd notes in his commonplace book: "An officer had a long time made

unsuccessful love to His Landlady's Daughter. At last when he found the force of Language could do nothing, he resolved to try the force of gold. And one day clapping a Guinea over one of her Eyes, he told her, Love was blind. Very true said she, but then tis blind of both Eyes" (Berland 179). The lady required more money (to be blinded by Guineas in both eyes) a slur on womanhood, but a lesson in the eyes of Byrd. Had Firebrand shown himself to be more of a gentleman—perhaps exhibiting the sorts of markers that makes one look to be of a higher status, "honest Ruth"—Byrd hints—may have been blind enough (in both eyes) to fall for Firebrand's brand of passion.

Even while Byrd critiques Firebrand's *personal* manners, he also shows how Firebrand is even more lacking in *personnel* matters. Firebrand has no control over his own servant:

While the Master was employ'd in making Love to one Sister, the man made his Passion known to the other, Only he was more boisterous, & employ'd force, when he cou'd not succeed by fair means. Tho' one of the men rescu'd the poor Girl from this Violent Lover; but was so much his Friend as to keep the shamefull Secret from those, whose Duty it wou'd have been to punish such Violations of Hospitality. (106-07)

In being unable to take care of his valet, Firebrand lacks the control of his underlings that a true gentleman would have; this lack of control, Byrd hints, is due to the master's own negligence of containing his own passions.

However, Byrd himself found that it wasn't always easy to control his own valet: "The Parson & I return'd to our Quarters in good time & good Order, but my Man Tom broke the Rules of Hospitality by getting extremely drunk in a Civil House" (90). Unlike Firebrand, Byrd was at least not drunk while his servant is also drunk. In fact, Byrd condemns Tom for being drunk because Byrd himself has shown Tom a good example.

In Firebrand's case, one gets the impression—from Byrd—that the servant learned his mannerisms from his master; i.e. “While the master was employ'd in making Love to one Sister, the man made his Passion known to the other.”

Firebrand's disinclination for arduous travel and his general grumpiness about the hardships of the road are also voiced by Firebrand's servants, to the shock of Steddy: “When Firebrand ask't his Man why he lagg'd behind, he exprest himself with great Freedom of his Master, swearing he cared for no Mortal but his dear self, & wishing that the Devil might take him, if he ever again attended him in any of his Travels” (101). The swearing, negativity, lagging, expressed and voiced by Firebrand are also expressed by his servant; even more shocking, though, is that the servant's lack of respect for Firebrand allows the servant to speak to Firebrand in a certain way. This particular passage is humorous, too, as throughout we get the impression that the servant is expressing vocally what Byrd himself cannot.

Byrd is also in doubt before the survey even begins that the people with whom he has been assigned to work will be amiable enough to complete the commissioned task. The expectations set forth by the governor and King James for the commissioners is more than Byrd expects from his fellow commissioners and those from the wilds of North Carolina. While sarcasm is difficult to detect in a text well before modern time and modern language usage, Byrd makes it clear that the people with whom he will work are “no doubt” lesser gentlemen than himself and less than ideal idealists: “After this, what imaginable Dispute can arise amongst Gentlemen who meet together with minds averse to Chicane, and Inclinations to do equal justice both to his Majesty and his Lords

Proprietors, in which disposition we make no doubt the Commissioners on both Sides will find each other” (83). This excerpt follows a discussion of money matters, including what each man is to be paid for taking on the surveying task, and quibbling among the governors and commissioners about how and when to begin the survey—a less than fortuitous beginning to the task of surveying rough territory.

This excerpt sets up the tone of the essay in terms of Byrd’s frame of mind when writing this essay, which was written based on notes Byrd took during the trip. Byrd was not reconciled with his position as a Virginian aristocrat—he was feeling the continued rejection of England because of his exile in Virginia. His writing reflects this knowledge of his rejection as well as his rejection of Virginia and what he finds as the inferior Virginian aristocracy. Virginian or North Carolinian—all of his fellow commissioners come under Byrd’s critical eye. For instance, Byrd compliments Meanwell, a commissioner from Virginia, on his ability to be useful with a needle, but at the same time, Byrd exposes Meanwell’s low working origins: “Meanwell was very handy at his needle, having learn’d the Use of that little Implement at Sea, & flourish his Thread with as good a Grace as any Merchant Taylor” (148). Shoebrush, a commissioner from North Carolina, receives the same compliment and critique: “We found Shoebrush a merry good humor’d Man, and had learnt a very decent behaviour from Governour Hyde, to whom he had been Valet de Chambre, of which he still carry’d the marks by having his coat, wast-coat & Breeches of different Parishes” (93-94). Both Shoebrush and Meanwell, are thus complimented on their abilities, but these are lesser abilities. These

are skills learned because they are men of lesser status. They do not, however, have the pretensions that Firebrand exhibits, so do not face the same searing critiques from Byrd.

Meanwell, for instance, is also a good storyteller: “Meanwell entertain’d the Carolina Commissioners with several Romantick-Passages of his Life, with Relation to his Amours, which is a Subject he is as fond of, as a Hero to talk of Battles he never fought” (110). As Byrd noted in his commonplace book, this type of humor and storytelling is not the mark of a gentleman—in fact, it marks one as the complete opposite: “All wit and knowledge except it accompanyd with honor and Justice, denigrates into poultry Fraud & cunning. These are the more contemptible qualities in men of parts, because they have them in common with Fools & Blockheads” (Berland el at 126). Meanwell’s story is not about honor and justice—rather, these stories make Meanwell a hero in his own tales, exacerbating Byrd’s idea of him as a “fool and blockhead.” As commissioners, and potentially seen by other Virginians as peers to Byrd, Byrd writes in Meanwell’s and Shoebrush’s lowly states into the *Secret Line* in order to remind himself who the true aristocrat really is. Byrd’s anxieties are clear through *The Secret History*—reminders of his status to himself are unsurprising in this context.

Other commissioners who face Byrd’s criticism include Plausible and Puzzlecause, who “In the Evening [. . .] return’d to Us from Edenton, where they had been to recover the great Fatigue of doing nothing, & to pick up new Scandal against their Governour” (102). These commissioners from North Carolina are lazy and

gossipy—perhaps better companions than Firebrand, but, nonetheless, they lack the responsibility Byrd feels towards his own men and his own (current) governor.

Along the road, Byrd and company lodge with a man whom Byrd calls a gentleman, perhaps equating him with Virginian aristocracy, but Byrd criticizes his Virginian-born and bred son. Byrd had this to say about “the Young Gentleman” of the house: “he seem’s to be as worthless as any homebred Squire I had ever met with, & much the worse for having a good Opinion of himself. His good Father intended him for the Mathematicks, but he never cou’d rise higher in that Study than to gage a Rum Cask” (107). Unlike Byrd, this young man did not live long in England, nor did he distinguish himself in study, also unlike Byrd, who earned a law degree from “the Middle Temple and was admitted to the bar in 1695. Byrd was elected to membership in the Royal Society” (Martin 79). Even worse, as Byrd well knew through quotes in his commonplace book “True nobility consists in pleading noble Acts, rather than noble ancestors, and tis the foulest Reproach for a man to derive himself from a good Family, that is debased and disparaged by his Vices” (Berland et al. 137). The young gentleman of this particular estate, instead of bringing further wealth and honor to his family, is marring the family name. Byrd did his best to exceed his father’s expectations—a task he struggled with until the end of his life.

Part of Byrd’s complication in defending himself from criticism in England is that many of his fellow Virginians did fall from the grace to which they were born. These men, like the aforesaid “young man,” fell victim to the influences of the American wilderness and were thus made more susceptible to whisky, horses, and gambling—

unlike Byrd, they did not focus on their educations and tapping into their mannered breeding. Byrd did have to study to become the gentleman he became, but so did the men with whom he went to school in London. As Berland et al. note,

Byrd's education, then, was successful, since it produced the qualities it set out to instill and prepared him for the public life of a responsible Christian gentleman, a preparation that served him well in his endeavors in Virginia politics and his career as a planter and a leading citizen in his community. His education planted in him a strong sense of the desirability of social order (although his place in this order was not always clear to him. (20-21)

Education does not necessarily make the entire man, he does need to be a born gentleman, but it does enhance what a gentleman can know. How Byrd presents this knowledge is reflective of his breeding.

In fact, one's breeding and education can prepare one for any situation, in or out of the city. Byrd, for instance, was able to function as a gentleman in the wilds of the Dismal Swamp because of his breeding and education. He could learn to be an outdoorsman, just like the men who shot for the expedition's food. He could learn to sleep in the great outdoors, eat odd meals, sit with those of lesser rank, and converse with his men in a familiar manner. Richard L. Bushman observes that "Erect posture [to gentlemen] was essential, but sometimes it was overdone. Urban gentleman smiled at overly correct country people for holding themselves too stiffly" (*Refinement of America* 65). The inappropriateness of being *too* correct marked one as a performer trying to "pass" as a gentleman. What marked him as a gentleman is that, unlike Firebrand in many of the previous examples, Byrd was a gentleman who could perform in the wilderness and still bear the markings of civilization and gentlemanliness—he didn't

need to stand up too straight, even in the woods. In fact, Byrd enjoyed learning how to function better in the wilderness:

Till this Night I had always lain in my Night Gown, but upon Tryal, I found it much warmer to strip to my shirt, & lie naked in Bed with my gown over me. The Woodsmen put it all off, if they have no more than one Blanket, to lye in, & agree that 'tis much more comfortable than to lye with their Cloaths on, tho' the Weather be never so cold. (151)

Byrd took his nightgown into the wilderness as a prop of his civilized world, but he found that it was not a necessary part of his experience in the wilderness—rather, he found it more practical to sleep with the nightgown as a blanket rather than as evening wear.

Byrd's ability to lead and become accustomed to the wilderness is also shown in his talent with the men who are walking alongside the commissioners—the men who actually carry baggage, get bit by snakes, and cut through brush. He even manages to endear himself to the men who have to go through the Dismal Swamp while Byrd and the commissioners go around it. At one point in the long trek, Byrd writes that,

After a March of 2 Miles thro' very bad way, the Men sweating under their Burthens, we arriv'd at the Edge of the Dismal, where the Surveyors had left off the Night before. Here Steddy thought proper to encourage the Men by a short harangue to this effect. 'Gentlemen, we are at last arrive'd at this dreadful place, which til now has been thought unpassable. Tho' I make no doubt but you will convince every Body, that there is no difficulty which may not be conquer'd by Spirit & constancy. You have hitherto behaved with so much Vigour, that the most I can desire of you, is to perservere unto the End; I protest to You the only reasons we don't Share in Your Fatigue is, the fear of adding to Your Burthens, (which are but too heavy already,) while we are Sure we can add nothing to your Resolution. (98-99)

Byrd, as Steddy, gives his men plenty of credit for traveling in the Dismal Swamp with fortitude. He acknowledges the hardship of the journey, but instead of dwelling on these particular hardships, Byrd uses these hardships to remind the men of how much they have

been through already and why complaints would insult the memory of the previous fortitude. The humor in this passage comes in when Byrd uses the word “harangue” – which the OED explains is “A speech addressed to an assembly; a loud or vehement address, a tirade; formerly, sometimes, a formal or pompous speech”—a very formal word for a swamp and a bunch of dirty surveyors and men working as pack mules.

As a gentleman addressing his employees, Byrd expects a proper response to his speech: [Steddy says] “I shall say no more, but only pray the Almighty to prosper your Undertakin, & grant we meet on the other Side in perfect Health & Safety.’ The Men took this Speech very kindly, and anser’d it in the most cheerful manner, with 3 Huzzas” (98-99). This is the proper response to a ‘harangue’ by a leader, especially a leader who encourages and supports the men.

It is also a direct contrast to Orion’s behaviour during the journey—Orion is everything Byrd is not as a leader and a gentleman:

It is wast to imagine the hardships the poor Men underwent in this intolerable place [the Dismal Swamp], who besides the Burdens on their Backs, were oblig’d to clear the way before Surveyors, & to measure & mark after them. However they went thro’ it all not only with Patience, but cheerfulness. Tho’ Orion was as peevish as an old Maid all the way, & more so, because he cou’d perswade Nobody to be out of Humour but himself. The merriment of the Men, & their Innocent Jokes with one another, gave him great offence, whereas if he had had a grain of good Nature, he shou’d have rejoiced to find, that the greatest difficultys cou’d not break their Spirits, or lessen their good Humor. (105)

As one of the surveyors from Virginia, Orion was unable to see the benefits of having cheerful men in wretched conditions—his ability to be a part of the leadership crew is called into question because he is “peevish as an old Maid” and unable to exhibit “a grain of good Nature” while watching men go through difficult conditions. Orion is on a horse

and his luggage is being carried by horses, mules, and men; his peevishness is a mark of his inability to lead, or behave like a gentleman even in rough circumstances. Byrd mocks this behavior in describing Orion as an “old Maid” and the men’s “Innocent Jokes”: the picture he paints with these descriptions offer a laugh at the man who cannot find anyone to be grumpy with him. Orion has to carry the burden of being in a bad mood by himself, while the men bore the physical burden of the trip on their backs.

This description of one of the Carolinian surveyors comes after a few rough nights in the woods outside of the Dismal Swamp. Here, “Steddy” asserts, “When people are join’d together on a troublesome Commission” they should act in accord with one another “not like marry’d People [who] make their condition worse by everlasting discord. Tho’ in this indeed we had the Advantage of marry’d People, that a few Weeks wou’d part us” (106). The contrast couldn’t be clearer. Steddy is the true gentleman here, making a joke about the atmosphere he is working in rather than complaining about the discord. In making these opinions, Byrd suggests that only a man who is unused to being in charge, a man, say, without his own plantation, slaves and workers—such as Orion—would encourage underpaid hard-working men to recognize and complain about their miserable conditions. In this depiction, Steddy holds Orion up as a foolish sort of man, who is to be laughed at for his ignorance and pretensions.

In the end, Byrd shows off a little of his own command experience as an example of what a gentleman does to take control of potentially unruly situations:

As I lay in my Tent, I overheard one of [the men], call’d James Whitlock, wish that he were at home. From this I reprov’d him publickly, asking him whether it was the Danger, or the Fatigue of the Journey that dishearten’d him, wondring how he cou’d be tired so soon of the Company of so many Brave Fellows. So

reasonable a Reprimand put an effectual Stop to all Complaints, and no Body after that day was ever heard so much as to wish himself in Heaven. (141)

Byrd uses his gift of rhetoric to show Whitlock the rationale behind being positive, even under hard circumstances. This particular example is not posed in the form of a joke; neither is it a picture of humor. Instead, Byrd offers an exemplar of gentlemanly behavior in times of trials. In writing about this particular situation, Byrd shows himself, even if no one else reads his manuscript, how he behaved when a situation called him in to play a role. He successfully performed his role as a leader and mentor in a time of strife. He succeeded in quelling complaints and he did so reasonably, without the rage of Firebrand or petulance of Orion.

Orion proves himself not only short-tempered but impatient. In being impatient, he also shows himself a bit of a grandstander in terms of considering his own importance.

By the favour of good Weather, and the impatience of being at home, we decamp't early. But there was none of the Company so very hasty as Orion. He cou'd not have been more uneasy even tho' he had a Mistress at Williamsburgh. He found much Fault with my scrupulous observing the Sabbath. I reprov'd him for his uneasiness, letting him understand, that I had both as much Business, and as much Inclination to be at home as he had, but for all that was determin'd to make no more hast than good Speed. (161)

Steddy offers a reasonable look at travel: rather than hurry and cause potential damage to horses or men, Steddy, despite his own inclinations to be home, wants to follow the slow but “Steddy” course of action.

In this episode, Orion thinks too well himself for Byrd. Byrd reminds Orion that he, too, had reasons to be at home as quickly as possible. Family, plantation, business, are a part of a gentleman’s life in Virginia and in giving himself “airs” Orion assumes he has more business and responsibilities than Steddy, who is in charge of the pace of the

travelers. Steddy reminds Orion that they have responsibilities to the men and their Governor, to make it home safely is as important as getting home to their home responsibilities quickly. As Byrd notes in his commonplace book, “How much more prudent it is to think with caution of a Business before hand, than with concern of it afterwards” (Berland et al. 128). As Byrd learned in his younger days, fulfilling the responsibilities of their journey is more important than thinking of home responsibilities—finish one project before moving on, Byrd reasons, because trying to do too much lessens ones focus on the duties at hand.

In contrast to Orion, or Firebrand, Byrd manages to laugh at himself when the opportunity to laugh comes to him. Byrd writes, “The second time we crost Crooked Creek, by endeavoring to step off my Horse’s Back upon the Shoar, I fell all along in the Water. I wet myself all over & bruis’d the back part of my Head; yet made no Complaint, but was the merriest of the Company at my own disaster” (155). Rather than complaining about his accident, or swearing, or losing his temper, Byrd leads the men in making jokes about his clumsiness. He shows them that one can laugh at one’s own misfortunes, especially when those misfortunes aren’t serious. As Byrd notes in his commonplace book, “The best Guard against the contempt of other People is to think, and Speak meanly of ourselves” (132). He may have gotten wet and bruised his head, but he wasn’t more gravely injured—the joke is on Steddy, the one balanced man on this trip, that he was also the one to fall off of his horse midstream.

In the end, Byrd remembers his upbringing and education by publicly thanking God for his safe journey. His worst injury, besides falling from the horse, is the assault

on his sensibilities by Firebrand. In both the middle and end of his *Secret History*, Byrd remembers to publicly thank his Creator. His words about his God appear frequently in his diary, but as his diary was heavily coded, these passages from the *Secret History* will often reflect his commonsense piety and aristocratic notions of his debt to God. In the middle of his travels, Byrd writes,

This being my Birth day, I adored the Goodness of Heaven, for having indulged me with so much Health & very uncommon happiness, in the Course of 54 Years in which my Sins have been many, & my Sufferings few, my Opportunities great, but my Improvements small. Firebrand & Meanwell had very high Words, after I went to Bed, concerning Astrolabe, in which Conversation Meanwell show'd most Spirit, & Firebrand most Arrogance & Ill Nature. (108)

Here, Byrd acknowledges his faults, in comparison to the greater Son of God in Heaven. However, he also realizes that while his sins have been many and his sufferings few, he can also thank Heaven for making him more agreeable than the quarrelsome Firebrand and Meanwell.

Byrd's brand of piety, as the editors of the commonplace book note, "is nowhere theoretical or metaphysical; it deals with the practical, day-to-day challenges of existence. These challenges are best face with faith that God will supply the grace that allows reason to moderate the passions and resist the downward pull of vice" (Berland et al. 64). As we can read at the end of his *Secret History*, Byrd acknowledges God's place in his life overall, rather than depending on God to step in for every small detail. As Sarah Knight understands, God takes care of those who care for themselves. Byrd writes that upon returning home,

I had the happiness to find all the Family well. This crown'd all my other Blessings, and made the Journey truly prosperous, of which I hope I shall ever retain a gratefull remembrance. Nor was it all, that my People were in good

health, but my Business was likewise in good order. Everyone seem'd to have done their duty, by the joy they express'd at my Return. (169)

Byrd is thankful for the health of his family, his slaves, and his business, in that order, and the elevation of the language (“Blessings,” “gratefull”) reminds his reader that, at the end of it all, it is God he is thanking.

It is God whom both Knight and Byrd thank at the end of their journeys, and one can only speculate that one of the blessings that they thank Him for is the knowledge of their own superiority in manners and class to those of their fellow human beings. Even if no one else sees it and understands it, God, these authors know, will see that behind the façade of manners and behavior that they are “truly” superior to those they meet along the road. It is these travelers’ duty to see to those in the lower spheres—the colonial equivalent of the “white man’s burden”—but it is also their duty to thank the God that granted them the inherent privilege and status they both desire to deserve and protect.

Endnotes

¹ The words feminine and femininity carry a weight behind them that I cannot completely ignore in my use of them in this chapter. The terms are problematic, as are the implications for a mindful twenty-first century audience; however, when possible I refer to feminine or femininity based on textual references and historical documentation of how the people of the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries would have defined the term if called upon to do so.

² The Knight section of this chapter will not address the conflict between the upper and middle ranks, as the aristocracy of early America, such as William Byrd II, was based on birth-right, following the English model. This aristocracy, including the Mathers, the Sewall family and, later, the Adams, was created out of the English tradition while the middling class was a newer creation in both England and New England during the early modern period.

CHAPTER III

NOBODY'S FOOL: JOHN MARRANT, THE TRICKSTER TRADITION, AND
SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

John Marrant's *A Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, A Black* (hereafter referred to as *A Narrative*) is not *just* another addition to the burgeoning market for spiritual autobiographies in the eighteenth-century; the text is one of the most complex trickster narratives recorded in the early history of the African American literary tradition. The conversion narrative is a serious genre that does not usually lend itself to any sort of parody or intentional humor. The converted sinners in these texts take themselves and their epiphanies seriously. However, even after the conversion, the converted find that they continue to fall into their sinful ways. Elizabeth Ashbridge, Olaudah Equiano, St. Augustine¹, and even Marrant post-ordination, struggle to renounce sin and Satan for the better life of Christianity. Unlike other tropes, though, in using the trickster, Marrant

displays his socially transgressive self—and voice—long *before* his actual conversion. In this way, it subtly undermines the ostensible structure of spiritual autobiography, which on one level recounts the archetypal passage from sinner to saint. From the very outset, Marrant tells a story [. . .] that [. . .] stages a series of rebellions against various 'masters' in order to gain a form of self-mastery. (Gould 119)

In Marrant's spiritual autobiography, the trickster works as the perpetual sinner who is always already present. Marrant offers a serious spiritual autobiography in which Whitefield and the Great Awakening via Methodism are shown to "reform" a trickster type into a minister in his own right—but the trickster is always in abeyance. Marrant's trickster figure plays a large part in his telling of his spiritual conversion. The trickster, I would argue, is a literary device comparable to the comic persona used in the texts written by British colonists and early Americans like Benjamin Franklin, John Robert Shaw, and Davy Crockett [cf Chapter IV and V].

It would be presumptuous to assume that Marrant grew up exposed to the trickster tradition as there is, as of yet, no concrete evidence to support the idea that Marrant was raised with the trickster tradition. But, Marrant certainly did live and work in communities among whom this tradition would have been alive and communicated. Although Marrant was born a free black, he lived in the South, where most scholars place the concentration of the oral African trickster tradition. As Karen Weyler notes about Marrant, he was "born free in New York in 1755" and grew up in "Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina with no particular religious calling" (46). However, as an adult, Marrant worked with slave children and their parents in Charleston, South Carolina, and they would have been familiar with the trickster tradition. While Marrant's particular use of the trickster figure within the European form of the spiritual autobiography is not completely loyal to the traditional use of the trickster, in light of the knowledge Marrant would have had of the African and African American trickster tradition and the textual

evidence of that use in his work, I argue that Marrant did indeed use the trickster figure in *A Narrative*.

In this autobiography, Marrant gives a traditional narrative based on a chasm of time and conversion. Marrant tells of his past life and, in doing so, makes the narrator of his story different from the protagonist: the author is a different person from the “Marrant” in the text. Marrant can write of his past trickster with this separation in mind—all the while foreshadowing what he knows will be his future sinful, yet converted, self. In the tradition of folktales and trickster tales, as well as the spiritual autobiography, the narrator and the protagonist are different people. I would argue that, despite the continuity of the trickster-as-sinner, that Marrant separates his pre-ordained and his post-ordained self, creating the protagonist Marrant as a different person than the preacher and narrator John Marrant. Thus, in this text, Marrant’s comic persona is a creation of the converted Marrant; form functions as a tool of humor here.

John Marrant published his memoirs “in hopes they may be useful to others, to encourage the fearful, to confirm the wavering, and to refresh the hearts of true believers” (929). In revising and supporting the fourth edition of this work with his own editorial comments², Marrant follows in the tradition of other spiritual autobiographers. In giving his pre-conversion story, Marrant is offering a path for readers’ salvation. If one is “wavering” and reads of Marrant’s own spiritual efforts, then one can see that it is possible to become a true believer—his struggles are the struggles of all who tread the narrow path to God and righteousness. In writing his spiritual autobiography, like others who followed the traditional form of spiritual autobiographies, Marrant shares his toils

and shows that the sinner cannot be fully repressed—that it is always difficult to follow God. In sharing his continuing struggles, Marrant can also help those “true believers” who wrestle with their own sins and look for comfort that they are not alone in their continuously sinning ways³. Marrant shows his fellow sinners and believers that the struggle will always be there, but that God will always be there, too. In writing about his transformation into one of Christ’s lambs from being one of Satan’s helpers, Marrant shows how other sinners can follow the narrow path to God.

