BROTHER JONATHAN'S CITY COUSIN: THE URBAN WISE FOOL IN TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICAN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SATIRE

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ABSTRACT

BROTHER JONATHAN'S CITY COUSIN: THE URBAN WISE FOOL IN TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICAN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SATIRE

BY

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The wise fool is one of the oldest characters in literature. His roots can be traced back to such folk festivals as the Roman Saturnalia and various tribal rites around the world, including those of American Indians, Africans, Asians, and Europeans; and his literary history includes appearances in the Commedia Dell' Arte, medieval sotties, and the works of such important writers as Erasmus, Cervantes, Skelton, and Shakespeare.

In satire the wise fool character operates from a variety of perspectives, including those of the buffoon whose antics present the author's thesis by his burlesquing the subject of criticism, the "inspired idiot" or madman whose simplicity is seen as God-sent, and whose nonsense innocently expresses Truth, and the common-sense philosopher whose practical experience and mundane understanding is held to be superior to more esoteric and sophisticated knowledge. The character is effective as a satiric device because the general audience readily identifies and sympathizes with his ridicule of self-conscious seriousness and pomposity.

Traditionally he is immune to punishment for his antics and opinions, and his humor allows him to make satiric references which would otherwise infuriate the authorities or the public. His humor also allows him to treat sacred or serious things as absurd, and trivial matters as elevated and important.

The wise fool character has been popular in America throughout the country's history, perhaps because our democratic philosophy accepts the moral equality of the "average man" and the intellectual or member of the social and economic elite. Such early American plays as Royall Tyler's The Contrast (1787) presented wise fool characters like Brother Jonathan, a rustic farmer who is naive and uneducated, but morally superior to his European adversary. During the nineteenth century such common-sense philosophers as "Major Downing," "Petroleum V. Nasby," "Hosea Biglow," "Bill Arp," "Josh Billings," and numerous others launched social and political satire against such things as war, slavery, current political policies, graft, and social pretension.

The nineteenth-century American wise fool was usually a rural figure, identified by a rustic dialect, who ridiculed the corruption of city and national authorities and leaders. His dialect also provided him opportunity to generate humor and ridicule through the employment of puns, malapropisms, double entendres, and other linguistic distortions. His other techniques included the use of the tall tale, fantasy, ludicrous description, and the "quip," or short joke which

created a surprise, "snub-ending" for which American humor is noted.

At the end of the century, the rustic sage began to disappear from the American literary scene, though in the person of Will Rogers and a few others, the archetype had some representation. The decline of this figure did not, however, signify the end of the wise fool character in American social and political satire for in the persons of Finley Peter Dunne's "Mr. Dooley," Leo Rosten's "Hyman Kaplan," Langston Hughes's "Jesse B. Semple" ("Simple"), and Art Buchwald he survived throughout the twentieth century, to the present day.