Unlike his spiritual memoir predecessors, the sinner is the scapegoat to laughter in *A Narrative*. The trickster figure serves as the source of humor in Marrant, as the reader can laugh at the trickster and the trickster’s downfalls. In comically setting himself up, Marrant is able to use his comic other’s downfall in order to elevate the seriousness of his uplifting religious experiences. Marrant shows his initial conversion experience as a reaction to a planned attempt to interrupt one of George Whitefield’s Methodist meetings with a trumpet blast. In one of Marrant’s more humorous moments, Marrant relates that, after fainting away at the Methodist meeting,

I found two men attending me, and a woman throwing water in my face, and holding a smelling-bottle to my nose; and when something more recovered, every word I heard from the minister was like a parcel of swords thrust in to me, and what added to my distress, I thought I saw the devil on every side of me. (931)

During this time, Marrant yells loudly and continuously, disturbing the meeting so much that his nurses remove him from the room. Despite his sudden, emotional conversion, Marrant manages to disturb the meeting as much as if he had blown the trumpet.

Further, in this moment, surrounded by devils on every side, Marrant has fallen to the problem that happens to tricksters everywhere—he has been tricked by his own trick.

A common trait of the trickster is “his cunning” which he practices on “others to get the better of them” (Sunkuli 95). However, as most scholars and readers of trickster tales (especially recent authors such as Thomas King and Louise Erdrich) know, sometimes the plan goes awry. Robert D. Pelton argues “Like divination, the tricksters’ myths reveal the world as human process, indeed as a story whose many-sidedness requires it to be never-ending reimagined. The trickster and his tales, then, are an education in wit” (279). Pelton goes on to argue that the trickster invests “the plastic imagination of the child with adult irony and remind[s] the adult consciousness that social barriers are boundaries of the mind that only a child’s expectancy can break through” (279-80). For Marrant, it is religious boundaries that require breaking, as much as social boundaries; thus, it is only through the puerility of the trickster that Marrant can overcome his sinfulness⁴—at the same time, however, this breaking of boundaries creates a continuum of sinfulness with which Marrant will constantly struggle. In Marrant’s case, instead of playing the trick, he becomes a convert to the religion he mocked. Further, instead of being converted and becoming part of the meeting, the trickster double-crosses himself and becomes a disturbance anyway. In either case, Marrant is tricked by his own trick, and then that particular trick is turned upon him again.

In this particular example, Marrant’s fainting away perpetuates the “old light” belief in the chaotic nature of the Awakening. Although Marrant later disproves these ideas, he begins his autobiography with an understanding of the fundamental differences between the old and new religions. Religious differences in early America problematize class, specifically, the differences offered between the Methodist converts and the older,

more established, churches, or the “new lights” and the “old lights.” Robert F. Sayre argues that “in a broader way, the Awakening led to or stood for a discovery of the egalitarian individual” (*American Lives* 71). The Great Awakening, and Methodism in particular, created a new-found enthusiasm for religion, especially the evangelical Methodism espoused by Marrant, which offered a place for realizing egalitarianism. Murray argues that Methodist “fellowship was a tremendous change because colonial America was such a hierarchical society” (10). Thus, as Murray continues “Whether men or women, African American or white, Methodists supported one another in a close relationship, usually in class meetings. Frequently worshipping together and attending prayer meetings created a separate space outside of the sinful world” (10-11). This space opened a gap in the class continuum (cf Introduction) to allow free blacks, such as Marrant, an opportunity to undermine strict color and class hierarchies.

Even further, the spiritualism that was a part of the revivalist movement brought the emotional wave of the masses who joined the movement out of the control of the more staid “old lights” and rocked the boat of the natural order:

The Old Light world was still organized around traditional concepts of the social order. Its members derived personal security from the belief that authority, descending from above through the agencies of government, could keep the peace. Their positions in society, their religious values, and their sense of control and order were sustained by this structure of authority. (Bushman, *Puritan to Yankee* 264)

The Great Awakening disturbed this continuum by providing a shift from loyalty to independence, or, as Marrant illustrates, a shift from saint to always already a sinner.

With the democratic-like creations of church community and worship in the Great Awakening, through religious sects like the Methodists, the movement created tensions in

North American that would affect the way ideas of individuality and class developed in the American colonies.

Of course, issues of slavery would both unite and divide along regional, as well as class, lines. Mason Crum argues that “the positive stand taken by the Methodist Church against the institution of slavery brought all of its preachers under a cloud of suspicion, by slaveholders and many people in general. This was particularly true in the Southern region where slavery was most profitable and where the fear of Negro insurrection was always present” (17). To top it off, “African Americans flocked to the Methodist church because in its earliest days Methodists opposed slavery” (Murray 11). Methodists, in the beginning, experienced a “new life” where

economic class, gender and race no longer defined them. Instead, many Methodists received a new identity based on God’s grace that freed them from all other claims. This new status produced a condition of liminality, a threshold of new experience that Methodists shared with one another. This liminality freed persons of ‘normal’ expectations, conditions, and rituals and established an order beyond such concerns. (Murray 10)

Of course, prejudice against both class and color remained prevalent in even the Methodist ministry. However, as Murray argues

Methodists preached that salvation was open to all and was not predestined by God and reserved for a select few. In a land wrestling with questions of political sovereignty, Methodism offered a religious equivalent to political independence in which worshippers chose salvation and God extended spiritual freedom to all. (8)

The implications of this religious freedom for a black man in South Carolina, like Marrant, created possibilities beyond even color barriers—this new form of Anglicanism created a space temporarily free from class divides as well. His spiritual autobiography

grasps these changes and offers a tangible way to explain the difference between an elect saint and the idea of a reformed, but perpetual, sinner.

Marrant uses humor, via the trickster, to show the ridiculousness that comes from sinfulness and, in contrast, the seriousness of the experience of epiphany. This duality reflects the traditional dichotomy attributed to the trickster:

The Trickster, thus straddling oppositions, embodies two anti-thetical, nonrational experiences of man with the natural world, his society and his own psyche: on the one hand, a force of treacherous disorder that outrages and disrupts, and on the other hand, an unanticipated, usually unintentional benevolence in which trickery is at the expense of inimical forces and for the benefit of mankind. (Wadlington 15)

Marrant, who is both man and trickster, will have to struggle with the trickster in order to gain control of the “force of treacherous disorder” and, meanwhile, hang on to the “benevolent” side of the trickster’s character. Simply, Marrant must save his soul from sin and the trickster's exuberance without excising the emotional vigor so important to Methodist evangelicalism.

The “new light” church was a means for a man such as Marrant to undermine class structure by being both the trickster and a minister—being playful and an elevated, educated man who can, in the end, help others become enthusiastic Christians and rein in their own sinful side. As well, becoming a minister following the ideals of Methodism, Marrant would follow the, perhaps unconscious, idea that

The revivalists undermined the social order [. . .] not by repudiating law and authority, but by denying them sanctifying power. Estrangement from rulers and the traditional patterns of life was demoralizing as long as the social order was considered divine, but Awakening preachers repeatedly denied that salvation came by following the law. (Bushman, *Puritan to Yankee* 193)

Again, by disturbing the “natural order,” by being both African American and ordained minister, trickster and saint, Marrant and his trickster are a part of a long-term impact on a later social change in colonial and revolutionary American society. Bushman argues that

In making peace with themselves, converts inwardly revolted against the old law and authority, and, as time was to show, they would eventually refuse to submit to a social order alien to their new identity. Conservative suspicions of the revival were confirmed when reborn men set out to create a new society compatible with the vision opened in the Great Awakening. (*Puritan to Yankee* 195)

This new society, as we see from Marrant’s ideals, includes a struggle for sin-free life by perpetual retrenching of one’s soul for God and creating an equality among all saved men, black and white, poor and wealthy, oppressed and empowered.

Marrant’s trickster figure is purposefully changed to resemble a christianized image. The trickster is not always a man, usually the trickster is an animal, nor is the trickster necessarily a messenger of a god. Further, “trickster tales were not intended to provide a literal guide for actions in everyday life but rather to promote cleverness, guile, and wit as the most advantageous behavioral options for dealing with the slave masters in certain generic situations” (Roberts 110). By incorporating the trickster into his spiritual autobiography, Marrant refigures the trickster figure from that of a “savage” one (Roberts 100) into a potentially enlightenable figure.

While the spiritual autobiography is an obvious aspect of *A Narrative*, Marrant’s trickster figure is harder to locate. Marrant’s trickster figure is the embodiment of his sinfulness. Marrant declares that he rebelled against his mother’s wishes in his own desire to become a musician: “Disobedience either to God or man, being one of the fruits of sin

and grew out of me in early buds” (930). Marrant acknowledges his early rebellion as a form of sinfulness. In rebelling against his mother he is also exhibiting a common characteristic of tricksters. As Roberts argues, “Trickster tales characteristically portray situations in which the principle actors create alliances that they inevitably break, or break long-standing ones in pursuit of their own apparently egocentric goals” (104). In refusing to honor his mother’s wishes, Marrant is breaking the longstanding bond between mother and son—a bond commanded by God⁵. With his tricksterish soul, Marrant breaks one of the ten commandments. Marrant is both trickster and sinner here—before his conversion his trickster side is in full control of his decisions.

Marrant’s trickster narrative follows traditional West African trickster tales, like those from the Ewe tradition. In the Ewe tradition, a tribe from Togo in west Africa, there is a tale of the “Spider and the Stone with Eyes.” In this tale, Spider comes across a large stone with eyes. Upon saying the phrase “A stone with eyes,” Spider falls over dead. However, the stone revives him. Seeing in the stone an excellent hunting opportunity, Spider takes the stone and places it along the road. Spider manages to trick large animals into saying the phrase “Stone with eyes” so that they die.

However, unbeknownst to Spider, Squirrel has been watching these happenings. When Squirrel appears to Spider, Spider tries his trick on Squirrel and fails. In fact, Squirrel tricks Spider into saying the phrase and dieing himself!:

Spider said, “So many people have come and left. You are giving me trouble.” [. . .] “Say, ‘that stone with e...e..ey....” Squirrel repeated, “Stone with e...e...ey....” Spider said, “Stone with e...e...ey....” Squirrel said, “Stone with e...e...ey....Spider, just say the name and let us depart!” Spider finally blurted out, “Does the stone have eyes?”

Immediately Spider fell with a thud! Spider fell! Squirrel said, “Aha! He who lays a trap for his neighbor often falls in it himself!” (Konrad Appendix)

In this we can see a similarity to a number of generic trickster tales and, specifically, to Marrant’s own tale—especially to Marrant’s initial conversion tale in which, like Spider, he falls pray to his own trick.

One of the first sightings of the trickster in the text is through the youthful Marrant’s sudden inclination for music. Both the African American and Native trickster figures have appetites for the forbidden, although it is usually food or sex. For the more urbane Marrant, this desire is translated to an appetite for music: “Some time after I had been in Charles-Town, as I was walking one day, I passed by a school, and heard music and dancing, which took my fancy very much, and I felt a strong inclination to learn the music” (930). Marrant’s desire eventually overrides his mother’s disapproval. This willfulness and initial disobedience to fulfill a desire is characteristic of the African American trickster figure: The trickster, “in his rebelliousness, characteristically indulges in actions that are not only socially unacceptable but also morally tainted” (Roberts 101). Marrant admits later, when reflecting upon his life as a sinner, that in his thirteenth year he was “devoted to pleasure and drinking iniquity like water” (930). His craving for music provided the appetite, and his ability to play led him to vice-laden experiences. Like the insatiable appetite of the trickster figure, Marrant revels in his music and inevitable vice that followed that pastime.

Soon after Marrant learns to play the violin and the French-horn, he takes an opportunity to play a trick on a religious congregation being preached to by George Whitefield. As one of the leaders of Methodist evangelicalism, George Whitefield is an

important character in Marrant's work. Whitefield, a preacher connected to the Huntingdon Connection, died in 1770, "shortly after leading a revival meeting in Charleston during which Marrant was converted" (Brooks and Saillant 10-11). Like the coyote in many Native stories, or Spider in the Ewe tale, however, Marrant has the trick turned on him. Just as Marrant "was pushing the people to make room, to get the horn off my shoulder to blow it," the preacher, Whitefield, looks directly at Marrant, points his finger at him, and announces "PREPARE TO MEET THY GOD O ISRAEL" upon which Marrant "was struck to the ground, and lay both speechless and senseless near half an hour" (931). Marrant has a crisis of the soul at this time and begins to reflect on his belief in God and his life of sinfulness. What started to be a joke on Whitefield and his congregation became a serious matter for Marrant.

Like the Native American trickster trope, the African trickster figure stands for different things to different tribes. But also like their Native American counterparts, the African trickster figures share broad characteristics. Susan Feldmann characterizes a generic African trickster figure (in comparison to the Native American trickster) as

represented by the underdog rather than the chief. His amorality is not that of the anomic, presocialized individual, who has not yet matured to a sense of responsibility. Suave, urbane and calculating, the African trickster acts with premeditation, always in control of the situation; though self-seeking, his social sense is sufficiently developed to enable him to manipulate others to his advantage. (qtd. in Roberts 103)

As Marrant reveals more of his character in *A Narrative*, he shows himself, like the African American trickster, as less the Chief and more the underdog of his own tale. The trickster in the African American tradition is dissimilar to its African ancestor in that, in the new land of America, the figure became more adaptive to the situations in which

storytellers placed him, as well as infused with a code-of-conduct conducive to community building (Roberts 109). Both like and unlike the more familiar Native American figure, the historical African trickster is a part of the earliest folkloric culture of African American people.

The African American trickster figure is, however, still based on African trickster-tale traditions. John W. Roberts, in a critical historiography of the African trickster tradition, argues that African Americans did not create the trickster tradition themselves,

nor can the values reflected in the tales be understood solely by reference to conditions faced by blacks in the United States [. . .] It is essential to recognize the African roots of the tradition from the vantage of African culture building as a continuous process that served as a source of black identity and heroic values. (101)

This argument suggests that the African American trickster figure is not only a representational reaction to slave conditions imposed upon African people, but that it is a cultural experience with a long history that crossed the Atlantic on slave ships.

Marrant's familiarity with this tradition is speculative; however, his close associations with African slaves as well as his own African American heritage make the connection more than plausible. Marrant also spent some time living in Native American communities of Cherokees, and he may have become familiar with their versions of the Native American trickster figure as well. Although he only lived among Native Americans for two years, Marrant's cultural (although not spiritual) assimilation into the tribes to whom he preached or by whom he was captured is apparent in his manner of dress upon returning home (Marrant 936). Further cultural assimilation may have

included an introduction to the Native American trickster figure. Although Feldman argues that various tricksters are “suave, urbane and calculating” (qtd. in Roberts 103), the Native American trickster is like the African in that he “plays tricks and is the victim of tricks [. . .] He is footloose, irresponsible [. . .] but somehow always sympathetic if not lovable” (Velie 122). The similarities between the Native, African, and African American tricksters are close enough to be suggestive of the others and to point to the possibility that Marrant could have used both the Native American and African American trickster figures as models in his autobiography.

Whether Native American, African, or African American, the trickster can be a fool and a god, a man and an animal, a role model and a model to reject, smart and asinine. Wadlington best sums up the contradictory position of the trickster when he notes that:

At once bestial and divine, fool and deceiver, the archetypal Trickster spans the entire range of shadowy, baffling worlds beyond the ordinary man’s control, from the superhuman to the subhuman, from the supersubtle to the subconscious. Whether he is seen, according to the social and historical circumstances, as demiurge, culture hero, savior-god, devil, shaman, or comic rogue, the Trickster has a profound fascination, abrogating as he does in his tricks and self-deceptions all restrictions, rules and taboos, manipulating the untouchable, and freely tapping the unchecked power of the conscious or the afterworld by means of illusion and metamorphosis. (Wadlington 16)

In Marrant’s autobiography, the trickster inhabits the shadowy world between sinners and saved, between the convert and the damned. For Marrant, the trickster appears both when he is slipping from the path of righteousness and when he is on the path back to God, both helpful and harmful. His own spiritual metamorphoses, for instance, reflect both the

trickster's ability to turn from man to animal and the Christian metaphorical conversion from man to one of Christ's sheep.

The trickster fights Marrant's conversion though. Marrant as convert is always repressing the sinner within—his spiritual confusion thus also mirrors the more mundane confusion of his place in the social order of the United States. Cowing argues that

The Great Awakening may have added as many as fifty thousand church members and 150 new churches to New England; and the composition of the flocks altered significantly. In the quiet era before the revival the churches had catered to women and to men of affairs. The Awakening brought into the church a variety of new men—rural, youthful, middle-aged, phlegmatic, unchurched, Indian, Negro—and some of Pilgrim stock. (Cowing 73)

Marrant contributes to the confusion of this time by adding his fervor to the growing congregations of middle and working class whites caught up in the spirit of the Awakening, as well as by becoming a Methodist minister⁶. In the many confusions of his own life, the perpetual presence of the trickster in the text, ironically enough, offers stability—in fact, as Brooks and Saillant argue, John Marrant's writings “record black people in pursuit of a space they could control. These texts convey a sense that many blacks felt at home only in precarious or marginal spaces: worshipping outdoors in Indian towns, seeking refuge in British camps, being at sea, and migrating to the Maritimes” (27-28). In offering the trickster as a sinner and in becoming an ordained minister, Marrant gains control of even his own religious education.

One significant difference between Marrant's own work and typical trickster figures in other narratives is that *A Narrative* also works as a spiritual biography. Like Elizabeth Ashbridge's *Some Account of the Early Part of the Life of Elizabeth Ashbridge*, a critically acknowledged spiritual autobiography, Marrant follows the story of his trials,

his descent into sin, and his struggle to find God among perpetual sinners, destitution, and potentially deadly situations. As Benilde Montgomery argues, for all of the hardship Marrant has to (by his own account) face, he “does not understand himself as the victim of frivolous circumstance but rather as an active participant in the evolution of a providential design” (160). The idea of providential design appears in many early American religious texts, especially spiritual autobiographies and Indian captivity narratives, as epitomized by works such as Mary Rowlandson’s *A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*.

In one example, Marrant relates a time when he was a preacher on a local farm and is stopped by the Mistress of the farm, who whips the blacks who attended Marrant’s sermons. Marrant relates that the blacks continued to meet, although Marrant himself had been run off. The meetings were in danger of discovery, though, and further punishment for the people who met despite the Mistress’ anger. Marrant relates that

In about two months after I left them, it pleased God to lay his hand upon their Mistress, and she was seized with a very violent fever, which no medicine that they could produce would remove, and in a very few days after she was taken ill, she died in a very dreadful manner, in great anger with her husband, for not preventing their meetings, which she had heard they continued, notwithstanding all her endeavors to stop it. (939)

As Weyler notes, Marrant “uses Christianity to scourge slave owners who would deny their slaves [. . .] spiritual communion” (40-41). Like other spiritual autobiographers, Marrant attributes the Mistress’ death to her refusal to allow her slaves to worship God. This attribution to God’s wrath and the death of the woman is also a solid part of the trickster method of revenge. The trickster himself did not take revenge, but rejoiced in the Mistress’ comeuppance.

Marrant further rejoices in occurrences of faith after her death: “After she was dead, her husband gave [the slaves] liberty to meet together as before, and used sometimes to attend with them; and I have since heard that it was made very useful to him” (939). Not only did the Mistress not win out in suppressing slave worship, but after her death her husband joined the slaves meetings and worshiped with them. Not only did Marrant empower the slaves to worship God strongly enough to precipitate the death of the evil Mistress, Marrant made a convert—via the slaves—of the evil woman’s husband. The spiritual conversion mixed in with Marrant’s trickster side come together nicely in this particular passage. Here, there is both life and death, good and bad, underdog and clear winner: the Master and the Mistress, conversion and death, Marrant as the exiled minister and Marrant as the minister who bought about such miracles—all through the power of God, of course.

Marrant was writing at a time when the concept of providential design in one’s everyday life was still essential to spiritual matters; his belief in a God-given reason for his having earned his hardships by displeasing God only serves to emphasize the religious nature of his text. However, rather than becoming a martyr to the cause of Methodism, as he seems to do later in his life, in Nova Scotia, Marrant follows the trickster’s inclinations toward an easier way to a happy salvation.

For instance, although his mother gives him what he wants in terms of his musical career, when Marrant turns to God, he becomes the underdog in his family. After his spiritual illness, Marrant returns to his Mother’s home and is “well received” (932). Not long after, however, “Satan began to stir up my two sisters and brother” who “persecuted

me” (932). Although Marrant first states his ability to resist the despondency that followed his mother turning against him for his religion, he later states, “I was tempted so far as to threaten my life” (932). Marrant then relates that he left his mother’s home for the woods, as he “thought it better for me to die than to live among such people” (932). In leaving his family because of persecution, Marrant follows the traditional trickster trope. If Marrant were more of a kingly figure, he would have attempted converting his family, rather than piteously bursting out in tears when they did not say the Lord’s Prayer before supper (932). Unlike the French and Spanish priests, John Eliot, Elizabeth Ashbridge, or even Marrant post-ordination, among others, who attempt to convert those that are more numerous and/or stronger than they, Marrant leaves the unconverted to their own fates and goes to find God in a more peaceful place. Much like his fellow African American tricksters, Marrant looks for a way out from systematic persecution.

After he runs away from home, Marrant finds himself wandering the wild woods and prairies around his home. He sleeps in trees and lacks food and water. He prays for God’s aid and, shortly thereafter, finds what he is looking for: “I continued moving so for some time, and at length passing between two trees, I happened to fall upon some bushes, among which were a few large hollow leaves, which had caught and contained the dews of the night, and lying low among the bushes, were not exhaled by the solar rays” (933). Roberts notes that “In African trickster tales, the trickster’s need to compensate for shortages in the food supply, often under faminelike conditions, is mentioned often enough to be considered a formulaic opening sequence” (104). While this episode is not

the opening to the autobiography, it is the beginning of Marrant's first journey into the wilderness—both spiritually and physically.

The trickster steps in unexpectedly while Marrant makes his way towards this God-given water: “this water in the leaves fell upon me as I tumbled down and was lost, I was now tempted to think the Lord had give me water from Heaven, and I had wasted it, I then prayed the Lord to forgive me” (933). In this slightly humorous moment in Marrant's spiritual journey, he finds that he has found exactly what he has prayed for, only to spill the water out of the leaves. He is thirsty and has spilled his only chance for “salvation” from this thirst. In looking for water in dew caught upon leaves, Marrant is exhibiting a trickster characteristic of cleverness; the loss of that water is the table turning on the trickster for reasons he cannot fathom. Marrant moves a little beyond the spot where he spills the leaves and finds a mud-hole from which he will fill his thirst.

In this episode, the trickster and convert wrestle; much like Jacob wrestling God⁷, Marrant wrestles his trickster—both animal and man, Marrant praises God while rummaging around like a pig. In fact, Marrant gives the reader the description: “I was presently directed to a puddle of water very muddy, which some wild pigs had just left; I kneeled down, and asked the Lord to bless it to me, so I drank both mud and water mixed together [.]” (933). In being both animal and man, Marrant is both the trickster-animal and Christ's sheep.

As a convert to Christianity, Marrant has begun the repression of his sinful-self—the trickster part of him—but that particular self does not remain buried. In praying to God and granting God the miracle of the water, rather than his innate tricksterish

cleverness, Marrant is turning his back on that part of his character. Thus, in revenge, the trickster works against him. Rather than being able to drink the God-provided cool, clean water, Marrant finds himself on his knees, much like his prayer-pose, drinking muddy water last inhabited by wild pigs.

Another trickster trait is, of course, a kinship to other “animal” characters.

Besides his own animal characteristics, and somewhat like Daniel, Marrant exhibits an ability to meet with dangerous animals and come away unharmed⁸. In Marrant’s wanderings he finds himself in the woods, where

I passed between two bears, about twenty yards distance from each other. Both sat and looked at me, but I felt very little fear; and after I had passed them, they both went the same way from me without growling, or the least apparent uneasiness. I went and returned God thanks for my escape, who had tamed the wild beasts of the forest, and made them friendly to me [...] (933)

As part of his conversion experience, Marrant changes what is seen in trickster narratives as a meeting of true minds into an experience for which he can give thanks to God. Thus, Marrant is in a constant struggle with the trickster who, until Marrant’s own Jonah-like moment later in his autobiography, refuses to be suppressed.

As both trickster and convert, Marrant finds himself able to use a little magic to help himself out of sticky situations. One characteristic of the trickster is his ability to “manouvre his way out of self-made trouble” (Sunkuli 95). The journey that leads to Marrant’s capture is self-made: Marrant ran away from home and deliberately walked into an Indian camp where (as Marrant relates it) the rules of hospitality included death to those who could not convincingly argue for their lives. By praying out loud, Marrant tricks his executioner into letting him go—once that effect happens, and the trickster sees

a new way out of these troubles, Marrant is given toward praying for deliverance once more.

As a convert, Marrant depends on prayer—the magic of the invisible hand of God. Like the African American and Native trickster figures, Marrant is in possession of a little of the magic with which trickster figures are usually imbued. His “magic” is not an inherent characteristic, but rather an ability to speak to a man whom no one else can see. Marrant’s magic makes its way into the narrative when he has been in the wilderness and finds himself “musing upon the goodness of the Lord” (933). He was musing out loud, causing the Indian hunter he meets in the “wilderness” to enquire, “who was I talking to?” (933). When Marrant informs the hunter that he was talking “to my Lord Jesus,” the Indian seemed surprised and asked, where is he “for he did not see him there” (933). Marrant replies, “he could not be seen with bodily eyes” (933). Thus, through his discussion with the Indian hunter and, later, the man who is meant to be Marrant’s executioner, Marrant converts those who could not “see” Jesus.

Unlike the many enemies that had entered the camp before him, Marrant is not subject to the torture and death that these other characters face. Through wit and trickery, Marrant not only outwits the Native American rules, he brings in a convert as well—adding to the people by his side to defend him while he is still in the camp. Marrant attributes his escape to God, substituting God’s awesome power for an acknowledgment of the trickster’s traditional power. Marrant relates that he “was taken away immediately, and as we passed along, and I was reflecting upon the deliverance which the Lord had

wrought out for me, and hearing the praises which the executioner was singing to the Lord, I must own I was utterly at a loss to find words to praise him” (935).

Marrant manages to avoid execution altogether when the executioner relays Marrant’s “magic” to the King: “The executioner went to the King, and assured him that if he put me to death, his daughter would never be well” (935). After Marrant prayed for the King’s daughter, and she recovered, the King released him. The magic of this particular trickster is the ability to believe in someone that others cannot see. For Marrant, the power of prayer works as magic. As Weyler notes, “Marrant never attributes the conversion of the Cherokee to his own actions; rather, as he carefully points out, it is God, working through him, who converts the Cherokee, just as it is God, working through the Cherokee, who saves Marrant” (48). This combination of magic and prayer marks just one of the changes Marrant wrought on the trickster figure and supports the idea of the ever present and ever repressed sinner. In this text, prayer and trickery are the dichotomy of the saved.

After his return from his Indian captivity, Marrant finds his appearance as an Indian humorous. He tells the story of his first appearance in “civilization” after he leaves the Native American camp:

It was about dinner-time, and as I was coming to the door the family saw me, were frightened, and ran away. I sat down to dinner alone, and ate very heartily, and, after returning God thanks, I went to see what was become of the family. I found means to lay hold of a girl that stood peeping at me from behind a barn. She fainted away, and it was upwards of an hour before she recovered; it was nine o’clock before I could get them all to venture in, they were so terrified. (937)

Marrant relates this story in order to show how “heathenish” his appearance has become—and the humor in being found terrifying after his experience in being captured by a semi-hostile Native American tribe.

The trickster figure revels in the unusual and in making others uncomfortable. For Marrant, his garish outfit and wild look make him stand out in a way that differentiates him from the farm family he encounters—his appearance makes him stand out in a way that his piety marked him as singular in the Native American camp. In this encounter, the reader can see that hilarity in the preachy Marrant scaring the type of family he will later be ministering to. His hearty dinner he attributes to God, on paper, but the reader and Marrant know that the dinner is a result of his wild appearance. The trickster is in abeyance in regards to Marrant’s obvious sins, but not in regards to his delight in scaring an innocent family of their hard-earned dinner.

Marrant used the trickster figure, really, to express the difficulties of living a sin-free life. The trickster represents that which is always already present in all of us. The trickster is also the underdog. Thus, when we cheer Marrant on when he conquers a particular foe, we are cheering on the trickster. But, our reading is conflicted, because we also support Marrant’s struggle against the trickster. When Marrant finally suppresses the trickster and begins life as a missionary, we are pleased that he has managed to reach his goal. As sinners, we know it is temporary, the trickster is always lurking, but we can also rejoice in Marrant’s confidence in having control over his own personal trickster.

After Marrant’s ordination and move to Nova Scotia, Marrant’s sermons take on the tone of one who has passed through the worst of his sins and can now be free from

them; however, the sermons also reflect the struggle Marrant continues to face. In one sermon from June 1789, Marrant pleads for his listeners to “present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service—let love be without dissimulation, abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good” (Marrant, *Sermon* 79). In fact, Marrant is just strong enough to help others who are “sin-sick,” as he remembers being. Marrant recalls in his *Nova Scotia Journal* that an elderly woman was brought to him and was asked if a doctor should be brought to cure her. Marrant recalls that “I answered—no, I told them that she was only sin sick, and no doctor in this life could cure her; but there was a good physician in Gilead, and in his good time he would apply the balm of Gilead to her soul” (*Journal* 113). After praying with and for the woman for a number of days, Marrant reports that finally, “God was pleased to arise and shine in her heart” (114). The woman was thus cured of her sin-sickness through Marrant’s prayer.

However, as I have said before, the trickster cannot be fully repressed, although, as Marrant shows, one can recognize the trickster’s presence and resent it at the same time. Even in his journal Marrant relates that he became both literally and figuratively lost in the wilderness of Nova Scotia: “O what poor creatures we all are, even the best Christians, and we cannot be kept unless we are kept by God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (*Journal* 119). After this speech Marrant is rescued, again figuratively and literally. Despite the good he knows his is doing—with God’s assistance—Marrant struggles to keep to the narrow path he sees before him.

The trickster is an unwilling part of Marrant's conversion. For instance, the trickster's desire is also turned on him when, after realizing that making music is sinful, Marrant is pressed into service on a ship⁹ as a musician, "as they were told I could play on music" (939). The trickster's former desire and manipulations to attain the object of that desire turn on him in a time when he no longer willfully wants what he once did. Like other spiritual biographers, Marrant relates that his conversion was not all smooth sailing: "In those troublesome times, I was pressed on board the Scorpion sloop of war, as their musician, as they were told I could play music.—I continued in his majesty's service for six years and eleven months; and with shame confess, that a lamentable stupor crept over all my spiritual vivacity, life and vigour; I got cold and dead" (939-40). In this particular passage, Marrant reveals that the trickster has found a way to express himself: Marrant's past as a musician creates a situation, well after his conversion, in which he is asked to bring the trickster back to life. In this case, it is a matter of performing or jail—or even death. In being pressed into service, Marrant is left with little choice as to what he has to do—he joins the crew of the sloop and becomes their musician.

Like the situation that prompts his decision to head into the wilderness, Marrant makes the best of his circumstances. Marrant is not a martyr figure. He is not a remarkable convert, nor is he an especially great role-model for other converts; his story is a story of faith and struggle, but also of impishness and a relentlessly sinning nature. Like the trickster's transformation from Africa to American plantations and farms, the trickster is a form that is less a role-model and more of a character in a story who displays traits that are copy-able, but is altogether a character to avoid in one's own life

whenever possible. In many African countries, the trickster had admirable traits, but was not necessarily meant to be literally copied. Roberts finds that

In America, the suppression of a religion that had informed the African conception of the trickster as a folk hero whose deeds involved the manipulative actions of others did not seriously inhibit the ability of slaves to transform the animal trickster tale to reflect their own situation. They found in their treatment by the slave masters sufficient justification for transmitting an oral expressive tradition in which the animal trickster's behavior was regarded as adaptive. (Roberts 108-09)

For a free black like Marrant, the necessity of converting the trickster to a literal model may not have been necessary. Roberts argues that “when viewed from the vantage of enslaved blacks—who were consistently short-portioned at the communal dinner table on the plantation—the actions of the trickster reflect a situational moral code for survival” (Roberts 110). Thus, when pressed into service, Marrant does not choose jail or death over service. He joins the sloop and makes the best of the situation. In fact, his regression to his pre-convert ways actually makes for a better story in terms of the spiritual autobiography: what is St. Augustine's story without his trials and failures?

In a society where race is problematized by the ideas of slavery and “unhumanness,” Marrant must negotiate his role in the tradition of spiritual autobiographies—a tradition many recognize as a white one. Marrant's trickster is the unbelievable aspect of his tale—but in symbolizing the sinner with his trickster, Marrant has brought together both the spiritual and the African tradition. In giving the traditional with the unfamiliar, Marrant has offered us an autobiography that brings in traditions of other countries; these traditions add to what has been already been “troped” to death. In his time, Marrant's situations offer a worldview many of his readers would not be able to

relate to—unless they too were literate free blacks. Thus, Marrant needs to make the unbelievable believable—a possession by an evil spirit is believable in this period of time—and he does this by creating a persona, the trickster, who Marrant is associated with and can potentially exorcise.

In giving the Scorpion episode, Marrant relates the trickster's overwhelming presence in his life: the musician returns and Marrant's spirituality backslides into his former dark ways. The difference this time is that rather than reveling in the sinfulness, Marrant feels like his soul is missing, he is "cold and dead." While Marrant attributes this to a lack in his "spiritual vivacity," he does not describe any other kind of "vivacity." For Marrant, his spirit is his life; the trickster is "seen" and acknowledged as a problem—Marrant has given his soul to God, and while before, without God, he had the trickster, now, without God, there is nothing. The trickster is only an encumbrance, no longer a vital part of his nature.

One of the opportunities offered Marrant while aboard ship was a chance to revive his flagging spirituality. Like other spiritual autobiographers, indeed, like many travel narratives published during the 1700s, Marrant finds himself tossed overboard the Scorpion. Marrant offers an episode in which he was thrown overboard by giant waves during a storm and was surrounded by sharks: "I then cried more earnestly to the Lord than I had done for some time; and he who heard Jonah's prayer, did not shut out mine, for I was thrown aboard again; these were the means the Lord used to revive me, and I began to set out afresh" (940). His soul is no longer cold and dead, but given a dunking in the ocean, becomes "revived." The trickster won out for a number of years after Marrant

is pressed onto the sloop, but, in the end, God wins out and the converted Marrant is shown the way back to spiritual salvation. The trickster is suppressed once again.

Marrant's Scorpion epiphany counterargues the critics of the Great Awakening who saw only chaos in the masses of men and women who gave their hearts to the message of the movement. Marrant acknowledges that his earlier conversion in the revival meeting was too easy—but through continued struggle Marrant shows his eventual “true” conversion, a conversion brought forth by continued study in Methodist teachings rather than a return to the traditional colonial church. Methodism provided Marrant with the means to find God, a means not available to him in the “old light” churches.

While Marrant does not initially strike his audience as a calculating figure, his spiritual autobiography is both deliberate and self-seeking. The narrative incorporates the trials and tribulations of Marrant's life, his conversion experience as depicted in his personal version of the temptation in the Garden of Gethsemane, his life among heathens, a prodigal return, and a small Jonah experience, all geared toward convincing the reader of his worthiness to minister to the “black nations” whose blood may be “made white in the blood of the Lamb” (940). Marrant manipulates the narrative structure to show his worthiness and abilities. The multitude of biblical images are calculated to clearly connect to Marrant's own experiences in order to present him as a Christian who has, indeed, suffered in order to be near God. The textual devices Marrant uses to push his own purposes manipulates readers' sympathy to his advantage.

The humor, however, tends to mitigate the manipulation by being linked to satire—Marrant mocks his sinfulness and those who doubt the faithfulness and godliness of the Great Awakening converts. Pelton says the trickster's

mockery include[s] himself, for he literally makes fun of the hidden underside of life, even his own. As the trickster exposes that dirty bottom, he invites men to contemplate what he shall become and to hope for what he already is—a world large in its intricacy, spiritual in its cruel bodiliness, multiple in its ironic wholeness, and finally transcendent in the very absurdity of its pretensions. (Pelton 264-65)

The pretentiousness that Marrant mocks, of course, are the pretensions of the “old lights”—those who do not see that God requires a fervent attention to one's soul and that sin cannot be reasoned away—no one person is a saint elected by God, although God can save those whom he elects.

Heimert argues that “the critics of the revival, who from the first moment of the Awakening feared the social implications of the new enthusiasm, were certain that [Jonathan] Edwards had issued a call to revolution” (“Introduction” xlvi). However, as Cowing notes,

The colonials approved in general the Calvinistic scheme [of the Awakening] not because it was reasonable but because it worked and its determinism was provocative; preaching God's sovereignty brought immediate and self-evident changes. It produced seasons of revival in which white men as well as women, children, Indians and Negroes felt God's power. [. . .] Its converts pushed church politics in a democratic direction toward congregationalism, and away from presbyterianism. (Cowing 224)

Further, Murray argues that “Methodism also appealed to African Americans because of its orality, for it was a religious movement rooted in preaching, praise, and hymn singing. African Americans faced many restrictions on literacy and found in oral communication a power frequently denied them in Revolutionary era society. Methodist evangelism was

not the only form of oral religion, but it was primarily the oral message that engaged its audience” (Murray 12). As Carretta argues, “a faith [like Methodism] that depends on predestination for salvation rather than on spiritual rewards for good works may have been especially attractive to those whose ability to perform good works was severely limited by their social condition” (8). Thus, egalitarianism among whites also prompted egalitarianism among blacks and whites—with an oral message that was dependent on the Bible but not upon being able to read the Bible, Methodism created a “democratic direction” well before its time. Marrant adds to that message in his own conversion narrative—a traditional narrative that incorporates non-traditional methods of communication about sins and sinners.

At the end of Marrant’s autobiography, he closes with a prayer. This prayer is typical of spiritual autobiographies, but it is also a nod to the trials given him by the trickster throughout his life. Marrant writes, “I have now only to entreat the earnest prayers of all my kind Christian friends, that I may be carried safe [to Nova Scotia]; kept humble, made faithful, and successful; that strangers may hear of an run to Christ; that Indian tribes may stretch out their hands to God [.]” (940). Marrant asks to be kept humble and to be a useful servant of the Lord, but behind those words one can also read his prayer to God to help him keep the trickster in abeyance: “kept humble,” “made faithful.” Some of the unfortunate characteristics of the trickster, in Marrant’s case as well as in historical tales, is an inability to be humble and the desire to perpetually turn against those who have befriended him or those whom he has befriended. Roberts argues “In a social and natural environment in which individuals must struggle for their physical

survival, harmony, friendship, and trust become ideals difficult to sustain, while deception, greed, and cleverness emerge as valuable behavioral traits” (Roberts 104).

More than a typical Christian desire to remain close to the strictures of the Bible, Marrant knows that he needs a lot of prayer to remain faithful to his chosen religion; humbleness and faithfulness are characteristics of the trickster-in-abeyance. Without prayer, the trickster will overcome him in the end.

As Marrant’s *A Narrative of the Lord’s Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, A Black* shows, one can blend African and English cultural traditions in a narrative with spiritual purposes. Although Benilde Montgomery found that Marrant’s text “is neither African, European, nor Native American but rather a kind of *coincidentia oppositorum*” she does agree that the characteristics of the text “manages to retain the powerful stamp of all three” (166). This combination of characteristics, especially through Marrant’s use of the trickster figure in *A Narrative*, challenges standard critical placement of this text in the Indian captivity narrative and spiritual autobiography genres. The use of the trickster figure differentiates Marrant’s work from that of other spiritual autobiographies in that he incorporates a traditionally pagan figure into a traditionally Christian narrative in order to further his own spiritual conversion. With humor, Marrant embraces his errors and with seriousness conveys his focus in God’s will—a seriousness doubted by those of different classes and religions. John Marrant’s *A Narrative* is an unconventional combination of tricks, trials, and tales that bring him into the forefront of African American cultural and literary history, as well as into the story of the Great Awakening’s significant addition to a democratic state and fair play for all classes.

Endnotes

¹ “Yet I was still bound to the earth, and I refused to become your soldier. I was afraid to be lightened of all my heavy burden, even as I should have feared to be encumbered by it” (Augustine 942).

² As Brooks and Saillant, as well as other scholars of Marrant’s work find, “Only one of [the] more than twenty editions can be considered authoritative: this is the fourth edition of August 1785, which was, as its title page announces, ‘enlarged by Mr. Marrant, and printed (with permission) for his soul benefit, with notes explanatory’” (19). This is the edition I have used in my research.

³ Carretta explains that “Arminians and Calvinists agreed in their emphasis on personal salvation gained in the process of recognizing that one was a sinner undeserving of redemption who, by submitting oneself completely to God, might be granted grace, whereby one experienced the joy of new birth through the revelation of one’s personal salvation” (*Unchained Voices* 15n10).

⁴ Isaiah 12: 6. “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.”

⁵ Exodus 20:12. “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you.”

⁶ Marrant was later ordained as a member of the Huntingdon Connexion in 1785, shortly before his departure to Nova Scotia (Brooks and Saillant 10-11).

⁷ Genesis 32: 24-32. “And Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and Jacob’s thigh was put out of joint; and Jacob’s thigh was put out of joint as he wrestled with him.”

⁸ Daniel 6:19-4. “Then, at break of day, the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions. When he came near to the den where Daniel was, he cried out in a tone of anguish and said to Daniel, “o Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?” Then Daniel said to the king, “O king, live for ever! My God sent his angel and shut the lions’ mouths, and they have not hurt me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no wrong.”

⁹ Carretta finds no history of Marrant about the sloop, stating that Marrant “may have fabricated his career” in the King’s service on the Scorpion (*Unchained Voices* 130-31 n47). However, as this is a type of scene one sees in spiritual autobiographies, Marrant

should be forgiven the (possible) fabrication in order to remain within the spiritual autobiographical tradition.

CHAPTER IV
 APPEARANCES AREN'T EVERYTHING—THEY ARE THE ONLY THING:
 BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, JOHN ROBERT SHAW, AND
 THE PERFORMANCE OF CLASS

Franklin's *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* and John Robert Shaw's *John Robert Shaw: An Autobiography of Thirty Years, 1777-1807* are both examples of texts that reveal the performance involved in class hierarchy. These texts, unlike some of the others examined in this dissertation, are not *obviously* funny—the humor is not necessarily that of the belly-laugh. While these authors are not comic writers, per se, they relate comedic episodes that epitomize Henri Bergson's theory of laughter and the comic: "Rigidity, automatism, absent-mindedness and unsociability are all inextricably entwined; and all serve as ingredients to the making up of the comic in character" (Bergson 147). It is the rigidity of these masks Franklin and Shaw wear that are humorous. The characters in the autobiographies I examine in this chapter exemplify Bergson's use of the mechanical and the humor behind rigidity—and Shaw and Franklin exhibit the fluidity of character and the charade necessary to carry on a successful life behind the charade. For Franklin and Shaw, the humor isn't necessarily in the writers themselves, rather in the performances they give and the examples they write about in their texts in regards to character, caricature and performance. In this chapter, I will also

examine the more obviously humorous *Memoirs of the Notorious Stephen Burroughs of New Hampshire* in order to emphasize the importance of performance in regards to class, especially during the revolutionary era.

By examining these texts side by side, I hope to show the more performative aspects of class during the revolutionary time period of United States history. In their texts, Franklin and Shaw follow the trope of a spiritual life journey prevalent during the 17th and 18th century (cf Mary Rowlandson and John Marrant). To begin with, they are both run-aways—prodigal sons—who attempt to fashion a life for themselves after leaving home. Further, they write of their trials as if they are a part of a larger purpose of tests and trials by God; the difference being that neither give more than surface attention to truly spiritual matters. Franklin writes about how to be successful, and Shaw demonstrates how he became happy—the difference between the two is the degree to which they attribute their success to their own strengths. Burroughs’ memoir, as argued by Daniel E. Williams,

did not attempt to deceive readers by omitting his crimes, but to entertain them by demonstrating the creativity of deception. Whether counterfeiting coin or a character, he displayed considerable creative force, and in writing his narrative he illustrated that the same force could be used to create—and then continually re-create—a self. (117)

Franklin, Shaw and Burroughs are great performers. Their strengths, as exemplified by Burroughs, are in the performativity of their deceptions. These are not spiritual memoirs; rather, they are confessions, advice books, and memoirs all in one. Franklin dons his comic persona to joke about his lucky rise to fame and, almost insidiously, mocks those who try to follow his boot-strap method of advancement—Shaw pulls on his comic mask

in order to perform to those willing to pay him for the performance. Burroughs, from a position of middle class prosperity and authority, questions the legitimacy of that particular authority.

The comic persona of each author in his own text reflects the performance each gives as a picaresque figure. Robert F. Sayre argues that the Franklin's autobiography began as a "short picaresque novel" (*The Examined Self* 18) while Shaw's text reflects the various characteristics usually found in picaresque works. Christopher W. Jones finds that "the main body of [Stephen Burroughs memoirs] is picaresque in its description of traditionally roguish behavior" (34). One of the best definitions of the picaresque that encapsulates these three texts is from M. H. Abrams: "a typical story concerns the escapades of an insouciant rascal who lives by his wits and shows little if any alteration of character through the long succession of his adventures" (191). Benjamin Franklin changes the performance behind the picaro—the comic mask covers for the class performance itself. John Robert Shaw retains his personality and foibles, even through a religious conversion¹ that imitates, and perhaps mocks, the conversion narratives of the eighteenth centuries, but, again, covers his self with the mask of a picaro that is his comic other.

This ability to maintain an inner personality throughout but adjust to outside forces is what gives Franklin an edge in confronting the hierarchy, and helps Shaw to survive. The picaresque hero in these texts are the masks—the comic personae—that allow Franklin and Shaw to be funny while also accomplishing their goals. The picaresque in this chapter is a literary translation of Bergson's theory of laughter: the

picaro is laughable because of the “little alteration” of character, but, because they do change personae, Franklin and Shaw are, in fact, flexible. The picaro is the comic mask.

Each author dons a mask that allows him to perform his role as successfully as possible. Alexander Blackburn argues that the picaresque figure is one who creates “a self that his will supports but that he knows for an illusion” (20). From this position, Blackburn writes, “the picaro evolves into a symbolic being, a confidence man, outwardly one who shares faith in existence, inwardly one reduced to spiritual nothingness” (20). Benjamin Franklin is such a figure. As Stacy Schiff so aptly puts it “The self-made man is one, after all, who has a fabricated self” (67). It is the fabricated self, especially in the guise of the picaro, that led me to first see the connections between class and humor in Franklin’s *Autobiography* and John Robert Shaw’s narrative. Bjornson argues that “If the recurrent sequence of events in the picaresque myth can be linked to the ambitious commoner’s struggle for physical and psychological survival in a hostile, highly competitive world, different attitudes toward the picaresque hero might actually reflect different attitudes toward a much more important socio-cultural phenomenon—the rise of bourgeois individualism” (Bjornson 14). The efforts of the picaresque hero of Benjamin Franklin mask the underlying mockery of those who would attempt to follow in his footsteps—reflecting an unfavorable attitude toward those who wish to rise into the bourgeoisie culture. In his autobiography, Franklin gives the requisite sequence of events, imbuing them with his struggles in becoming a businessman of note in Philadelphia. In offering his exertions in this way, Franklin performs to an audience he sees and can perform for. The picaro disguises the actuality of the

performance. John Robert Shaw's picaro is more of a clown—he creates humor in seriousness and invites audience participation in laughing at the stiff picaro figure. Both figures offer a stolid face that hides the riveting social dilemmas plaguing each author.

Both Franklin and Shaw come to manhood when the North American colonies were starting to become crowded and expensive. Gary Nash remarks, “even in the most fertile and connected regions, such as Philadelphia’s hinterland, the trend in the late eighteenth century was toward increasing landlessness, accelerating transience, and growing rates of poverty” (13). Franklin’s success was the exception to the rule—through an acquisition of middle class mannerisms and influences, Franklin escaped the dire poverty waiting for men like John Robert Shaw, who was largely uneducated, poor, and chronically ill. Further, Shaw was part of a larger problem of poverty among Revolutionary War soldiers who were no longer needed, or wanted, for a conscripted army. There were many more men like Shaw who did not survive the poverty at the end of the war, a disorganized Congress, and the new nations lack of funds. A reading of the congressional records from immediately after the war through the 1830s shows that men were continually pressed to petition for war reparations in terms of salary, reimbursement, and disability payments, and that many did not receive them.

Shaw’s biography was originally printed in 1807, reprinted in 1930, and then restored, researched, and published by Oressa M. Teagarden and Jeanne L. Crabtree in 1992. The text was first published by subscription, with over 1000 subscribers (“Introduction” 2). Crabtree relates that the list of subscribers, included as an appendix in the 1992 edition, included people “from New England to Tennessee” and many of them

from Pennsylvania and Kentucky, “where the ebullient Englishman was a familiar figure in almost every settlement” (2). As A.V. Huff articulates in his review of the 1994 edition of Shaw’s memoir, “This memoir, though difficult to classify, is a valuable source in tracing the often elusive individuals who lived on the fringes of society in the period of the early republic” (566-57). Shaw lived on the fringes, class-wise, but he was well in the thick of things in terms of the activities surrounding the Revolutionary War. Shaw was a soldier, frontiersman, well-digger, farmer, traveler, and a champion of veterans’ rights. While he cannot claim the title of “Founding Father” as Franklin can, Shaw took an active role in being one of the many who helped to develop the new nation. This role, however, is buried beneath a mask of obsequiousness required of him to survive in poverty.

Franklin, who can trace his lineage to established, respected, although not wealthy, Puritan stock, is mythically understood to have come from great poverty and a lower-class background. However, in his upbringing, Franklin was brought up to replicate what we would now classify as middle-class values. Franklin’s father, for example, “always took care to start some ingenious or useful topic for discourse which might tend to improve the minds of his children. By this means he turned our attention to what was good, just, and prudent in the conduct of life” (24) rather than what food was put on the table. In this manner, Franklin says, “I was brought up in such a perfect inattention to those matters as to be quite indifferent what kind of food was set before me” (24). Rather than learning to care about the types of foods placed before him on the table, Franklin learns the art of conversation—an art that would help him throughout his

life. Franklin grew up in an atmosphere of learning and genteel manners—which implies that his family, albeit poorer than their neighbors, were educated, thus in the realm of middle-class status. Richard Bushman comments: “A parvenu could hire a tailor to dress his body and a dancing master to teach physical deportment. But to acquire the spiritual and mental traits of a well-bred gentleman required years of tutoring the intellect as well” (*Refinement of America* 80). Franklin learned the rules of the game well before he became a moneyed member of the higher bourgeoisie.

Mark Patterson argues that Franklin “explores the possibility that, outside the confines of British society, position and power might be held by performance arising not from proper breeding but simply through imitation” (14). It is the possibility of imitation—the idea that class status can be faked—that Madame Knight and William Byrd II work against in their texts—the fears that these two authors conveyed in their works are exploited by Franklin in the later 1700s. Class status is performative, as I argue in my introduction, and Franklin is one of the most popular performers of class from the early national time period. All Franklin needed, really, to learn to perform properly was a knack for conversation which would include, as I discussed in Chapter II, a knowledge of moral undercurrents and codes.

Franklin’s mask undermines hierarchy—because he can use his mask to reach his goals—and supports the hierarchy in that he needs the structure to exist in order to have “goals” to reach. As Sayre remarks, “Franklin readily slipped into poses in the *Autobiography* because he had lived in a fluid world. His day-to-day identities approached poses” (*The Examined Self* 23). Franklin’s poses are a part of his craft in the

Autobiography, only it is a craft he does not seem to have to learn, like printing or candle-making are learned. The *Autobiography* does offer suggestions for learning the craft of poses, however. As Colleen Terrell argues “Franklin portrays the acquisition of virtue as a manufacturing process in all its stages: a mechanical craft whose methods exploit the mechanism of the human mind, producing a citizen whose behavior [. . .] bears remarkably automatic features” (Terrell 113). It is the automatic features in *other* people that makes Franklin’s text an almost insidious mockery of the bootstrap method of becoming part of the middle classes. While Franklin is a fluid caricature of himself, he creates an automated system of representation for others—prompting him to laugh at those who rigidly follow his lead. Before he can help create a rigid social structure, though, Franklin had to reach a place of authority. To reach that place of authority, Franklin had to successfully perform his way into a believable burgher position.

As Jennifer L. Goloboy finds: “Members of the eighteenth-century middling sort subscribed to a strict set of values. In his autobiography, Benjamin Franklin summarized this ethos with a list of thirteen qualities: frugality, temperance, chastity, silence, tranquility, humility, cleanliness, moderation, order, resolution, sincerity, justice, and industry” (539). In the homespun revolutionary era, only the aristocrats could really stand out with visible physical class markers, such as clothes and home goods—everyone else relied on the acting out of valued qualities such as conversation and mannerisms. Such acting out—or imitation—of middling sort qualities, as shown in other chapters, undermines and supports class hierarchy. Franklin, who can do both, shows the weakness of the structure while aspiring to strengthen it after his own admission.

As Franklin demonstrates so clearly in his autobiography, it is imitation that makes class and status. Burroughs, unlike Franklin and Shaw, comes from a clearly middling class background. His father was a clergyman in New Hampshire, and Burroughs the only son (3). Burroughs was also sent to Dartmouth College, far more formal education than received by either Franklin or Shaw, and was allowed to remain “an inactive member of society” for a number of years before his father “fitted [him] out with a horse, saddle, bridle, and about twenty dollars in money” (30). While Burroughs clearly provides a connection to class and performance in terms of examples, he is not from a lower-class or working-class family and did not have to learn the rules of the class—in fact, his performance is more of a game than a matter of advancement or monetary stability.

Like Knight and Byrd, and Franklin, really, Burroughs is able to perform outside of his class *because* he knows the rules. As Stephen Burroughs argues so famously in his autobiography,

An imposter, we generally conceive, puts on feigned appearances, in order to enrich or aggrandize himself, to the damage of others. That this is not the case with me, in this transaction, I think is clear. [. . .] That I have a good and equitable right to preach, if I choose, and others choose to hear me, is a truth of which I entertain no doubt. (67-68)

For Burroughs, his ability to preach and appear as a minister gives him every right to call himself one. For Benjamin Franklin, performance requires the skills and knowledge of class in order to imitate successfully—an act Burroughs manages until his less spiritual nature unveils itself. While being a clergyman is an occupation rather than a level of class, clergymen in this time period, much as they do now, hold a special status in terms

of knowledge and reliability. Burroughs and Franklin both earned respect in terms of their status in society, even while Burroughs lost money and Franklin earned enough wealth to have both monetary and elite social status, because of their mannered appearances and knowledge of social rules. While Franklin became wealthy through business acumen and good connections, his rise in status occurred through manipulation of his character and the strength of character required to maintain his picaresque mask—this strength, I would say, gives Franklin the idea that he too has a right to his particular performance. By giving himself this right, Franklin is endowing himself with the authority of the bourgeoisie before quite achieving this status.

Franklin's autobiography is understood to be a text about authority—types, values in, repercussions of, how to obtain, and so on. Franklin's text, however, is also a text written by the established Benjamin Franklin. Further, as Patterson finds,

By writing his life, Franklin authorizes it. As he supersedes his rivals, he no longer submits to others. He has, in effect, narrated his life in his terms, thereby escaping the ignominy of subordination and his imitation [. . .] By explaining his life in terms of conditions for proper judgment, he presents us not only with the image but also with the structure for recognizing its authority. (Patterson 31)

The text is written by a figure of authority and thus gives the text its authority—Franklin isn't so much as offering advice as giving an authoritative written argument for certain types of mores and lifestyles.

John Robert Shaw, however, never achieves the level of authority Franklin attains in his lifetime. While Shaw was well known in his field and, perhaps, in the various neighborhoods where he lived, especially given the subscribers list for his book, his autobiography was printed but then buried in obscurity. Shaw's autobiography isn't

written with authority, it's written as a performance piece in order to earn Shaw a few more pennies to establish his family into a comfortable lifestyle before his death. At the end of his autobiography, Shaw writes:

Through all the career of my folly, vice and intemperance, I made it a point never to lose sight of industry; from which source I now derive my present advantages in pecuniary concerns; with the pleasing prospect of an ample support for myself and family during my declining years. Therefore, I recommend industry to my youthful readers, which is the law of our being; it is the demand of nature... And now I wish to observe that in whatever I have said in the style of direction and advice, I meant only to offer, not to obtrude; to submit, not to dictate. (155)

Like Franklin, Shaw offers advice throughout his work on how to earn money, make friends, and develop a happy home life. However, even at the end of his text, Shaw kowtows to those who may know better. He acknowledges that his text is more about what *not* to do than a memoir of a life virtuously lived. Shaw reveals the major flaws in his attempts to live virtuously—his text is replete with drunken parties and orgies paid with borrowed funds. What Franklin warns against, Shaw embraced with a *joie de vivre* he repents of only near the end of his life.

Franklin's authority tied him to a higher class with a high position and an important public office; he could acknowledge his rise from the safety of his societal authority. As Patterson argues, "In essence, authority was encoded in those expressions of self, tying one to a particular class, position, employment, and public office" (13-14). Shaw, however, remained tied to his class and thus performs to the authority figures who could enable him to make a living wage from his written words and physical labor, despite his reputation as a drinker. What Shaw does not perform is the actual physical

labor he must perform in order to survive: military service, farming, felling, and well-digging take a true toll on Shaw's body.

From a position of solid middle-class authority himself, Stephen Burroughs supports and critiques the performance of class in his autobiography by arguing both for and against that which is counterfeit. In one of the most anthologized incidents from his memoirs, Burroughs gets involved in a scheme to manufacture and distribute counterfeit coins. In his argument against the distribution of counterfeit coins, Burroughs states

You [to Lysander] are sensible that counterfeiting the coin of any country is contrary, not only to the laws of that country, but likewise to the laws of our own minds, having implicitly engaged to observe and protect those laws. When we once take advantage of their efficacy to protect us in the enjoyment of our rights and privileges; therefore, should the business succeed according to our most sanguine wishes, and the coin pass to the end of time as standard silver, yet we should as really violate the simple principles of justice. (81)

The argument Lysander offers to oppose Burroughs' arguments is an argument that Burroughs quickly supports: "Money, of itself, is of no consequence, only as we, by mutual agreement, annex to it a nominal value, as the representation of property" (83). Lysander goes on to illustrate this argument with the idea of paper money and the agreement of value that paper money has, despite its having no intrinsic value. In the end, Lysander argues, he is counterfeiting money as to balance out the "undue scarcity of cash" (84) that interferes with business propositions; thus, rather than *violating* justice, in counterfeiting money they are *contributing* to the positive welfare of the country.

Burroughs examines the money himself and finds that he "could discover no difference" between the counterfeit and real money (84). Burroughs sets out to distribute the money, with little thought to danger, "for the money is executed so well, as to prevent

any man from distinguishing it from standard silver; at least, it looks as well to me as any money” (86-87). In these passages, Burroughs presents his innocence and his agreement with the counterfeiters at the same time—while the writer Burroughs regrets the decision to pass the counterfeit money (perhaps because he was caught), the character of Burroughs agrees that if it is passable enough then there is no wrong in passing the fake for the real. As I will show later in this chapter, Franklin argues for the same ideal of “passing” and the “real.”

Daniel E. Williams writes, “If the representation was true enough to compel acceptance, then the counterfeit became genuine. And Burroughs, aside from his apparent noble motives and ethical hesitations, admitted that he was convinced the counterfeit would pass as real. For him, what people believed to be true became true” (107). In the same way, Burroughs argues that he did no harm in posing as a minister—he offered the same sermons as a minister, eventually dressed like a minister, and performed duties like a minister. For the middle-class Burroughs, anyone or anything that can “pass” for true is true, recognized as such by the belief of the people who agree that the object or person is “real.” Burroughs, unlike Shaw or Franklin, had the advantage of being born and educated into a portion of society that taught him the codes and nuanced mannerisms he needed to know to perform any imitation. Franklin gained this same knowledge, mostly through being highly literate, to counterfeit and successfully perform these rules.

For Franklin, part of his attempt to achieve success was to pretend success before actualizing it. As Diana Taylor argues, “theatricality strives for efficaciousness, not authenticity” (13). Part of Franklin’s success was his ability to perform the idea and

image of success even before actually achieving it—Franklin achieved success by acting on the idea that he had already achieved it and that he wasn't in need of help. By remaining seemingly independent, other Philadelphian businessmen would not expect to be asked for favors from Franklin, making him more of a peer than an underling. In one instance, Franklin relates:

I began now gradually to pay off the debt I was under for the printing house. In order to secure my credit and character as a tradesman, I took care not only to be in *reality* industrious and frugal, but to avoid all *appearances* of the contrary. I dressed plain and was seen at no places of idle diversion. I never went out a fishing or shooting; a book, indeed, sometimes debauched me from my work, but that was seldom, snug, and gave no scandal; and to show that I was not above my business, I sometimes brought home the paper I purchased at the stores, thro' the streets on a wheelbarrow. (78)

Thus, having shown his industry, or, in Franklin's words, been "esteemed an industrious, thriving, young man, and pay duly for what I bought" Franklin says that the town's merchants, mostly Quakers, "solicited my custom; others proposed supplying me with books, and I went on swimmingly" (78). As Sayre remarks, "Note the props: the plain dress, the debauching book, the wheelbarrow! Being industrious was for Franklin a game, a cheerfully entered role. Having noticed that the burghers of Philadelphia [. . .] paid attention to industry and frugality, Franklin quietly went about attracting their attention" (*The Examined Self* 25). Franklin here embraces the appearance of one who is a hard and steady worker—no doubt Franklin was a hard and steady worker, but it is the appearance of such that is emphasized by Franklin here.

The appearance of humility quickly follows this appearance of hard work. Franklin-the-elder adds to this image of his youthful self that he was unable to resist all diversions: "that hard-to-be-governed passion of my youth had hurried me frequently

into intrigues with low women that fell my way, which were attended with some expense and great inconvenience, besides a continual risk to my health by a distemper, which of all things I dreaded, tho' by great luck I escaped it" (80). The autobiographer Franklin recognizes that perfection is not persuasive, and adds that his failings made him realize how lucky he was to stay in good health and in good business, despite these failings. In offering humility, Franklin shies *away* from the idea of perfection *towards* the idea that small mistakes do happen, but that only luck keeps one from the unlucky consequences. The picaro travels steadily on and conquers despite a little waywardness coming through from Franklin's hidden personailty.

Michael Zuckerman argues that Franklin "donned guises and doffed them, as circumstances demanded. He put manners on and took them off, according to the situation in which he found himself, and he did the same with morals as he did with manners" (447). These guises are part of his performance of both a poor working class man and a man of sheer frugality and hard-work. The important message in Franklin's *Autobiography* is not about the frugality and hard-work, but the performance of these virtues. For those who wish to rise, Franklin seems to argue, the performance must be believable. The counterfeit, to return to Burroughs, must pass for the real silver.

Franklin performs, even encourages performing class ideals, but buries the idea of the individual self beneath the good of a possible national self. As Patterson notes, "An industrious and talented man like Ben Franklin could rise socially because he knew the appropriate parts to play, but he required the hierarchy in order to imbue the strata of society with the representative moral values marking one's moral decline or progress"

(14). His part in the aftermath of the Revolutionary War was to reestablish a comfort zone in order to reestablish trade and normal community relations. In part, Franklin does this by adding to the propaganda machine of earlier settlement times—the idea is that in this new land one can rise from lower classes, unlike in England; however, throughout the *Autobiography* Franklin is also very carefully establishing a “how-to” of maintaining the new American hierarchy.

While Franklin’s earlier days are given as a picaresque journey of gaffes, buns, and humorous moments of truth, the transition to the statesman days leaves off the humor of Franklin and becomes more about the subsumation of the self to the national good. Franklin’s earlier days involved the masking of one’s true self to get ahead for oneself; the latter part of the text asks the individual to use that skill for the greater good of national advancement. Together, the anecdotes serve to ask the reader to forgoe the individual self for the collective.

Franklin’s *Autobiography* opens with what has become part of a recognized trope about the American Dream:

From the poverty and obscurity in which I was born and in which I passed my earliest years, I have raised myself to a state of affluence and some degree of celebrity in the world. As constant good fortune has accompanied me even to an advanced period in my life, my posterity will be perhaps be desirous of learning the means, which I employed, and which, thanks to Providence, so well succeeded with me. They may also deem them fit to be imitated, should any of them find themselves in similar circumstances. (16)

The phrase “I have raised myself” reflects Franklin’s own belief in his self-madness—an image that haunts the poor of the United States, even today. However, there are phrases which are just as important in Franklin’s depiction of his rise to fame: “good fortune,”

“means, which I employed,” and “thanks to Providence.” It is these three phrases, along with anecdotes of Franklin’s own life strewn throughout the *Autobiography*, that actually belie Franklin’s bootstrap method of coming out of poverty. Franklin’s rise was not self-made; rather, he was part of a social world that was bound to help him. In attributing his rise to following a certain set of rules, Franklin is asking those who wish to be like him to follow those guidelines, too. But, what Franklin does not add to this speech, is that he performed his way success through a flexibility of character but hid that flexibility behind a mask of jolly good humor and servitude.

Franklin’s character behind the mask, or picaresque figure, are what Henri Bergson would call “elastic.” In his seminal text on humor, Bergson argues that “The laughable element [. . .] consists of a certain mechanical *inelasticity*, just where one would expect to find the wide-awake adaptability and the living pliability of a human being” (10). Franklin is, as aforementioned, elastic in his adaptability to class performance—the humor is in the inelasticity implied in the performance of others who attempt to follow the rigid picaro. Colleen Terrell argues that “Franklin’s detailed account of his labors in the art of virtue suggests that the construction of the self presents as a great technical challenge, demands as great a skill, as the manufacture of a time-piece. And indeed, the two crafts had identical goals: the regulation of behavior” (Terrell 116). Further, Terrell finds, “where the *Autobiography* encodes an iterable process, circulating a representative pattern for the further reproduction of citizens in the Franklinian mold, the text itself becomes a machine for the manufacture of virtue” (Terrell 132). Thus, Franklin’s elasticity becomes mechanized and creates inelasticity for

others—his elastic art of performance creates an inelastic mold that sets the hierarchical model in stone.

Franklin's discussion of moral perfection is recognized as both serious and humorous—no one could possibly expect to achieve moral virtue by a chart. As Franklin humorously points out “While my attention was taken up and care employed in guarding against one fault, I was often surprised by another” (93). Here, Franklin makes fun of his own step-by-step process of success, as well as mocking those who attempt to attain moral virtue. The humor shows itself in Franklin's assessment of his project:

In reality, there is perhaps no one of our natural passions so hard to subdue as *pride*; disguise it, struggle with it, beat it down, stifle it, mortify it as much as one pleases, it is still alive and will every now and then peep out and show itself. You will see it perhaps often in this history. For even if I could conceive that I had completely overcome it, I should probably be proud of my humility. (104)

The pliability of the human figure is a virtue Franklin can get behind—one of the best physical examples of this pliability is in the episode he relates regarding his diet.

Franklin writes that he did not eat meat for quite a while: “the taking of fish as a kind of unprovoked murder, since none of them [the cod] had or ever could do us any injury that might justify this massacre” (48). Franklin writes that while he had been a “great lover of fish” he had refused to eat them on the above grounds. However, after being becalmed on a ship off shore, Franklin observed that “when the fish were opened [he] saw smaller fish taken out of their stomachs” (48), thus he said to them, and himself ““if you eat one another, I don't see why we mayn't eat' them” (48-49). Franklin then happily eats the fish, writing “So convenient a thing it is to be a *reasonable creature*,

since it enables one to find or make a reason for everything one has a mind to do” (49). Franklin is eminently flexible, in his eating habits and his character.

Franklin’s autobiography explains his performance, exposes the mechanicalness of it, and sets up those who follow Franklin’s model to be inelastic, or humorous based on Bergson’s model. Franklin performed class in a way that creates an understanding of performance and ideals of authority, bringing Franklin closer to the higher realms of authority and class, all the while undermining the performance of those who haven’t the authority to back themselves up. Franklin’s authorial self grants this authority to his younger self.

As Mark R. Patterson argues in *Authority, Autonomy, and Representation in American Literature, 1776-1865*,

What Franklin narrates is a life full of encounters with various forms of authority; what he assumes as narrator of that life is his own authority. In doing so, he takes on the central issues of this [Revolutionary War] period: the nature and location of authority and how that authority was to be represented. (5)

Authority in this case has much to do with autonomy, a self-hood and idea of individualism, that enveloped ideas of governmental autonomy and representation fostered by the Enlightenment. As Sayre argues, “Autobiography is an examination of the self as both a sovereign integrity and a member of society. In fact, the self is at all times both these things, and autobiography is an endless stream of demonstrations of the inseparability” (*The Examined Self* 6). In this chapter, authority reflects the idea of an individual’s autonomous being—one no longer at the mercy of a physical master or higher authority. John Robert Shaw has only the authority to give his experiences; he is otherwise indebted to outside masters for his livelihood and good reputation. He remains

self-deprecating throughout his *Autobiography* because he has little idea of moving outside of his realm of knowledge and social standing.

Benjamin Franklin's authority in his *Autobiography* is the authority he has invested in himself; his authorhood and his status at the time of the writing of the *Autobiography* invests his past self with the authority to represent something bigger. The writer-self authorizes the past-self to challenge class hierarchy through performance—a nice manipulation of the time-space continuum. Franklin's authority comes from an agreed upon set of rules understood among middling class people and valued in leaders and merchants, such as himself.

In this part of my argument, I want to show that Franklin's authority was well-placed from the beginning of his life—he had the tools to perform properly from his youth. While Franklin's family was by no means part of the wealthy, or even middling merchant class, groups in Massachusetts, they were highly literate. This literacy gave each Franklin child a chance beyond that of their peers. As well, Franklin's family were tradesmen with the opportunity to place the children in valuable apprenticeship positions. Historically, Franklin's family had thirty acres of freehold land in England (17), passed down the family, as well as a smithy business (18). One uncle was a scrivener, indicating that the family was literate for a number of generations. Literacy is and was, of course, an enormous step forward for any working class family, then and now. Franklin's insistence that he was brought up in a life of poverty and obscurity is somewhat marred by the fact of his family's literacy—other young men in his position, but in illiterate

families, such as Shaw's, would have a more difficult time getting ahead than Franklin did.

For instance, Franklin wrote a pamphlet about paper currency that was "well received by the common people in general; but the rich men disliked it, for it increased and strengthened the clamour for more money; and they happening to have no writers among them that were able to answer it, their opposition slackened, and the point was carried by a majority in the House" (77). As a result of his ability to write persuasively, Franklin was thus rewarded with the "profitable job" of "printing the money" (77). This, Franklin writes, "was another advantage gained by my being able to write" (77). Further, much like Burroughs was convinced by Lysander that counterfeit coin has the value of real coin as long as all parties agree to its value, Franklin is convinced, and convinces others, that paper currency has the same value as real coin. Performance for both Burroughs and Franklin requires persuasion and argumentation.

As Jennifer Jordan Baker has found in her studies of Franklin's work "Despite the common characterization of Franklin as a self-proclaimed self-made man, he repeatedly acknowledges that his initial success could not have been possible if financial backers and customers had not been willing to invest in him" (Baker 281). Even a trip to London, a trip to which Franklin admits was not exactly part of his overall plan, was not a loss for Franklin: "I had improved my knowledge, however, though I had by no means improved my fortune. But I had made some very ingenious acquaintance, whose conversation was of great advantage to me, and I had read considerably" (63). Baker argues that the London trip, although difficult, "allowed [Franklin] to acquire instead a different sort of

capital, namely advantageous conversation and personal connections” (Baker 281). Even his connections to Governor Keith, while not monetarily fruitful, provided Franklin with experiences that Franklin “considered a great honor, more particularly as he conversed with me in the most affable, familiar, and friendly manner imaginable” (43). Franklin’s connections to Keith led him to England, which provided him with even more connections, increasing his network of people and, additionally, increasing his own sphere of influence. Franklin was not alone in this method of meeting people and making friends—in fact, the old boy network was in full swing for this prodigal son.

For instance, Franklin’s father was well-respected during his lifetime. According to the Franklin, Josiah “was ingenious, could draw prettily, was skilled a little in music [. . .] He had some knowledge of mechanics, too, and on occasion was very handy with other tradesmen’s tools” (24). Beyond his physical skills, Josiah’s “great excellence was a sound understanding and a solid judgment in prudential matters, both in private and public affairs” (24). He wasn’t a statesman, as Franklin himself became, but was “frequently visited by leading men who consulted him for his opinion in affairs of the town or church he belonged to, and who showed a good deal of respect for his judgment and advice” (24). Much like Franklin himself, Josiah was “also much consulted by private persons about their affairs when any difficulty occurred, and frequently chose an arbitrator between contending parties” (24). Franklin was from a well-connected family.

Franklin was a part of a growing number of middling class young men working toward greater achievements through societies and informal groups of like-minded men. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, social and religious societies were

created in England, in part, argues Margaret R. Hunt, because of a “groundswell of discontent on the part of young middling men at the inadequate job their families were doing to prepare them for the world” (105). Hunt finds that the

Societies for the Reformation of Manners were, in a sense, a coming of age. Like the Religious Societies, they helped redefine the urban moral inheritance by subtly altering the ways ethical and behavioral norms were enforced. Reared to respect order, accuracy, and planning, their members were men to whom moral nonconformity represented a breakdown of the codes that kept a precarious system going. (Hunt 121)

Much like England’s Religious societies and the Societies for the Reformation of Manners, Franklin’s Junto assured Franklin’s place in the growing middle class society of colonial America.

The Junto, whom Franklin calls a group of his “ingenious acquaintance” (71) established connections of, in the beginning, non-influential merchants, apprentices, and shopkeepers, with one or two young gentlemen “of fortune” (72). Franklin “required every that every member in his turn should produce one or more queries on any point of morals, politics, or natural philosophy, to be discussed by the company” (72). In gathering in this way, Franklin found that “we acquired better habits of conversation” through advanced discussion and learning (73). As the societies of middling men “took great care whom they inducted into their fellowship” (Hunt 105), so did Franklin’s Junto. Like the English societies for reformation, the Junto required a level of trust and confidence that meant that each member could rely on his friends’ discretion. This type of trust created groups with strong bonds, bonds that disagreement and discussion only furthered. Each member could form his own group, however, but each group reflected the ideas of the central Junto organization. As Hunt argues, “The membership of the

Religious Societies may not always have achieved virtue, but they all knew precisely what it was, and, at least within their own microcosm, what the penalties were for transgressing its bounds” (108). The Junto, thus, in its vast octopus of an organization, repeated (performed) the ideals of the central society so that while the organization only enforced its own rules in its own microcosm, that microcosm was vast and, eventually, powerful. Franklin’s organization represents the manufacture of virtue that he later wrote into his *Autobiography*—Franklin created a structure in which his own performance could be rewarded.

Franklin considered these forms of imitation long before establishing the Junto, though. His first writings were transcripts of the *Spectator*—a series of mechanical reproductions that helped Franklin learn the style of more learned men. After copying and recopying different articles from the *Spectator*, Franklin found that “by comparing my work afterwards with the original, I discovered many faults and corrected them” (29). This act of copying and correcting is as, Jennifer T. Kennedy argues, “an act of practiced forgetfulness” (221). Kennedy writes that Franklin trained “his memory to remember the words of the *Spectator* as if they were his own, to make himself, in short, a spectator of his own mind” (221). Franklin writes of his experiment that he sometimes “had the pleasure of fancying that in certain particulars of small import I had been lucky enough to improve the method or the language, and this encouraged me to think that I might possibly in time come to be a tolerable English writer, of which I was extremely ambitious” (29). This exercise is, as Kennedy says, “intentional mortification” of one’s own memory (221). Part of Franklin’s performance is the death of his own memory. In

creating a new memory, Franklin subsumes his old self beneath the mask of an act of class pretence—that of skilled writing for an audience.

Later, Franklin argues that “those who aim at perfect writing by imitating the engraved copies, tho’ they never reach the wished-for excellence of those copies, their hand is mended by the endeavor and is tolerable while it continues fair and legible” (101), but any person who tries this is already educated and of Franklin’s class. As I have already discussed, writing requires an education, and the writing that Franklin is arguing for—through reading and copying—requires both the physical tools for the attempt as well as the leisure time to pursue such an endeavor. Further, in encouraging this type of imitation and forgetfulness, Franklin is also encouraging the act of subsuming the self for the sake of class performance. In writing of the act of performance, Franklin both undermines the idea of a rigid, natural class structure, and supports it by encouraging people to perform to the demands of that structure.

Franklin, however, in giving advice, tends to speak to his audience rather than of himself. While he might offer an anecdote about himself to illustrate his point, the main point is the advice to his audience. In one instance, Franklin writes,

if you desire instruction and improvement from the knowledge of others, you should not at the same time express yourself as firmly fixed in your present opinions; modest and sensible men, who do not love disputation, will probably leave you undisturbed in the possession of your error. In adopting such a manner you can seldom expect to please your hearers, or to persuade those whose concurrence you desire. (31)

In giving this advice, Franklin is offering an argument for the best methods of persuasion, with the main advice being not to persuade. In doing this, Franklin is also asking his readers to figure out a way to suppress their individual desires for the greater good of a

more subtle method of persuasion: erase individual desire and beliefs in front of others in order to be more able to learn from others. The individual is gone in order to pursue a later, greater, authority. The individual becomes the humorous automaton. This type of advice-giving stretched beyond Franklin's *Autobiography*. Franklin writes that his Almanac was "proper vehicle for conveying instruction among the common people, who bought scarce any other books" (107).

Even in success, Franklin donned the mask necessary to be even more successful. The picaresque mask he dons at the beginning of his life suits him well when he needs to demonstrate his rigid moral virtues to his fellow Philadelphians. John Woolman, who has written a well-known spiritual autobiography of his struggles with sin and his desire to work on being a good Quaker, offers a number of examples of what it means to be a good Friend—examples that are mirrored in Franklin's own actions during his tenure in Philadelphia. For instance, just as Franklin attempts to appear a good citizen with a Christian-like work ethic, John Woolman writes that, "It had been my general practice to buy and sell things really useful. Things that served chiefly to please the vain mind in people I was not easy to trade in, seldom did it, and whenever I did I found it weaken me as a Christian" (626). Franklin's idea of usefulness to his neighbors comes more to the foreground in his discussions of his inventions. In terms of the Franklin stove, and other inventions from which he did not profit, Franklin writes that he did not apply for patents "as having no desire of profiting by patents myself" (128). As Franklin remarks, "The use of these fireplaces in very many houses both of this and the neighboring colonies, has been and is a great saving of wood to the inhabitants" (128).

Woolman also found that “the increase in business became my burden, for though my natural inclination was toward merchandise, yet I believed Truth required me to live more free from outward cumpers and there was now a strife in my mind between the two; and in exercise my prayers were put up to the Lord, who graciously heard me and gave me a heart resigned to His holy will. Then I lessened my outward business [.]” (Woolman 626). Like Woolman, Franklin eventually “disengaged” himself from “private business,” writing that “I flattered myself that, by the sufficient tho’ moderate fortune I had acquired, I had secured leisure during the rest of my life for philosophical studies and amusements” (130). In a city that valued its Quaker heritage, indeed, that was still ruled primarily by Quakers, Franklin found the resources to imitate those leaders in order to create an image of those rulers within himself—and for them. That Quaker heritage served Franklin well overseas, too.

While in England, negotiating for a pre-Revolutionary War peace that never happened, “Franklin saw himself as what modern scholars would recognize as a cultural broker, a person with the responsibility for diffusing knowledge about the culture from which he came in the colonies among his host culture in metropolitan Britain” (Greene, “Pride, Prejudice, and Jealousy” 120). As Michael Zuckerman notes, too, Franklin

is conventionally taken for an avatar of American individualism, he ultimately individuated himself very little and revealed himself still less. He bent his being to accommodate the claims of others more than to assert himself. His essential American-ness inhered in his mastery of the fronts and facades that in profound ways *are* American culture, not in his quest for self in the sense of an authenticity and integrity that have never held any notable number of Americans. (448)

Thus, Franklin’s *Autobiography*, while giving the impression of individuality and class fluidity, reveals itself to be nothing more than that, an impression. The *Autobiography* is,

instead, about the suppression of the individual and the lack of class fluidity available to those without Franklin's performative skills. It offers how-to type advice, but this advice also imposes a workman-like rigidity that cannot successfully imitate the fluidity of Franklin's performance. As Patterson argues, "Franklin is hardly revolutionary; he accepts the conventions, the roles of society, for they provide him with the costumes and dialogue by which he represents himself as the model American" (11). And Franklin's performance, as it is, depends upon the hierarchical structure in order to be invested in outwitting it and being a part of it.

Unlike Franklin, John Robert Shaw wrote his autobiography in order to earn a little extra money—after his fifth on-the-job explosion as a well-digger Shaw was no longer fit enough for manual labor. Although I will argue that Shaw is arguing from a working-class position, the written document itself, although poorly written, suggests that Shaw was educated enough to write an autobiography. However, Shaw's autobiography also gives enough detail to know that Shaw's education was a street education without the connections and middling class mores ingrained from youth, as Franklin's life was. Like Franklin, John Robert Shaw is a picaresque character following traditional tropes in order to tell his tale; also like Franklin, Shaw dons a mask in order to tell his story. Shaw places the comic mask on himself—a self made more foolish, perhaps, in order to jolly readers into buying his book. Shaw's performance reveals the pitfalls—and in Shaw's case, the pratfalls, of imitating gentry: this picaresque hero manages to drink, wed a number of times, avoid certain weddings, earn money, injure himself, and become renowned for his accidents on the job.

Shaw is an even match for Franklin in gesturing toward being a simple trickster.

In one incident, Shaw relates that,

One day going to see the curiosities of Mr. Whitman's brewery, he and some more gentlemen happened to be there, when the conversation turned to the size of the kettles. He observed that one of them contained 500 gallons. I swore he was a liar, for which he said I should give him gentlemanly satisfaction; accordingly I started off for my sword, but totally forgot ever to return. (118)

In this episode, Shaw creates a scenario in which he is portrayed as a bit of a scoundrel and a naïve fool. Shaw calls a man a liar, is challenged to a duel, and runs away from the challenge. By running away, Shaw contradicts the hero-type he has, up to this point in the text, especially in his characterizations of Revolutionary War struggles and heroics, fostered for himself. By calling the man a liar, which he certainly would have been, Shaw makes a brave gesture; by running away, he counters that gesture. His comic persona, the one who "totally forgets" to return to the site of a duel, shows that the challenge itself was a farce—that Whitman was the foolish man in taking offense at Shaw's contradiction of his statement about the 500 gallon kettle. Shaw performs his role perfectly here—while maintaining his picaresque figure, Shaw is able to be a rogue and an anti-hero at the same time. It is this ability to perform that helps Shaw survive in a tough world. However, this performance is about caricature. Unlike Franklin, Shaw knows that there are certain things that the middle class does: frolics, duels, hunting for sport, but he doesn't know how to perform them for his own advancement. Unlike Franklin, Shaw's flexibility is only effective in terms of advancement within his own sphere of influence.

One thread that continues throughout Shaw's tale is the thread of Shaw's elasticity on the job. Much like Wile E. Coyote², Shaw seems to bounce back after every explosion—that is, until the very end of his career. Shaw writes, in one episode,

The blast went off with about three-quarters of a pound of powder in my hand, which consequently left me for dead in the bottom of the well, but shortly recovering and the neighbors assembling who hauled me up, and after getting bled and drinking a little spirits and water, felt tolerably well recovered, and in the course of eight days after, went to work; though feeling rather disagreeable, being both burnt and lame; however, I soon accomplished the well and for which I was well paid. (136)

Here, Shaw even includes a little pun to laugh off what would be a tragedy to anyone. In the end, writes Shaw, he “lost no less than one eye, four fingers, one thumb and seven toes” (152). Shaw demonstrates the physical elasticity that Franklin performs conversationally. While Franklin had to work through difficult jobs in his youth, Shaw had to continue in his manual, menial, labor, much to the detriment of his physical health. Franklin's elasticity bought him higher social power; Shaw's flexibility only gave him opportunities to feed his family. What Franklin and Shaw *do* have in common is in their earliest starts in new lands: both were runaways looking for better opportunities.

Franklin runs away from being his brother's apprentice—an apprenticeship Franklin says is filled with “harsh and tyrannical treatment” (33) that eventually impressed him “with that aversion to arbitrary power that has stuck to me through my whole life” (33)—and finds that after running away from his apprenticeship with his brother, and finding refuge in “a poor inn” [. . .] “I made so miserable a figure, too, that I found by the questions asked me I was suspected to be some runaway servant, and in danger of being taken up on that suspicion” (37). Franklin returns home after having

accomplished a little something in the way of earning cash and having new clothes. As Jay Fliegelman remarks, “The ultimate importance of Franklin’s *Autobiography* lies in the fact that it is the optimistic report of a prodigal son [.]” (111). He returns to Philadelphia to continue his pursuit of independence, but with the blessings of his parents. Franklin runs from harsh conditions, but returns to his family having made some success for himself.

Shaw’s labors began at home, where he worked for his father; he first runs away to avoid becoming a weaver like his father: “Tom and Jack immediately proposed that we should all go and enlist for soldiers, get clear of work, and be gentlemen at once” (10). In imitation of the younger sons of gentry and middle-class sons unable to find other work, Shaw joins the ranks of the military in order to gain some ideal of respectability. Shaw continues, “So we all concluded to go and enlist the first opportunity that offered. And lest this should come to my father’s ears and I should thus be prevented from accomplishing my design, I determined to lose no time” (10). Shaw recognized his mistake in enlisting after suffering some abuse and “the keeping of bad company” which Shaw recognized as “a growing evil, by which my situation was rendered so unpleasant that I began to entertain serious thoughts of returning home” (10) and thus he returned to his father “like the repenting prodigal, and lived with him contentedly for some time” (11).

Repentant or not, Shaw ran away from home again. Shaw reenlists for the army: “But as old habits are hard to be relinquished, I again relapsed into my former irregularitie and grew weary of labor” (11). Finding the life of a soldier more difficult

than he thought, even after his experience the first time, Shaw was discontented again, “At first I thought of returning home again, but the dread of paternal chastisement and the ridicule of my acquaintances, to which I must be exposed in case I came back the second time, banished all thoughts of domestic concerns and firmly fixed my resolution of enlisting as a king’s soldier” (11). In the end, after being a soldier in both the British and American armies, Shaw does not return home, but finds a good life, for a while, in the army: “To tell the truth, I was very easy about it, for I loved the life of a soldier. The bounty indeed was so small that it could not be sufficient inducement to any man to enlist who was not otherwise inclined to it; for we had but two dollars in advance and one complete suit of clothes” (87). Shaw seems to have found a hard life that he enjoyed, despite his poverty.

In fact, in one humorous moment, Shaw relates the hilarity involved with some of the privations he faced under the rigors of fighting the colonial army. At one point, Shaw writes, he and a few of his fellow, at this time, British, soldiers leave camp in search of food. They searched until they came upon “a fine, open plantation, and an elegant framed house belonging to a major Bell of the American army” (40-41). When Shaw and his friends asked for flour and food of the lady of the house, she readily gave it to them. Shaw then writes of a conversation he had with the woman:

While we were partaking of this delicious repast, for us it was truly delicious, a conversation arose. Says the old lady, ‘Now if you will go with what you have gotten, and join our boys, I will give you my two daughters, and a complete suit of clothes apiece.’ ‘But,’ we argued, ‘the bad consequences of desertion, that is death by the law, and that even if we could bring ourselves to act so dishonorable a part as to desert our colours, yet death by shooting or hanging was a thing not much to be desired.’(41)

Shaw then adds as an aside, “But bye the bye, I must inform the reader that for my part, if I could have entertained the smallest hopes of succeeding in gaining the affections of either of the young ladies, so lovely were they to my eyes, I would have cheerfully hazarded my life and taken the old lady at her word; for I thought them the most beautiful creatures my eyes ever beheld” (41). After leaving the lady’s house, Shaw and his cohorts are captured by the colonial army (who were alerted by the lady). Shaw’s running away from home puts him into a new world without any family connections at all. Rather than a real loyalty to the British army, or even, later, to the colonial army, being in the army is fun for Shaw. His real loyalty is to himself, because there is no one else to care for him if he does not.

The results of running away from family end differently for each character, reflecting the performance of each autobiography in giving an audience the picaresque mask: Franklin asserts his independence based on character and a willingness to work hard, and Shaw finds a poor, hard life in the army after foregoing the meager comforts of a weaver’s life in Britain. Even Shaw’s work experience in Philadelphia differs from Franklin’s own well-known account. This experience also reflects upon Shaw’s ability to imitate what he believes are middle and upper class actions without understanding the shifts in rules that happened over the course of the European development of North America. Rather than imitating the somberness of the Philadelphian Quakers, Shaw imitates the worst types of debaucheries attributed to the upper classes. In his experience in Philadelphia, Shaw spends his entire soldier’s pay on a “frolic” (84), which involved figuring out “the different price of liquors” and, as Shaw writes, “the next thing was to

make choice of company suitable to the occasion” (85). This first frolic was not his last in Philadelphia, however; Shaw worked for his “numerous frolics and irregularities while [he] remained in the city of Philadelphia” (85). Shaw says himself that “every penny I made by my work was immediately squandered away in the haunts of dissipation and vice” (86).

Shaw’s frolics are an imitation of the upper class corruptions related to a reading public in texts like *Moll Flanders* and *Pamela*. However, they are an imitation. And, because these images are of the rigid picaro hurtling into flagrant depravity, these scenes are quite funny. In one instance, Shaw relates that he enters an inn and “the landlady with a smiling and inviting countenance tak[es him] by the hand” and asks Shaw if the room she has chosen will “answer your purpose; for I understand you wish to have a frolic” (85). Shaw negotiates the price of the room, the different prices of the liquors, and the next thing as to make choice of company suitable for the occasion” (85). After this genteel conversation, Shaw proceeds to explain that “In such scenes of wild festivity, in the company of the most debauched characters, I continued until all my money was spent; and then to work I had to go” (85). Shaw offers an example of his debauched life, but this example does nothing more than offer an idea one of Shaw’s reasons for remaining poor: spending all of his money on frolics, alcohol, and women means that he has to return to the soldiery and well-digging in order to support himself and his (future) family.

Unlike Franklin’s Junto, John Robert Shaw finds another way of creating community and finding his way in the world—mostly by telling his story and critiquing

the government's method of treating its Revolutionary soldiers. Shaw relates that when he is at one of his sickest moments, after nearly freezing to death in a winter river accident and being paid off from the army, Shaw finds kindness in strangers. At his most despondent Shaw writes that, "Being in want of the common support of nature, and not being able to work, ashamed to beg, and dreading the consequence of stealing—in this wretched situation, I one day sat on a wharf, bewailing my sad destiny, when a lad stepped up to me [.]” (101). Shaw tells this lad his story, in short, that Shaw “being an old soldier, and discharged as unfit for service, with a recommendation to the board for a pension, where it seems nothing could be done, as no provision had been made for superannuated soldiers since the revolutionary war; which occasioned me to be destitute of support, except that which Providence threw in my way” (101). The young man takes Shaw to his master (he is an apprentice) and provides him with food and lodging until he could find further sustenance—which he finds is made for him in the way of a subscription (102). Shaw finds that the subscription is enough to help him live, and when it comes time for him to earn a living again, much later in life, he finds that a subscription, to publish his book, helps him to feed his family.

It is Shaw's ability to tell a story and persuade others to believe him that helps him succeed to feed, cloth, and house himself throughout his life. For instance, while he may have started in the Revolutionary War as a British soldier, he was able to convince the American government that his work as a soldier in the American army was worth a pension. His storytelling marks him as a man with conversation—much like Franklin, but without the national impact.

Soon after the above incident with the young boy and the subscription, Shaw writes that he “got the name of the gentleman beggar, particularly owing to my appearing as clean in my dress as my indigent circumstances would admit of. I always made a point to be unassuming and civil, which was the-cause of my being well treated wherever I came [.]” (104). In his abject poverty, Shaw understood that dirt and insolence would get him nowhere. He survives because he can adjust to his surroundings. Unlike Franklin, Shaw does not find himself in need of persuading larger governments to adopt the idea of paper money; rather, more practically, he finds himself in need of food, clothing, and shelter.

When Shaw is unable to stay out of debt, he offers thankfulness and gratitude toward those willing to help him. Circumstances outside of Shaw’s control led him into a debt he could not pay, “This with some other crosses began to make me very uneasy, but my distresses reaching the ears of captain Fowler, he immediately came to town and desired me to bring him an account of the different debts which I owed; accordingly I did, and he became responsible for them all” (142). As Billy G. Smith finds, “Only an extremely thin margin separated those who required assistance from those who were able independently to secure the necessities of life. Many early Americans consequently led lives of continued financial insecurity created by a myriad of factors [unemployment, health care, alcoholism, mental illness, low wage, high mortality, etc.]” (xviii). Here, Shaw manages to critique the American Dream in order to demonstrate that his poverty is not entirely his own fault, while remaining grateful to those who help him through the times when the poverty is related to his own clumsiness or drunkenness.

By reading Shaw and Franklin's text side-by-side, looking at the picaresque-type humor and self-characterization of each author, I see the differences in assumptions each makes about his own prospects and expectations. As Richard Bjornson finds,

- because picaresque heroes wander from place to place and traverse various social milieu, they encounter many different people, and by momentarily focusing upon those secondary characters, the author can depict a cross section of contemporary manners, morals, and idiosyncrasies. By satirizing or parodying these characters, an author may be distorted reality, but because distortions are produced according to recognizable principles, it is usually possible to identify the ideological and moral assumptions which mediate between perceived reality and the literary representation of it. (9)

In part, it is because of the picaresque characteristics of Franklin and Shaw that readers can see the underlying assumptions they expect readers to agree with in their texts.

For instance, the moral assumptions the author Franklin makes are based on, usually, one's ability to save money or to be qualified for some sort of business—the markings of a successful middle class man. In Franklin's descriptions of some of the men he works for, or with, one can see the inherent ideas Franklin held about businessmen. His picaresque self is compared to those around him by his authorial self. In his entrance into Philadelphian printing society, Franklin finds that, "These two printers I found poorly qualified for their business. Bradford had not been bred to it and was very illiterate; and Keimer, though something of a scholar, was a mere compositor, knowing nothing of presswork" (41). The underlying assumptions here are that a good printer, perhaps one like Franklin, would be both scholar, compositor and pressman—a literate printer with business skills and the physical ability to lay out a paper.

While working in business with Hugh Meredith, Franklin writes with the assumption that his audience should perhaps agree with him that money and a school

education cannot be everything one needs in order to run a successful business. For instance, Franklin sets up a printing business with his skills and Meredith's money, but Meredith is, by Franklin's measure, "no compositor, no pressman, and seldom sober" (74). Franklin says, "My friends lamented my connection with him, but I was to make the best of it" (74). Here, Franklin laments his business endeavor with someone like Meredith, although he frankly admits to needing Meredith's money and connections in order to have the business set up in the first place. A true businessmen, from these examples, should be educated in the wider world, literate, sober, physical, and knowledgeable. In a word, the only successful pressmen can be someone like Franklin himself.

Franklin also makes moral assumptions based on actions on insobriety and its connections to poverty—that is, alcohol and dalliances can keep one poor. Franklin comments that in London, "I was pretty diligent, but I spent with Ralph a good deal of my earnings in going to plays and other places of amusement" (55). Franklin says that, "In fact, by our expenses, I was constantly unable to pay my passage" (56). After his time there, Franklin adds, "I worked hard at my business, and spent but little upon myself except in seeing plays, and in books. My friend Ralph kept me poor" through borrowing (63) and entertainments. Here, Franklin expostulates the dangers of spending money on amusements and loaning money to obvious wastrels—like the early examples of his investment in appearance, here Franklin uses the examples of other people's mistakes to create the morally superior attitude he holds of sobriety and temperance in all things.

In one example, Franklin shows what happens to those who are unable to both *appear* somber and to be somber—at least somber enough. In contrast to Franklin's own attempt at his own printing business, Franklin writes that a potential rival in the printing business, David Harry, failed. Harry, says Franklin, “was very proud, dressed like a gentleman, lived expensively, took much diversion, and pleasure abroad, ran in debt, and neglected his business—upon which all business left him” (79). In taking their business away from Harry, Franklin seems to say, society has opted for supporting other certain characteristics, all of which are performed by Franklin.

Shaw does not make moral assumptions—he knows that his status in his world is not high enough to do more than offer a nod toward his own inability to remain sober and staid in his own work. Shaw, however, creates a picaresque hero who reflects the traits of one who is naively cunning and simplistically sorry—his virtues reflect the virtues condemned by Franklin. In fact, by performing as a picaresque, Shaw undermines the ideals set up by Franklin by showing that those ideals are based on the strawmen of the poor—the poor do not want to be poor, claims Shaw, but are reduced to circumstances beyond their control.

In the beginning of his autobiography, Shaw writes that upon his eventual enlistment, the captain of his company told Shaw and an accompanying Sergeant to “buy such necessities as you think he will stand in need of to make him appear like a gentleman” (12-13). Shaw enlisted in order to be a gentleman, but the captain's statement proves from the beginning that that impression is merely a façade—Shaw is to only have enough money to make him “appear” as a gentleman, and is not given the

resources to “become” a gentleman beyond those clothes. Again, Shaw has on the outside the trappings of an advancing working class man, but is still working within the limitations of his knowledge regarding the rules for a real advancement on the social ladder. His ability to imitate helps him to survive—but only to survive in continued poverty.

Shaw shows his wiliness, a trait of the picaro and the trickster, in a variety of scenes in his text, including his loyalty to himself rather than any nation, and his ability to bounce back from the hardest of physical labors. While Shaw knows that he is not the cleverest person in his sphere of friends and neighbors, he also knows that experience has taught him well. Experience, not the education he may have gotten in England while a small boy, have taught him street smarts that one needs to survive in a transitional government and with frontier law.

After escaping as a prisoner of war and working off and on for a number of men in the country, Shaw decides to join the colonial army—which was against the law while the colony was still technically under British rule. Shaw gives the recruiter a story, and the captain, used to such stories, tells him: “‘Well, Shaw,’ said the sergeant, ‘you have a fine story truly, and I hope you will stick to it; for you must know that a liar has need of a good memory. So look sharp or else you will be caught’” (56). There is no pretense here—the captain knows that Shaw was a prisoner of war and is, technically, a British deserter. All the captain asks is that Shaw sticks to his story and to remember to stick to the performance he presented to the captain.

After his recruitment, Shaw is given “bounty money,” following which “my new companions used all the means in their power to jockey me out of my money, but ‘it is not easy to catch old birds with chaff.’ I was not so raw a soldier as they ignorantly supposed nor so easily imposed on as they imagined; for I deposited my money with the officer, and drew as I stood in need” (57). Shaw does stick to his story about being a raw recruit for the colonial army, but that means his army comrades are ready to take him for a naïve recruit—a position that would leave Shaw vulnerable to losing his money, if Shaw were in fact the raw soldier his compatriots took him to be. Shaw performs well, but not so well that he loses the one reason he joined the army: money.

Given these anecdotes, it is no surprise that Shaw is ready to count himself among the brighter folks that he meets along his path. For instance, Shaw refuses to take advantage of those who suffer more than he does. Shaw relates an incident in which “a simple rustic” is conned into joining the army by a recruiting sergeant (64). Shaw writes that

I have enlisted many a man, but I always despised the dishonest methods practiced by some of trepanning a man when he is intoxicated, and enlisting him by slipping a piece of money into his hand or into his pocket or into his boots and then swearing he is enlisted fairly. If the devil does not get such recruiting officers, and all who follow such diabolical practices, I will give up that there is no occasion for a devil at all. (64)

Shaw is willing to perform for his cash, but he is not willing to help con men take lesser able fellows. He may work to fool others, but only those who have enough to spare.

While Shaw may be a trickster of a sort, he is unwilling to trick those not smart enough to be a proper foe. He is flexible enough to survive, but exhibits a morality that refutes the

idea that he was ever a dishonest man, despite his desperation, drunkenness, and foolishness.

Shaw's physical flexibility, beyond his on-the-job injuries and recoveries, is on par with the ridiculousness portrayed by Franklin in regards to his fish diet. Shaw relates scenes meant to lull the reader into understanding him as the fool he continually sets himself up to be. On one of his jobs, Shaw writes about his general ineptness, without actually calling himself inept, of course. In attempting to cut down a tree for wood, Shaw tangles up one tree with another. In an effort to untangle the trees, Shaw climbs one tree and proceeds to chop the tangled branches; the tree falls, taking Shaw with it: "I necessarily came down with the falling tree; and by the friction against the rough bark of the standing tree, I got my body as well shaved as the best barber in the world could have done it" (82). Further, once the tree is down, Shaw begins cutting branches: "I proceeded to trimming the branches of the tree, which in its fall had bent down some pretty stiff saplings, and having inconsiderately cut off the top of one of them, which I mistook for a branch of the tree, it rebounded with force and struck me so violently on the mouth that it laid me sprawling" (82). Shaw then writes, "I rolled over and over and over, until I got on my posteriors, where I sat for a little while like a baboon, looking around me, to observe if there was any person beholding me in that awkward position" (82). Shaw here is performing like a monkey—a circus act expected of one who is unable to fend for himself. Undeniably, though, Shaw's ability to create a picaresque hero out of an ordinary man belies that foolishness. In the end, the picaro is the persona that reaches out of the text and performs for an audience. The rigidity and foolishness of the picaro is

a tool for Franklin and Shaw. Their pliability enacts the mask for their own purposes, leaving humor in their wake and survival—for Franklin in a class structure and Shaw a literal state—as part of their futures.

Franklin and Shaw exhibit a flexibility that helps each to survive, but for Franklin that flexibility remains behind a picaresque mask of obsequiousness and tradition. Shaw uses his flexibility in the same way, although his survival is more tenuous and less assured than Franklin's is. This flexibility also makes them ringmasters of the humor in their lives. Both offer anecdotes that amuse the reader—for Shaw, this means that he may sell more copies of his book, or that those that may subscribe toward the publication of his book will be amused enough to do so. Franklin's humor is a continuation of his reputation as a man of wit and personability.

In Franklin's *Autobiography*, inflexibility is made fun of—those who try and follow Franklin's footsteps are a part of that inflexible humor. The picaresque humor in Franklin's text is a cover for his absorption into the middle and upper classes. Shaw's flexibility—the picaresque humor that peppers his text—is a part of his survival technique. Shaw has to be flexible because those who are inflexible in his world cannot, do not, survive. They play the picaro for their own purposes: Shaw to survive within the strictures imposed upon him as a working class man; Franklin, to bring himself up through the ranks and to prevent others from following him. Shaw and Franklin perform class through their flexibility, both surviving in their own way to create a place for themselves within their class structures.

Endnotes

¹ “My lost state appeared so apparent to me that I requested of Mr. Ellison to summon all the profligate youth and old drunkards in the town, in order to take warning by me and to avoid if possible the life I had pursued, and which brought me to this truly distressing situation. It being an unseasonable hour, Mr. Ellison declined calling them” (136-37). A few moments later, Shaw relates that he, Shaw, was “taken with my old complaint (the bottle fever)” (137), despite the flurry of his conversion.

² This is a Warner Brothers cartoon character which regularly appears on television with his nemesis “The Road Runner.”

CHAPTER V

EXPLOITING THE FRONTIER: THE PERFORMANCE OF CLASS IN DAVY
CROCKETT'S *A NARRATIVE OF THE LIFE OF DAVID CROCKETT OF THE STATE
OF TENNESSEE*

The “wild” frontier brought terror and danger to the minds of civilized society—with that, and the ever-growing presence of the “civilized” world, however, came the sublimity of terror and danger. What townspeople could not get in person, would not want to get in person, they could get on the stage and through written texts:

When patrons bought tickets to a frontier play, they were buying more than the words of the script. They were also purchasing the trick shooting, the animal stunts, and the scenic embellishments. They were acquiring proximity to actual participants in the westward movement and access to representations of historic personages and events, as well as to the sounds and the smells of galloping horses, exploding gun shot and blazing red fire. (Hall 21)

In buying the performance of the West—“acquiring proximity” and “access to representations”—patrons were granting validity to the act of performing the West. Romanticism of the West and theatrics went hand in hand. In the characterization of the West, romanticism was highlighted by the props: horses, flight, the Noble Savage, and inherently (naturally) good “hero” frontiersmen. Mark Twain's *Roughing It*, as excerpted in my introduction, parodies these ideas.

Part of the romanticism imbued in the theatrics of the West recalls the idea of the pastoral; this image of the “fully articulated pastoral idea of America” has been a part of

American arts and politics since it “[emerged at] the end of the eighteenth century” (Marx 73). The rough definition of pastoral that I am using here is Gordon Sayre’s summary of Leo Marx’s idea of the pastoral impulse: a desire, in the face of the growing power and complexity of organized society, to disengage from the dominant culture and to seek out the basis for a simpler, more satisfying mode of life in a realm closer to nature (Marx 9-10). My use of the word pastoral is arguably too simplistic in the larger scheme of developing ecocritical theory and scholarship. However, my aim is not to argue that this particular definition is the only one; I am attempting to invoke the idea most likely understood by those reading the promotional materials and texts written by land speculators and promoters—materials that compelled Edenic metaphors involving easy farming and animal husbandry—of a place where carrots and potatoes grow with no work and pumpkins the size of one’s home grow after an afternoon rainstorm. By leaving the unhealthy air of London, the virtual serfdom of tenant farming, and the politics of enclosure, settlers from England, Scotland, and Europe were sold on the idea of a return to a golden-age of self-sufficiency and independence. The tall-tales of nature fit into the tall-tales of the American frontiersman nicely, creating an American world of hearty, healthy, easy living. Away from the cities, the materials proposed, life was based on individual abilities and fecund American nature.

Manipulation of the idea of the pastoral occurred over a number of centuries and is still evolving. The evolution of the pastoral, and the fundamental changes in these ideas during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is important because it affected how Americans saw the frontier—and frontiersmen like David Crockett and Mike Fink. After

the Revolution, the idea of the pastoral created a United States history that jibed nicely with European ideas of civilization and American innocence, an idea that gave the United States the image of a longer history and legitimized its government and policies. In creating a romanticized, historical ideal of the frontier; the class realities absorbed by these ideals begin to take on the same rosy-hue. The poor (hungry) frontier settler is no longer ragged and pitiful—instead his poverty is valorized to represent simplicity. When class becomes romanticized alongside the romanticization of the frontier—as seen in the theatrical productions about the west and pastoral idealizings—class hierarchy re-legitimizes itself. In examining Davy Crockett’s humorous manipulation, in *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett of the State of Tennessee*, of a romantic Western ideal, I have found that he disrupts this ideal and the class hierarchy set up by the pastoral of the eighteenth-century because his text reveals the performance required of class to continue to legitimate itself.

As Leo Marx, among others, argues, the idea of the pastoral in eighteenth and nineteenth century America encompassed a contradiction between the ideas of “the primitive and the pastoral” (85). The confusion of pastoral primitivism and the pastoral is the confusion between “the assumptions about the inescapable influence of the natural environment upon the character and fortune of men [. For instance] we are led to expect that the Europeans, as a result of their removal to this virgin land, quickly will be redeemed” (80) and the idea that too much fertility makes men lazy and weak (cf Beverley, Byrd I, Jefferson, etc.). Marx finds that Robert Beverley, and other writers of that time, were “groping for the distinction between two garden metaphors: a wild,

primitive, or pre-lapsarian Eden in which he thought to have found the Indians, and a cultivated garden embracing values not unlike those represented by the classic Virgilian pasture” (87). How this affected the political scene post Revolution is that,

Instead of Arcadia, we have the wild yet potentially bucolic terrain-of the North American continent; instead of the shepherd, [we have] the independent, democratic husbandman with his plausible ‘rural scheme’; instead of the language of a decadent pastoral poetry, [we have] the exuberant idiom, verging toward the colloquial, of the farmer [...] (Marx 114)

The backlash from these Georgian ideals and a growing separate American pastoral idea reflects the confusion of these two thoughts—primitivism and the ideal pastoral shepherd—creating an opening in the traditional elite political world for men like Andrew Jackson and David Crockett. The wild land both redeems and primitivizes men in the blurring of the lines between these two ideals. Thus, rough but witty characters—with plenty of spunk and fire and not overly refined—becomes the ideal American male. Richard Hauck argues that

A comparison of Franklin and Crockett as autobiographers is both enlightening and entertaining. Both men were conscious of their image, developed it, expanded it, and to a considerable extent controlled it. Both loved joking and storytelling. Both led lives that we now view as exemplary of the American tradition of independence and self-reliance: they started out with no money, no name, and no connections and went on to create their own mark on history. (183)

The difference between them is time and, in some ways, place—Benjamin Franklin worked within a hierarchy dependent on a northern, citified, idea of class. Davy Crockett made his mark in a time that had begun to valorize those outside the typical Bostonian or Philadelphian man-of-the-world. When Crockett wrote his narrative, it was a moment when he who could exhibit the inherited natural laws of humankind, but not too much polish, exhibits the best of both the worlds of primitivism and the pastoral. Crockett’s rise

to fame required westward expansion as a political and cultural force, a national myth held into place by time, and a desire for a national identity. By embracing his poverty and lack of education, Crockett becomes part of the fabric of the growing nation. He manipulates the class ideals that were (are) a part of the pastoral dream. Through Crockett's tricksterish nature (cf John Seelye in "Cats, Coons, Crocketts, and Other Furry 'Critters'") and manipulation of his own image, via backwoods humor and dialect, he reveals the performed nature of the backwoodsmen in a developing nation and the pastoral ideal held to a high standard in the national imagination.

In one instance in Davy Crockett's *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett of the State of Tennessee*, Crockett writes that he could not find a wife, "so I cut out to hunt me one," the same language he uses for hunting bears in this particular narrative (49). After finding his wife, Crockett relates an incident in which he needed her to support his decisions, and she did: "This was just such talk as I wanted to hear, for a man's wife can hold him devilish uneasy, if she begins to scold, and fret, and perplex him, at a time when he has a full load for a rail-road car on his mind already" (145). The colloquialisms and naïveté in regards to his personal relationships shine throughout the text. In bringing his wife into his *Narrative*, Crockett solidly mires himself in the pastoral—no longer the wild single man in the woods, Crockett is domesticated, and on the right side of the fringe of civilization. He is still very much a part of the frontier, though, in that he compares his wife to bear and rail-roads, rather than making her out to be a delicate homebody. Crockett's family are survivors on the edges of the wilderness, but civilized enough to recognize the need for family structure. In only a few brief sentences, Crockett

establishes himself as a wit, through word usage and metaphor, and a plain-spoken man. In this chapter, I am going to focus on his humor in regards to his political campaigns because it is during these campaigns that Crockett literarily works through the process of performing the American ideal frontiersman.

As discussed in the Franklin and Shaw chapter, elasticity is a value to those wishing to give a believable performance; in order to adapt, conform, and re-adapt and re-conform, one has to be “elastic.” Laughter, in this chapter as well as with Benjamin Franklin, is used to indicate differences between those who are adaptable and the rigid performance of the laughable. Bergson argues that it is laughter’s function “to convert rigidity into plasticity, to readapt the individual to the whole, in short, to round off the corners wherever they are met with” (177). Laughter, in this chapter, is something Crockett uses to help smooth down his own rough edges. In his *Narrative*, Crockett still shows his roughness—the bear hunting, swearing, and short-temper all recall his roots in the rougher wilderness. Crockett needs to keep those to maintain his status as a frontiersman, but he must also show that he has become a part of the American ideal of the pastoral: pasture rather than dark woods, family man rather than lone-trapper, noble primitive rather than savage. In this *Narrative*, Crockett shows his edges, but smooths them down for his audience so that they can see the “wildman”, but, in the end, elect the frontiersman. Dan Kilgore argues that “Crockett employed his wit, imagination, and charm to establish his position as a great American frontier character in the mind of the public” (8). The figure Crockett is working from was an established literary—like Brother Jonathan—and political—like Daniel Boone and Andrew Jackson—character.

Unlike the very real David Crockett, Brother Jonathan was solely a literary figure. Brother Jonathan wore a “mask of foolishness” that helped him manipulate “most situations so that his humor functioned as a weapon and as protective coloring” (Morgan 23). Like the figures in my dissertation, “Jonathan” hid himself behind a mask—he performed his foolishness. Winifred Morgan shows that “Jonathan—like the Yankee Doodle of song and stage references—was a country boy who often appeared foolish but beneath whose seemingly bland and slow surface lay a threat of comeuppance” (19). Brother Jonathan, Morgan argues, came to his full fruition “during the politically, economically, and socially stormy period of Jacksonian era—roughly from 1828 to 1848” (13). Much like Jonathan, Crockett performed the rube to an audience who wanted a simple frontiersman—a romanticized westerner. By performing the ignorant frontiersman, Crockett put himself on the proper stage to engage his audience. Jennette Tandy argues that “The great body of Southern antebellum humor centered about the poor white” (Tandy 66). Crockett, as a Tennessee rip-roarer representing the squatters of East Tennessee, fit this image to the Eastern mindset. Tandy further argues that “Crockett is the earliest Southern humorist, so the tale of his adventures marks what was to be for a long time the distinct separation between the romance of the Southern border and its comic spirit. The low caste white man of the South was to be for many years a comic figure” (Tandy 69). In literary history, Brother Jonathan and Huck Finn, the men who show up in Frederick Law Olmsted’s travel journals, the men from William Byrd II’s travel narrative, all visibly support this argument. These characters are deemed

humorous—each was depicted as such by authors immersed in the national idea of the pastoral frontiersman.

In *A Narrative*, Crockett embraces his heritage, the romanticization of his heritage, and became a part of creating the humor normally directed at a man of his class. Catherine Albanese argues that “Humor, like politics, became part of the substance and not simply the style of the Crockett mythology” (486-87). Humor is more than form in Crockett’s autobiography; here, as in my other chapters, humor functions as part of a reaction to, and a manipulation of, class hierarchy.

The importance of the pastoral ideal to the American public plays itself out in the literature about Mike Fink and David Crockett. According to Marx, Thomas Jefferson saw “rural virtue as the moral center of a democratic society” (123). Davy Crockett, as a frontiersman who embraced agrarian virtue, is a part of this “moral center,” while Mike Fink, a loner and a man who disregards all laws, is far from this center. Crockett embodies the pastoral ideal because, as a comic in the same vein as “Brother Jonathan,” Crockett combines what Jefferson and others idealized as one with “country manners with a wit capable of undoing city types” thus embodying “values of the middle landscape” (Marx 133). This middle landscape, according to Marx, is the happy medium between a central agrarian focus and incipient industrialism of the future: “What is important about the rural world, in any event, is not merely the agricultural economy but its alleged moral, aesthetic, and in a sense, metaphysical superiority to the urban commercial forces that threaten it” (Marx 99). The middle ground was necessary because “In 1816 America, the choice for America is continuing economic development or one of

two unacceptable alternatives: becoming a satellite of Europe or regressing to the life of cavemen” (Marx 140). Brother Jonathon was an underdog to the British John Bull, but in the aftermath of the Revolution and the War of 1812, Jonathon became a symbol for an ideal American world of innocence, cleverness, and adaptability. In embodying these ideals, Jonathon can embark forward into a realm of commerce and agrarianism that combined the best of both worlds, much like Crockett’s place, which is centered between primitivism and the pastoral. Like Jonathon, the ideals Crockett embodies—the backcountry ideals with the wit and cleverness of the refined—provide a means for the ideal American character to foreshadow a United States that can move forward without culturally imitating the old country it has rejected politically.

In post-Revolutionary America, the Democratic party used these pastoral ideals to create a historical national image of a unified America: “The election of Andrew Jackson to the presidency in 1829 was but the political expression of the development of an intense interest on the part of Americans in things peculiarly American” (Inge 1). And what is uniquely American about America in the early nineteenth-century?: (white) freedom from oppression, from outside aggression, the “unexplored” wilderness, among others. In this, the country needed “civilized” backwoodsmen to further embody these ideals. Shackford in “David Crockett, The Legend and the Symbol” argues that

David Crockett’s greatest value is as a symbol of the new man striking into this new and spiritual frontier. His life and career depict the great formative struggles in the birth of this new philosophy on this new continent. Crockett did not espouse the philosophy of the old physical man who judged people in terms of externals—ancestry, caste, riches, or fame—holding some men of value and some worthless and setting one group to war against another. Instead, he grasped the philosophy of the new spiritual man who judges a people intrinsically in terms of their inherent worth and their divine potential in a universe where all the sons of

God and where all before God are of inalienable value and entitled to equal dignity and justice. (217)

Crockett becomes a symbol because he performs the new ideal American in person and, for this project, more importantly, in print. For Crockett, performing to the symbolic American ideal meant taking on “the noble husbandman’s true identity [. . .] the good shepherd of the old pastoral dressed in American homespun” (Marx 127). In wanting to present a unified front, the United States had to lean on a past that accentuated all that was unique about itself, without any of the drawbacks Europe expected of the wild (to them, degenerated) American people. Thus, the man who could stand for the middle ground of agrarianism and commerce, pastoral and primitivism, became the idealized American symbol.

The *Narrative of the Life of David Crockett* embraces and, in true southern style exaggerates, these symbols. As a text meant to help Crockett in his last bid for Congress, “Crockett employed his wit, imagination, and charm to establish his position as a great American frontier character in the mind of the public” (Kilgore 8). By writing about a love of hearth, but not of eastern civility, love of order, but not eastern laws, love of freedom, love of exploration, love of adventure, and the simplicity that comes with the pastoral ideal Crockett, in his *Narrative*, makes himself that symbol. Roger Hall argues for the idea of this nationalized symbol in writing that

frontier drama [. . .] represents the victory of the wilderness over the city, of the unlearned over the educated, of the popular masses over the critical establishment, and of the democracy of the ‘unwashed’ over the aristocracy of the well-dressed. By the end of the [nineteenth] century the lowbrow triumphed so convincingly that they dragged the highbrow—virtually kicking and screaming—along with them until the highbrow legitimated the frontier subject matter by adopting it for their own. (14)

A relevant example of this is that Jackson's election (as a Democrat) spurred the more aristocratic Whigs to take on Crockett when he left Jackson's party. The "highbrow" appropriated frontier symbolism for their own ends, thus spreading the symbols' use nationwide. In the end, by adopting the lowbrow, the highbrow, especially in terms of the frontier narrative on stage and in politics, manipulated

the comic countryman [who] had by rights the ear of many who were deaf to the ordinary appeals of editor and orator. He could insinuate many things forbidden. The rustic observer could innocently betray official double-dealing. He could poke fun wherever he chose, tell all manner of slighting stories about the great, and satirize the humble Democrat by revealing his own gullibility. (Tandy 25)

With the popular and political use of frontier ideology and symbolism, no politico was exempt, neither the "great" nor the "humble." "In the egalitarian social climate of America [Jacksonian America] the pastoral ideal, instead of being contained by literary design, spilled over into thinking about real life" (Marx 130). "Real life", for the purposes of this project, is focused on one man and his story. Crockett is known, even today, as "the great American ideal of the self-made man. For what could be more indicative of the mobility inherent in an unstratified frontier society than the rise of an untutored backwoodsman, dependent, chiefly, upon horse sense, to the highest body in the land." (Stiffler 137-38). The symbol of true egalitarianism is, then, the reaffirmation of a social ladder—a "rise," as it were, to greatness from the woods. The frontier ideal still persists, as Tandy argues: "Popular myth makes [men like Benjamin Franklin, Davy Crockett, Abraham Lincoln] rustic critics, backwoods philosophers, instead of politicians and men of the world" (Tandy x). Even though rising to greatness, Crockett (unlike

Franklin and more like the mythologized Lincoln) retains his cultural symbology for its value in his culture—even exaggerating it for his purpose to continue his rise.

As part of his performance in this cultural phenomenon, Crockett embraced frontier-symbology-ideas and, with his reputation for being a quick and sure shot, became a popular figure in his own neighborhood. This fame spread and Crockett was supported by the democrats who helped Andrew Jackson become elected. Shackford argues that

the theoretical backwoodsman was present in the minds of all, East and West, David won his right to represent his class in his own neighborhoods in a succession of localities as he moved across the state. The exploitation on a national scale of the public taste, and of Crockett to satisfy that taste, had a tremendous effect in establishing him in the minds, thoughts, and conversations of people all over America. (“David Crockett” 212)

When Crockett broke with Jackson and the Democrats over political and idealistic reasons, the Whig party embraced Crockett’s frontier characteristics in order to further its own ends: “The national Whig party, once the party of the aristocrat and mercantile interests, had determined by the early 1830s that to oppose Andrew Jackson successfully, they should adopt the language and trappings of frontier egalitarianism” (Montgomery 50). To do so, the Whig party would have to undermine the idea that Jackson was a frontiersman and an ideal American—to make Crockett more frontiersmen-like than even the war hero Jackson could be. Crockett’s autobiography supports this idea, especially in his defense of his innocence and the playing up of his naiveté. Jackson at this point was well-versed in politics and rhetorical smoothness—Crockett uses this to his advantage in his autobiography by using “fer”-out frontier phrases and comedy. He also manages to mock both Jackson’s rise to greatness and his own, showing his humble, down-home nature to be closer to his frontier roots than Jackson to Jackson’s roots.

Born around 1786 in Tennessee, Crockett fought in the Indian Wars, served two terms in the Tennessee legislature (1821-25), and then was elected to Congress in 1827, 1829, and 1833 (Shackford and Folmsbee xii fn15), before dying at the Battle of the Alamo. The *Narrative of the Life of David Crockett of the State of Tennessee* was published in early 1834 and had, perhaps, seven editions. This *Narrative*, according to James A. Shackford and Stanley J. Folmsbee, “was designed as a campaign document to help [Crockett] win re-election in 1835” (xi). However, the ploy failed and the “Jacksonites succeeded in getting Adam Huntsman, a ‘wheelhorse’ of the party to run against him, and Crockett was defeated” (xv).

Crockett’s text represents the fight between Jackson and Crockett, which becomes, partly, a fight based on status¹: the status of the poor-yet-idolized frontiersman. Like the other amorphous characteristics of class and status as examined in my other chapters, this fight had to discern, if existent at all, lines of demarcation between one class and another. The performance, in written form, of being a frontiersmen in the last election he would take on meant that Crockett had to bring to the forefront his own background and ideas—and to do that he had to counter all the previous writings about himself, claiming his own agency and making his claim to humbleness stronger. David Crockett justifies the writing of this particular text as a rebuttal to previous publications printed about his life: “A publication has been made to the world, which has done me much injustice; and the catchpenny errors which it contains, have been already too long sanctioned by my silence” (3-4). Although historical literary research shows that Crockett was very likely involved with this previous publication, *The Life and*

Adventures of Colonel David Crockett of West Tennessee, and that “both [texts] contain certain types of information which only Crockett could have given the ghost writers” (Shackford and Folmsbee xii), Crockett is trying to separate himself from this and his previous political stance in the same party with Andrew Jackson.

Crockett attests that in this *Narrative* he is only trying to straighten out misconceptions about his life as written in the other texts, especially as one particular text quotes him, *The Life and Adventures of Colonel David Crockett of West Tennessee* or, as he writes, pretends to quote him:

If he [the author of *The Life and Adventures*] had been content to have written his opinions about me, however contemptuous they might have been, I should have had less reason to complain. But when he professes to give my narrative (as he often does) in my own language, and then puts into my mouth such language as would disgrace an outlandish African, he must himself be sensible of the injustice he has done me, and the trick he has played off on the publick. I have met with hundreds, if not with thousands of people, who have formed their opinions of my appearance, habits, language, and every thing else from that deceptive work. (4-5)

These complaints are quite justified, although had Crockett lived to see the *Tour of the North and Texas Exploits*, which are quite stronger misrepresentations than *The Life and Adventures*, he would have been more upset. In the above quoted text, Crockett validates his argument for this particular autobiography by claiming to only need to refute the claims made in his name in the *Life and Adventures*, as well as in newspaper accounts. He can take criticism, he says, and mockery, but not when it is done with words purported to be his own—especially when those words appropriate a dialect and word play Crockett claims to be badly performed.

Crockett’s narrative is, among other things, an attempt to redirect the mockery of him as a politician to a work that embraces humor towards others. Crockett uses humor

to deflect class differences that would clearly find their way to his opponents' speeches about him. Crockett creates a persona that embraces laughter as a way to redirect the inevitable class antagonisms tossed in his direction. Crockett's humor mocks all forms of class anxieties by including those anxieties as part of his humorous performance. Tandy argues that "the significant thing about the reputation of Crockett is that he is the first frontiersman about whom a distinct comic tradition arises" (69). Crockett's text serves to show that this comic tradition also arises from him, not just about him, in a very deliberate manner. Lofaro argues that Crockett's humor—"parts of the broad comic farces, outrageous character sketches, and outlandish exaggerations"—"were even to live on well after the period because of the formative influence that this type of humor exerted upon Mark Twain who was born that very same year" (Lofaro *Tall Tales* xxi). I would argue that the tall-tale of Crockett's narrative transitions, as published by Crockett and about Crockett, from oral history to a written literary form that finds its apex in Twain.

In the tall tale, it is a tradition to recount the exploits of heroes with some amount of knowledge that each telling entails inaccuracies. Folklore narratives thrive on incredible half truths. One American icon, Daniel Boone, for instance, gained popularity through largely verbal lore, passed on through newspaper accounts and travelers' tales. Mike Fink's tales were likewise transmitted and left to oral and spotty newspaper history (Blair and Meine 15-17) until a 1933 collection by Walter Blair and Franklin J. Meine called *Mike Fink: King of Mississippi Keelboatmen* was published. In fact, it is only in these shorter histories, argue Blair and Meine, that "such a lowly character" could properly be placed (30). Historically, Mike Fink and David Crockett have a similar past:

rough living on the frontier, Indian scouts, and fierce hunters. However, Fink went the way of the “boatmen” and acquired a reputation of being one of the fiercest of the fierce riverboatmen (Blair and Meine iv). As Blair and Meine argue, “In both oral and printed narratives, Mike Fink cavorted precariously on a line between history and legend or between folklore and more sophisticated fiction” (20). Blair and Meine continue to argue for the Fink tales as part of an old world mythology, reading the Fink stories as a part of a long line of European and ancient mythological lore. I would argue that the development of Fink alongside Crockett and literary figures like Brother Jonathan show that Fink’s and Crockett’s heroic trajectory followed the development of American nationhood—from rough (Fink) to rough and ready (Crockett).

Fink did not have a voice in his own creation, much like Davy Crockett claims he did not have until his last, official, *Narrative*. In the history of the Fink tales, Blair and Meine find, writers had Fink follow “frontier ritual and shout boasts, and writer after writer gave this champion of boasters the most imaginative boast he could concoct. He was reputed to be a witty tall talker, and throughout the stories there runs a fine stream of figurative speech mingled with earthiness—the typical amalgam of this kind of utterance” (33). Fink has no control over his own story. Fink—unlike Crockett—is “wild” and uncontrolled and his narrative remains uncontrolled.

Crockett, however, is the civilized shepherd of his own idyllic pastoral, and thus gains mastery over the telling of his own tale. Rather than leaving his story in the hands of fate, he connects to the machinations of civilization—by rewriting his tale, Crockett becomes a controller of his own political machine. In the *Narrative*,

Crockett presents himself as a man who remained true to Jacksonian principles after Jackson himself had given them up. He tells the story of his life in a straightforward, mock-modest style. The book displays a high level of comic art. Crockett has good timing, firm control of the literary devices that suggest the backwoods idiom, and a way of letting realistically presented details speak for themselves. (Hauck 10)

Hauck's argument touches upon an important point here. The *Narrative* is formally purposeful. The format exerts control over the telling in the text, giving the *Narrative* a formal structure that also tells the story of Crockett's narrative control.

By controlling the story, both as political and formal narrative, Crockett controls his image. This image has persisted. As Stuart A. Stiffler argues, "He had persistence, buoyant self-confidence, independence of spirit, and the belief in a sort of rough equality which he attempted to translate in the best way he knew from a personal into a sacred philosophy" (138). In his *Narrative*, Crockett attempts to integrate his personal beliefs into the sacred national ideal of the pastoral—or, tellingly, vice versa.

In his *Narrative*, Crockett controls the events and their telling—he shows humbleness, a naiveté seemingly unavailable to more polished politicians, and the ambition only to do what is best for his family and country: "I want the world to understand my true history, and how I worked along to rise from a cane-brake to my present station in life" (Crockett 172). Crockett writes, too, that he apologizes for being, perhaps, "too particular about many small matters" (172).

In contrast, the Mike Fink tales show Fink as constantly yearning for praise or approval—and his restlessness is drunken and overpowering, not dignified. As such, his story is the shepherd gone native—the unredeemed and unredeemable frontiersmen who is the wolf in the idyllic pastoral of frontier America. In one story, transmitted by

Morgan Neville, it was known that “Every farmer on the shore kept on good terms with Mike—otherwise there was no safety for his property” (Blair and Meine 52). Further, as written by a correspondent known as “K,” “Mike was one of the very lowest of mankind, and entirely destitute of any of the manly qualities which often were to be found among the bargemen of his day” (Blair and Meine 86). In many of the stories Fink is not just the fiercest, he is the lowest and the worst.

It is in later texts, written after Crockett’s death in Mexico (now Texas²) that the stories of Crockett in connection to Mike Fink begin to appear. Most of the anthologized stories are told in the voice of Davy Crockett—although written after Crockett’s death—who perpetually denigrates Fink. For instance, “Crockett” introduces Fink in the “Crockett Almanac” stories (published first in 1850):

You’ve all of you, heered of Mike Fink, the celebrated, a self-created, and never to be mated, Mississippi roarer, snag-lifter, and a flatboat skuller. Well, I knowed the critter all round, an upside down; he war purty fair amoungst squaws, cat-fish, an big niggers, but when it come to walkin into wild cats, bars, or alligators, he couldn’t hold a taller candle to my young son, Hardstone Crockett. I’ll never forget the time he tried to scare my wife Mrs. Davy Crockett. You see, the critter had tried all sorts of ways to scare her, but he had no more effect on her than droppen feathers on a barn floor. (209)

Here, the stronger Crockett tells the tale of the still-silent Mike Fink. The author of these tales compares the wildness of Fink to the controlled, hierarchical and idealized Crockett family—following the tradition of the pastoral which Crockett poses in his own autobiography. Fink is laughed at as the weaker, less-able character—the man who could conquer nature, but not his own inner beasts.

The author of this tale manipulates the ideal of the frontiersmen in contrast to the wild Mississippi river-rats. Fink does not return to the eastern seaboard when the decline

of the riverboats happen in the face of steam boats; instead, he heads west to die in a mysterious, yet always terrible, fashion in a cave. The idea of the frontier is romanticized in contrast to the arrogance of the rough boatmen who decline into savagery after their immersion into the wild. Mike Fink's story is appropriated in order to create a dichotomy between the pastoral and the dangers of the frontier wilderness. In the above description, Fink is described as a wild creature—a creature who lacks control. As such, he is unable to beat those who have both frontier smarts and self-control, like Mrs. Crockett and the young Crockett son. He is an exemplar “bad” guy who is used to show the potential for badness in the frontier ideal—a what-not-to-do, in opposition to the idealized Crockett family.

“Crockett” was not the only storyteller of Fink tales—even Fink's death is controlled by a narrative that makes him the perpetual loner—this tale, as collected by Vance Randolph, poses the idea that Fink romantically returned to his river habitat, but as a misanthrope (Blair and Meinle 250):

Another historical character who became a kind of Ozark superman was Mike Fink, king of the keelboatmen. He was never famous like Colonel Crockett, and the younger generation of hillfolk knew little about him. Price Paine, a guide who lived on Cowskin River, near Noel, Missouri, used to tell several good Mike Fink stories. According to one of these big tales Mike did not die at all, but disguised himself as a big catfish which stirs up storms by lashing the water with its tail. As late as 1920, according to Paine, there were still old timers who said that floods which destroy lives and property are really caused by Mike Fink, the immortal water demon who hates all humanity. (251)

These tales remain uncontrolled, thus Fink is immortalized in stories that show his declension into the wild until the ultimate decline is reached—the misanthrope. Fink hates all humanity—a serious accusation that further places Crockett's type of heroism on

a pedestal. Unlike Fink, Crockett dies as the ultimate humanitarian, a warrior who heroically dies at the Alamo.

Mike Fink is an individual but an amalgam of all riverboatmen—who are portrayed as an amalgam in themselves. The river boatmen “are a sort of amphibious animal—kind-hearted as a Connecticut grandmother, but as rough as a Rocky Mountain bear” (Blair and Meinle 64). Riverboatmen are seen as the outsiders of the outsiders, bits and pieces of frontier folk and the rougher trappers and hunters who avoid contact with regular communities. As the writer (whose identity is disputed) of the 1837 “Crockett Almanacs” writes, “Spending the greater portion of their time on the water, they scarce know how to behave on shore, and feel only at home upon the deck of their craft, where they exercise entire sovereignty. [new paragraph] They have not degenerated since the days of *Mike Fink*, who was looked upon as the most fool-hardy and daring of his race” (64). Here, Mike Fink stands out, but only from a crowd of men lumped together as dangerous and “fool-hardy.” They live in the liminal world of water—with, literally, no grounding in the earth or the real. Thus, they remain caricatures of that which is “wild,” and uncontrolled, outside of all civilization.

In Crockett’s *Narrative*, Crockett returns to the traditional, bringing himself back to the American ideal. At one point, Crockett writes that because his father was poor, “I stood no chance to become great in any other way than by accident. As my father was very poor, and living as he did in the *far back in the back woods*, he had neither the means nor the opportunity to give me, or any of the rest of his children, any learning” (16). Crockett here established the idea that he too has had to work very, very hard

throughout his life. Like Franklin, and others, Crockett remembers that ideal men now raise themselves on their own devices. Crockett was not given an opportunity to attend school for long, although his reasons for quitting school did not have much to do with poverty, but instead went to work to help his family survive. James E. Caron argues that

By becoming more savage than the savages he encounters in the wilderness, Davy Crockett ironically ensures the triumph of civilized values and behavior. He is thus a figure both of cultural degeneracy—the ultimate backwoodsman from the backwoods—and a figure of cultural progress—the pioneer who trailblazes for the civilization that follows. The crudities attributed to Crockett therefore can be read either as the signs of a loss of civility or as merely the rough manners that necessarily mediate the prospective wilderness and the subsequent civilizations. (165)

Again, here Crockett mediates the “middle ground.” Crockett also makes sure his audience remembers that he did not plan on becoming great, nor did his family have hopes of his greatness and plan for that. Instead, his rise was through the desires of his fellow Tennesseans, who recognized his honesty and hard-working traits.

Crockett writes that his background is so poor and unimportant, that the only thing that matters is that he was, in fact, born:

I suppose, however, it is not very material to my present purpose, nor to the world, as the more important fact is well attested, that I was born; and, indeed, it might be inferred, from my present size and appearance, that I was pretty *well born*, though I have never yet attached myself to that numerous and worthy society. (17)

Here, the humor shines out of the text. Crockett attributes the physical characteristics of the well-born, usually clothes, horses, and other material goods, to more physical traits, like height, weight, girth, and manliness. His own manly appearance, he argues, makes him as well born as anyone he knows. The play on words reveals his cleverness, as well as a further undermining of the idea that material goods can indicate anything about a

man's inner power. It is, Crockett seems to say, his strength, via a man's size, which is a true physical sign of power. Crockett does not want to be a part of the material men's obsession with power—as long as he has his own personal strength he can hunt and survive in the wilderness. Crockett's survival in the political world seems to indicate that he attributed his strength and power there to an ability to survive in the wilderness of politics and civilization as well. His humor captures those strengths. Caron argues that “Crockett is both the man from the woods, representative of the wilderness of the natural world, and the man from Congress, representative of *polis* and politics, of civilization and civility” (165). By moving between two worlds, Crockett is living between the ideal and the reality of the pastoral.

Mike Fink does not show a “nimbleness of wit” reflective of a “middle ground” type man. Instead, his wit is followed by violence and admired only by sycophants. Mike Fink

became fond of strong drink, but was never overpowered by its influence. He could drink a gallon of it in twenty-four hours without the effect being perceivable. His language was a perfect example of the half-horse and half-alligator dialect of the then race of boatmen. He was also a wit; and on that account he gained the admiration and excited the fears of all the fraternity of boatmen; for he usually enforced his wit with a sound drubbing, if any one dared to dissent by neglecting or refusing to laugh at his jokes; for as he used to say, he told his jokes on purpose to be laughed at in a good humored way, and that no man should ‘make light’ of them. The consequence was Mike always had a chosen band of laughing philosophers about him. (Flint 59)

This is the frontiersmen soiling the beauty of wit and nature. Mike Fink is portrayed as the wolf willing to kill the sheep and the shepherd—and then to laugh at their deaths.

Fink does not represent the middle ground of hard work and “natural” ability, but the man who will destroy that ideal with rough living and immoral ways. His jokes aren't funny.

Crockett's jokes in this *Narrative* are funny, because Crockett controls them and directs them specifically toward an audience willing to accept some crassness and some roughness. Crockett's voice in this text is focused and pointed toward a certain goal—that of appearing as the ideal frontiersmen: witty, natural, and even the romanticized version of the ideal woodsman. Crockett's early focus in his *Narrative*, as already mentioned, is on controlling his own narrative. In wanting to control his story, Crockett shows his awareness of his performance and reputation. Mike Fink never controlled, or purported to control, his own story—and Mike Fink is the wild, uncontrolled, laughable caricature of the frontiersmen that serves as a moral for the pastoral ideal. Crockett pushes the idea of controlling his narrative as part of his struggle to maintain his image. As Crockett says, “But I ask him, [the author of the previous texts] if this notice should ever reach his eye, how would he have liked it, if I had treated *him* so?—if I had put together such a bundle of ridiculous stuff, and headed it with *his* name, and sent it out upon the world without ever even condescending to ask *his* permission?” (5). It is permission Crockett wants, permission to create Crockett's life and to put Crockett's name on it. Robert F. Sayre argues that autobiography

enabled Americans to invent (or reinvent) themselves as the citizens of the new nation, at once defining themselves and defining it. After the war, autobiography helped to promote the settlement of the frontier describing the country and the people. [. . .] At the same time, however, autobiography was criticized by many people as a vain and deceitful kind of writing that modest, respectable folks should shun. (173)

For Crockett, this means defending both his honor and his humility—this particular passage also defends Crockett against those who would accuse him of vanity.

Crockett would not have been oblivious to his reputation in the capitol. His Whig supporters would certainly not be able to ignore this reputation: “While not precisely a joke, [Crockett] was considered a privileged member because of his romantic career, and only stories of coons, bears, and red skins were reported” (Garland 9). In claiming this particular autobiography for himself, Crockett is able to take some control of his own reputation, as a person and a politician. In re-writing his story in his own words, Crockett can discuss his political career and his hunting career in the same text, and show how they are connected and why it is important that he can do both. He continues to use humor in describing these situations to show that, no matter how far up politically he has come, that he has maintained his sense of humor and humble nature—his roots in the noble frontier ideal.

Unlike the writer of his “other” autobiography, Crockett asserts that this particular autobiography is a true reflection of his real nature: “In the following pages I have endeavored to give the reader a plain, honest, home-spun account of my state in life, and some few of the difficulties which have attended me along its journey, down to this time” (6). The implication is that the other tales about Crockett were written for purposes other than sharing the life story of a simple backwoodsman. In giving the reader a “homespun” account, Crockett foregrounds the readers experience by emphasizing all that is important about “home”: warm, real, true, familial, honest. By repeating the idea of honesty throughout the text, Crockett labors to make this autobiography the “real” autobiography that represents him, the “real” or “natural” Crockett, and his frontier values.

Much like Benjamin Franklin's image of a humble nature, an image used to further his image at home and abroad, Crockett's lack of education was a boon to Whig promoters. As can be found in current political campaigns³, Crockett reminds his readers of his humble origins. Michael Montgomery notes that

there is an informal tradition in Tennessee politics that delineates what is acceptable political behavior, especially while electioneering. It is a tradition that can largely be traced back to David Crockett, the three-time congressman from the West Tennessee canebrake. It involves politicians using backwoods symbols, language, and traits to express themselves, to relate to the people, and to establish their image. (44)

There weren't many official schools along the frontier, and those who attended school could not help the family raise crops, hunt, herd cattle, and take care of the home.

Crockett had the opportunity to attend school, but an, apocryphal perhaps, fight with his teacher caused him to run away from school, and home.

I was now almost *fifteen* years old; and my increased age and size, together with the joy of my father, occasioned by my unexpected return, I was sure would secure me against my long dreaded whipping; so they did. But it will be a source of astonishment to many, who reflect that I am now a member of the American Congress,—that most enlightened body of men in the world,—that at so advanced an age, the age of fifteen, I did not know the first letter in the book. (43)

Crockett is not telling an entirely tall tale here, as records show that he did not learn to sign his name until well into adulthood; however, this image was perpetuated by many who wanted to relate to the frontier people who were unable to get a formal education.

Folmsbee and Shackford footnote this particular story with the following:

In the backwoods there was little time for 'book-larnin'.' Characteristic of the politics there was a lampooning of anything suggesting aristocratic tendencies. If a man could hunt, shoot, labor, and have a ready wit and good sportsmanship, he might well be proud of not having non-utilitarian accomplishments. Crockett was one of the earliest to help form a political pattern which lingers even today. (43 fn23)

This particular lack also adds to Crockett's idea of a homespun knowledge and innate sense of justice that would help him hold his own against "manufactured" politicians during his campaigns.

Crockett uses this written work to clear his name of any wrong doing, or, more likely, any odd impressions others may have gotten from the other texts written in his name. Crockett seems to have taken a dislike to the idea that he is an oddity among civilized men: "I know, that obscure as I am, my name is making considerable deal of fuss in the world. I can't tell why it is, nor in what it is to end. Go where I will, everybody seems anxious to get a peep at me" (7). Crockett acknowledges his popularity, implies that this is both welcome and unwelcome attention, and then reverts back to his humbleness by writing that he is unsure of where this attention comes from. In making these claims, Crockett is also showing a naïve amazement at his own ability to make a name for himself in the world. One thing he is certain of, though, is that if people are anxious to "get a peep" at him, that he is in control of what they see. In this text, they will see an honest, accidentally popular, backwoodsman: a man who cares for his family, his home, and honest dealings with everyone with whom he comes in contact.

In grounding his own humble nature, Crockett begins his autobiography with the standard opening of his ancestry. "I shall commence my book with what little I have learned of the history of my father, as all *great men* rest many, if not most, of their hopes on their noble ancestry. Mine was poor, but I hope honest, and even that is as much as many a man can say" (14). Crockett doesn't claim greatness in his past, as men like Benjamin Franklin or Andrew Jackson did. In fact, all that he grants his father is

honesty. Later, Crockett relates that after working to pay off a debt for his father, Crockett's father seemed to be pleased "for though he was poor, he was an honest man, and always tried mighty hard to pay off his debts" (46). His father did not always succeed, making him a man, like many of his era, who owed debts and felt bad about being in debt. Honest, hard-working, but very, very, poor is the ancestry Crockett established for himself. This is part of the poor-shepherd ideal maintained in the pastoral as well. While we generally don't get to see a funny shepherd in classical pastoral narratives, Crockett uses humor to assert himself into the pastoral ideal. He doesn't remain the nameless shepherd, but an individual partaking in the American pastoral ideal.

Besides his constant invoking of his humble nature, one of Crockett's real strengths is his speech-making and invocation of humor when stuck in a tough spot. Crockett was asked to make a speech during his first run at being a candidate. Crockett states that "A public document I had never seen, nor did I know there were such things; and how to begin I couldn't tell. I made many apologies, and tried to get off, for I know'd I had a man to run against who would speak prime, and I know'd, too, that I wa'n't able to shuffle and cut with him" (140). In order to get ahead, Crockett says that he told the crowd an anecdote about a man and a barrel, the man trying to get out the last of the liquor but not getting it out. "I told them that there had been a little speech in me a while ago, but I believed I couldn't get it out" (141). After this tale, Crockett says his audience

roared out in a mighty laugh, and I told some other anecdotes, equally amusing to them, and believing I had them in a first-rate way, I quit and got down, thanking the people for their attention. But I took care to remark that I was as dry as a powder horn, and that I thought it was time for us all to wet our whistles a little;

and so I put off to the liquor stand, and was followed by the greater part of the crowd. (142)

Here, Crockett takes the crowd from the more accomplished, or polished, speaker and wins them over with his wit and, really, sheer audacity.

It is this audacity and wit that, again, make him an acceptable figurehead for the pastoral ideal and the fundamental basis for an American memory. "Crockett is also strong, but his successes are due to his intelligence and skill as well as his strength. He embodies an American ideal, the shrewd self-made man who can succeed without formal education. It is through his cleverness and his jokes that he defeats his better educated opponents" (Botscharow 84). The homespun Jonathon strikes again.

In another instance of what Crockett calls his "electioneering," he relates a time when he tells a rival candidate that

he had many advantages over me, and particularly in the way of money; but I told him that I would go on the products of the country; that I had industrious children, and the best of coon dogs, and they would hunt every night till midnight to support my election; and when the coon fur wa'n't good, I would myself go a wolfing, and shoot down a wolf, and skin his head, and his scalp would be good to me for three dollars, in our state treasury money; and in this way I would get along on the big string. He stood like he was both amused and astonished, and the whole crowd was in a roar of laughter. (169-70)

Again, Crockett uses his poverty as a way to make the best of his own particular situation, and get the best of his opponent. While the other man has money, power, and friends to support his campaign, all the markings of a career politician, Crockett wins the crowd by being like them: hard-working, hunting, tough, frontiersmanlike with a native inclination to laugh at the pompous and overdeveloped. Crockett also uses the idea of a working family unit and audacious physical skill as markers of a real man. His opponent,

as implied in the contrast, is a pampered, paid-off, town-fellow type, and probably unwilling to make good on his promises to the poor backwoodsmen of Tennessee.

In his autobiography, Crockett controls this image. He uses humor, a humor that makes whole crowds “roar with laughter.” The laughter is acceptable and within an unstated boundary of social discourse. Crockett’s escapades may be humorous but are within the laws of the land—the natural laws anyway. Fink, however, has no respect for the law and thus works outside the boundaries available for acceptable laughter:

In all his little tricks, as Mike called them, he never displayed any very accurate respect to the laws either of propriety or property, but he was so ingenious in his predations that it is impossible not to laugh at his crimes. The stern rigor of Justice, however, did not feel disposed to laugh at Mike, but on the contrary offered a reward for his capture. (Cassedy 229)

One of the many tricks in Fink’s arsenal was one in which he fooled a sheep farmer to give him a sheep—a wolf’s trick indeed. Ben Cassedy has been given credit for passing on this particular tale, “which affords a fair idea of the spirit of them all” (Blair and Meinle 227). With this particular trick, Fink convinces a farmer that at least one of his sheep has “black murrain” (a deadly sheep virus) and that if the farmer doesn’t kill the sheep that the entire flock will be infected and dead. The farmer eventually begs Fink to shoot the sheep and throw it into the river—which Fink does, making sure the sheep land in an eddy. Fink and his men then retrieve the sheep at night, and they feast on their ill-gotten meal (Blair 228-229). The laughter prompted by this trick is laughter that is based upon a sheep farmer who could not well afford to lose a number of sheep to a boatman who was able to buy sheep to eat if he so desired. The trick is funny—but only at the expense of the yeoman.

Mike Fink may feel like the strawman here, but as a contemporary figure of Crockett's, and anthologized like Crockett, his story (or the stories told about him) show the differences between how men who fit into the American ideal of the pastoral and those who don't are treated and are remembered. National memory continues to hold Crockett as a standard of goodness and righteousness—while men like Fink are now laughed at and denigrated for their ignorance. Fink is a strawman—but a strawman of American memory and the pastoral idealism that pervades American memory.

Crockett's humor focuses on those who can well afford to lose—the aristocrat, the rich dandy who needs to be taken down a peg rather than exalted or elected. To further this humorous Robin Hood ideal, Crockett writes about his experiences on the frontier to make his point that he knows how to work with innate justice, rather than a set of idea of what one *must* do to stay ahead politically (as Crockett mocks his Jacksonian rivals for doing) or harming those like him as Fink is purported to have done. In fact, Crockett did learn frontier justice from experience beyond a tough fighting justice portrayed in the Mike Fink stories. For instance, as Crockett writes in the *Narrative*, he and his family move around quite a bit, looking for better land to settle and woods to hunt. In one move, Crockett and his family settle near Shoal Creek:

We remained here some two or three years, without any law at all; and so many bad characters began to flock in upon us, that we found it necessary to set up a sort of temporary government of our own. I don't mean to say that we made any president, and called him the 'government,' but we met and made what we called a corporation. [. . .] [W]e met, and appointed magistrates and constables to keep order. We didn't fix any laws for them, tho'; for we supposed they would know law enough, whoever they might be; and so we left it to themselves to fix the laws. (133)

Here, Crockett tries to explain the justice the people of his settlement were trying for—in not appointing a President or writing specific laws for the magistrates, this settlement is not a group of politicians vying for a favored spot in the government system; rather, that this simple community depended on each other for keeping the balance of laws and civility. This simplicity is counter to the favoritism and cronyism of the Jacksonian government—a counter that implies the elitism of the city-folk that does not exist in more simple neighborhoods, like Crockett’s.

In a comparison of Fink and Crockett in regards to lawfulness, as Botscharow argues,

Crockett is a man of law, quite literally. As a settler, he brings human law to the wilderness, creating domesticated order out of natural order. Fink is a lawbreaker. He fights representatives of the law and creates degenerate chaos in the midst of domesticated order. While Fink is lawless among men, Crockett is lawful among animals. Fink is an inversion of Crockett. Men like Fink transform the order of law to chaos, and this chaos is far more threatening than the order of nature, which is regulated by natural law because it is a human chaos capable of utilizing perverted human reason. (88)

Botscharow works with the implications of the American pastoral: a middle ground of order and nature. Here, without actually examining the reasons for this particular type of reading, Botscharow gives a surface difference between Fink and Crockett: lawlessness in its place. My argument is that the only reason that this difference exists is because of the pastoral ideal always already waiting in the background to foster comparisons between the shepherd and the satyr. The regulation of behavior, the comparison of “wild” versus “tamed” nature are part of a social structure that values the man who can inhabit both worlds, yet maintains “civilized” qualities throughout his sojourn.

Despite the unstructured neighborhood watch, eventually Shoal Creek moved to a more formal form of government. In due course, Crockett was made a magistrate in his community. He relates, “My judgments were never appealed from, and if they had been they would have stuck like wax, as I have my decisions on the principles of common justice and honesty between man and man, and relied on natural born sense, and no on law, learning to guide me; for I had never read a page in a law book in all my life” (135). Crockett is clear here, where he may have used simile, metaphor, or implication before, that it is nature’s children who can rule the world. It is “natural born sense” and “common justice” that make the laws that “stick.” It is the idea of “honesty between man and man” rather than smooth talk and promises from politicians that is best for a community of honest people. If the masses want an honest government, they need to select and elect honest men.

In his *Narrative*, Crockett gives a number of examples of how an honest man takes the measure of other men. In both seriousness and humor, Crockett supports the image of the natural man being the best reader of other men. In a pithy statement about taking the measure of men, Crockett writes, “I don’t think courage ought to be measured by the beard, for fear a goat would have the preference over a man” (75). In his youth Crockett’s opinion had been disregarded due to his young looks. It is his belief that it is not youth, or really age, looks, education, wealth, et cetera, that make a man a man—rather, it is courage. And through his autobiography, Crockett shows that he has plenty of that, and some to spare.

For instance, after a long week of hunting bear, and getting into a number of precarious situations, Crockett finds that he is in a small hole, trapped with a bear he has wounded. Crockett relates, “I got back in all sorts of a hurry, for I know’d if he got hold of me, he would hug me altogether too close for comfort” (164). His jolliness in the face of a real danger continues to mark his native wit—a wit he uses throughout his text to show that it is an innate humor that he works with. This innate humor being, of course, at least equal to that of the educated, polished controlled humor of the Jacksonians. It is also his ability to laugh at himself throughout his autobiography that helps Crockett to perform his role better.

There are some instances, however, that Crockett relates in seriousness to support the sincerity of his election run. Crockett writes that during the Indian Wars that he has information he conveyed to the commander of his troops. However, “When I made my report, it wasn’t believed, because I was no officer; I was no great man, but just a poor soldier. But when the same thing was reported by Major Gibson !! why, then, it was all as true as preaching, and the colonel believed every word.” This incident, says, Crockett, “convinced me, clearly, of one of the hateful ways of the world” (82). Crockett tells a story here that many American soldiers faced. Like John Robert Shaw, Crockett is a man who sees the injustice done to the poorer sort who served the fledgling country. Even if his audience wasn’t part of this mistreated group of war veterans they may be sympathetic to the idea of the poor misunderstood soldier.

It is the poverty of these soldiers that Crockett focuses on when talking about his exploits against the Indians. He frequently finds himself without good food or shelter, or,

even worse for a frontiersman, the opportunity to make do for himself. Crockett does find an opportunity to find food, though, and shares with his fellow soldiers. After a successful hunt, Crockett relates that he had a deer that he could have sold

for almost any price I would have asked; but this wasn't my rule, neither in peace nor war. Whenever I had any thing, and saw a fellow being suffering, I was more anxious to relieve him than to benefit myself. And this is one of the true secrets of my being a poor man today. But it is my way; and while it has often left me with an empty purse, which is as near the devil as any thing else I have seen, yet it has never left my heart empty of consolations of having sometimes fed the hungry and covered the naked. (85)

This comes in comparison with other images in his text, which show the wealth and pomposity of those in power. Unlike the horse riding (Crockett himself preferred to walk), overeating politicians in government, Crockett bankrupts himself, both physically and fiscally, to share with his fellow man. Rather than worrying about wresting control of the national bank, as Jackson did⁴, Crockett is worried about the basic survival of the people he works with and meets with on a regular basis. Crockett shares with the soldiers he fights with during the Indian wars, and shares his wealth, food, and hunting knowledge with his neighbors during peace time. This is a man who recognizes his fellow men as human beings. Crockett's idea of humaneness is reflected in both his actions and his words.

Crockett embraces government if it will help his fellow man—the good of the country depends on development and organization to help the poor. So, Crockett will do what he can do to organize and develop with the help of the government. He embraces changes that he believes are for the good of all. Unlike others who may protest the loss of some independence and wilderness, Crockett asserts that these are small in comparison

with the death of fellow countrymen to starvation. In contrast, Mike Fink sees change as a great loss:

Wild and uncultivated as Mike appeared, he loved nature and had a soul that sometimes felt, while admiring it, an exalted enthusiasm. The Ohio was his favorite stream; from where it runs no stronger than a gentle rivulet, to where it mixes with the muddy Mississippi, Mike was as familiar as a child could be with the meanderings of a flower garden. He could not help noticing with sorrow the desecrating hand of improvement as he passed along, and half soliloquizing, and half addressing his companions, he broke forth: 'I knew these parts afore a squatter's axe had blazed a tree; 'twasn't then pulling a ----- sweep to get a living, but pulling the trigger done the business. Those were times, to see; a man might call himself lucky.' 'What's the use of improvements? When did cutting down trees make deer more plenty? Who ever cotched a bar by building a log cabin, or twenty on 'em? Who ever found wild buffalo, or a brave Indian in a city? Where's the fun, the frolicking, the fighting? Gone! Gone!.' (71)

Poor Fink sees the loss of the wild to farming and settlements. He grieves the loss of the wild because he cannot adjust to the ways of it—as Crockett does, or, as Crockett also does, Fink cannot see the ultimate good for others that these changes have wrought. Crockett has taken his “fun, frolicking, and fight” to the political realm. He catches bear, yes, and may mourn the loss of the frontier to large settlements of people, but he takes his frontier ways and applies them to the wild world of politics. He is nature’s “wildman” brought back into the fold.

But, again, to perform to the rational ideal, he is on the edges of that fold. Crockett reveals more of himself in his autobiography than serious politicians (now, anyway) would feel comfortable revealing. In order to show that he is not all seriousness—and certainly doesn't take himself too seriously—Crockett also offers places for his audience to laugh at his audaciousness in aiming for high political office. Crockett writes that he may have thought highly of himself in his youth, showing an

immodesty unbecoming to his nature, but that now, as an adult, he can laugh at himself and his foolishness. In going forth in one of his first moments of courting for a wife, Crockett decided that his future in-laws “knowed me so well, they wouldn’t raise any objection to having me for their son-in-law. I had a great deal better opinion, I found, than other people had of me; but I moved on with a light heart, and five dollars jingling in my pocket, thinking all the time there was but a few greater men in the world than myself” (53). She married another.

Crockett *invites* laughter here, controlling when his audience laughs at him. Crockett also does this in a story about a rafting accident. In the following story, Crockett demonstrates that he has embraced his humble origins and the *almost* ridiculousness of a man like him reaching for the presidency.

In an incident in which Crockett tries a different way to earn money, floating boats of wood down river, he gets caught in a whirlpool and almost drowns. In being rescued, Crockett writes that he was “literally skin’d like a rabbit” in that the water tore away all of his clothing. He arrived naked into Memphis, Tennessee. Crockett writes, “Four of my company were bareheaded, and three barefooted; and of that number I was one. I reckon I looked like a pretty crackling ever to get to Congress! ! !” (198).

Crockett takes on his critics here by giving them an incident in which he is ridiculous. However, he uses these as part of his performance of the man who still takes a chance to make a living on his own. This story shows as a clear contrast to the more serious Crockett, the Crockett who can help to run a young country, when Crockett does become serious about himself and his fellow countrymen/frontiersmen.

Crockett takes a different tack in tone when he begins to talk about the injustices done to him and his fellow working poor. Crockett uses the natural love of man for his family as part of his justification for his break with Jackson and the Democrats. The Democrats spun this break as a break with independence and egalitarianism. So, Crockett controls the images he uses to explain his rupture with the Democrats. Crockett brings this home in his discussion of family throughout his autobiography. Poignantly he finishes his discussion of the Indian wars with a picture of his return to his own family.

After his term of service ends, Crockett returned home.

Nothing more, worthy of the reader's attention, transpired till I was safely landed at home once more with my wife and children. I found them all well and doing well; and though I was only a rough sort of backwoodsman, they seemed mighty glad to see me, however little the quality folks might suppose it. For I do reckon we love as hard in the backwood country, as any people in the whole creation.
(123)

In the end, all people are equal in life, love, and death. It is not education that keeps families together, nor is it money and power that binds their love; in the end, Crockett argues, it is the importance of family and community that is important. It is to help them and keep them alive in the best manner possible that propels him to politics. Rather than power, Crockett wants to agitate for the best for the Tennessean families he loves and respects.

It is this love that leads Crockett, he writes, to leave the Jacksonian Democrats. Crockett was first elected based on his connection to Jackson and the Democrats; after the split with the party Crockett needed to justify his move to the Whig party, a party that did not do much to help the poor. In standing against Andrew Jackson, Crockett writes that

I never would, nor never did, acknowledge I had voted wrong; and I am more certain now that I was right than ever.

I told the people it was the best vote I ever gave; and I had supported the public interest, and cleared my conscience in giving it, instead of gratifying the private ambition of a man. (171)

Here, Crockett argues for his vote against Jackson's Indian policy⁵ (the policy that led to the Trail of Tears) is justified. It is a tough justification to make, for Jackson was the original backwoodsman-made-famous, and his rise to Presidency was a rise Crockett had hoped to follow. It was the Jackson party that Crockett hoped would support his Tennessee land bill. It was the Democrats who promised prosperity to the poor of the frontier. The party failed Crockett's ideals, so he turned to the Whigs who also, in the end, let him down. However, these setbacks did not set Crockett's idealism back:

"Crockett was a man—archetype of the frontier ideal—who acted courageously, albeit, sometimes quixotically, on self-evident convictions of the common sense imperative; and if this pitted him against more capable adversaries, he nevertheless went ahead resolutely as he saw fit" (Stiffler 139).

Once involved in politics, Crockett found that the "yoke" of the party was too much for his ideals. After his last election win, Crockett writes that "I am at liberty to vote as my conscience and judgment dictates to be right. without the yoke of any party on me, or the driver at my heels, with his whip in hand, commanding me to ge-wo-haw, just at his pleasure. Look at my arms, you will find no partyhand-cuff on them!" (210-11). Further, says, Crockett, "But you will find me standing up to my rack, as the people's faithful representative, and the public's most obedient, very humble servant" (211). Humble, naïve, faithful to his friends and community, Crockett tries to bring together

their values—freedom, honesty, and individual ideals—to remind his constituents why they elected him, and in hopes that they wouldn't turn on him for switching political parties. Crockett was only elected once more to Congress before being finally defeated and Crockett turned to Texas for his freedom and, ultimately, death.⁶

Lucy Jayne Botscharow offers a study of Crockett and pastoral ideals that is a summary of what many scholars have found about Crockett and his image:

Crockett seems to represent the ideal person. He is civilized and domesticated, but not overly so. The nature which is part of human nature has not been repressed. It has been channeled. Crockett is vigorous, active good-humored and down to earth. There is nothing pretentious or artificial about him. He stands in contrast to the overcivilized. The overcivilized have lost most of their natural qualities. They are artificial and weak. They are incapable of true emotion, and they are helpless in adversity. Such persons are depicted in both sets of narratives. They are Crockett's political opponents. All these men are described as being educated and effete, and most definitely not bear hunters. There are elegant, worldly and wealthy men. They take their superiority for granted and are inevitably surprised by Crockett's nimble wit. (85-86)

The ideal of, as referenced earlier, “country manners with a wit capable of undoing city types” thus embodying “values of the middle landscape” (Marx 133), is held as a high standard here again. These images of Crockett rely on, in the end, Crockett's “nimble wit.” He could be down to earth, a hunter, he could be like many of the frontiersmen he lives with—or riverboatmen like Mike Fink—but it is his ability to perform to and answer the easterners that puts him into political running. He has experienced the roughness of the backwoods, but has the ability to go into both worlds—this ability isn't to fully defeat the overcivilized and tricky easterners, but it marks the ultimate ideal of the pastoral man: wise, earthly and earthy, humble, idealistic. The pastoral man is a myth, to be sure, but like the myth of the “easily reachable” American Dream, it has its

icons who represent those who have reached it—or something like it. The ideal of the pastoral man furthers the nationalized ideal of a tamable, yet still “naturally wild,” American backcountry. Further, the performance of class requires a standard—in this case that standard is an ideal pastoral frontier that supports a national ideal of independence, social mobility, and self-education—all ideals accessible to few but desired by many. Crockett perpetuates this idea, because he reached it via politics. The purpose of his *Narrative*, though, is to show that he reached this ideal honestly, and under his own recognizance.

Crockett did lose his last political campaign, but in the process of attempting to reach an amorphous American ideal, he left us with a text that reflects the class performances involved in being a frontiersman. Richard Boyd Hauck argues that Crockett’s “life and legend reveals him to be less like Superman and more like Huck Finn: naïve, good-hearted, and commonsensible, but sometimes confused, often victimized, quick-witted, and fleet of foot, but always leaping from one jam into another” (188-89). Always witty, always laughing, Crockett’s text offers another place in American history where laughter covers a changing class structure. Morgan argues that “Clearly during the ascendant years of Jeffersonian and Jacksonian democracy, Jonathan appealed to or reinforced the beliefs of popular culture consumers who viewed the character as an American everyman. For a while, he did indeed—as has the more recent western hero—tell viewers about themselves and their society” (159). Davy Crockett’s *Narrative* gives us this same picture—but the picture is of a real man in a real place trying to attain a fictionalized ideal of American independence.

The performance of class involves props, or the ability to be without the props, of civilization, humiliation, self-regulation, repetition, and so much more. Each author in my dissertation offers a glimpse into the world of class performance in early American literature. Their humorous approaches were just one way in which their class anxieties were expressed. I would like to think that this work will lead to further discussion of how humor and class work together, even today. More importantly, I hope that my discussion will open avenues for more inquiry into other literatures that pose the problems of class beneath the surface of laughter. Many things make us laugh, sometimes innocently, but usually that which makes us laugh is motivated by intentions we forget to question. In questioning the laughter of early American texts, we can see the class divides of early American society being created and undermined—an important step to realizing how these divides are maintained in our world today.

Endnotes

¹ The multiple complexities of the ascendancy of Jackson and the Democrats is not the focus of this chapter, thus I will not be able to discuss the nuances of the political debates between the Whigs and Democrats. Neither party stood solely for or against agrarian policies or trade policies. The Jacksonians gained power in a time, however, when “the effort [for the Jacksonians] to recall agrarian republican innocence” fought against “a society drawn fatally to the main chance and the long chance, to the revolutionizing ways of acquisition, emulative consumptions, promotion, and speculation—the Jacksonian struggle to reconcile again the simple yeoman values with the free pursuit of economic interest, just as the two were splitting hopelessly apart” (Meyers 15).

² As a family member has repeatedly pointed out to me, David Crockett and the band of “freedom fighters” at the Alamo, with the exception of Jim Bowie, were illegal aliens in the land of Mexico at Crockett’s death.

³ Michael A. Lofaro argues “If you don’t think that [Crockett’s] grassroots image and down home style has had an effect, try to recall, the last time someone was elected who emphasized wealth, status, and family privilege as assets for holding public office” (“Davy Crockett, David Crockett, and Me” 100).

⁴ Jackson’s concern was to “restore the ways of the plain republican order. Dismantling of the unnatural and unjust bank and paper system is the necessary first step” (Meyers 28). Crockett may have agreed with Jackson on this point, but when Crockett became a Whig, his first task was to condemn this maneuver by Jackson and the Democrats.

⁵ Shackford and Folmsbee found that Crockett cast the only opposing Tennessee vote on the Indian Removal Bill of 1830 (205 fn 9).

⁶ Crockett’s political career was not extraordinarily successful. He voted and fought for measures that were dear to his own heart, such as his Tennessee land bill, which was not supported by the Jacksonians, and voted against the Indian Removal Bill of 1830 (Shackford and Folmsbee xiii); he lost in major political moves that cause him to break political promises to his constituents, as well as make himself unpopular with the Jacksonian democrats: “Crockett went to Congress a second time, on the strength of his arm, the keen glance of his eye, and his abounding humor. He was ready to fight for a vote, tell a story for a vote, but there is no evidence that he ever paid for a vote, and yet even his historian must admit that his career in Washington and New York was picturesque rather than important” (H. Garland 8). This picaresqueness was the ultimate downfall for Crockett—in the end his *Narrative* couldn’t keep the political machine from marching over him: “That the machinations of experienced politicians proved too much for Davy Crockett, that he was, in fact, only partially successful should neither obscure the good humored courage of his efforts nor endanger his rightful place in the folklore of American individualism” (Stiffler 138). This idea a heroic of Davy Crockett persists in

American memory because he is the ideal of a “real” man defeated by “machinations” and politicians too sneaky to be beaten. This innocence got him elected, lost his election, and made him an American icon. Like the figure of Brother Jonathan, who lost out to, among other things, “the homogenizing force of Victorian gentility,” Crockett’s earnestness came too late to help him win politically (Morgan 25). In the end, Morgan argues, the Brother Jonathan figure “came to be a fossilized shell whose only reference was to the past. From a folk character, Jonathan changed into a popular character who often—though not always—was manipulated by Whigs bent on controlling the language and meaning of the independent impulse Jonathan represented. Whig success, however, constituted his downfall, since to alter Jonathan’s language and humor was to destroy him” (Morgan 160). The shepherd was defeated by the machine.

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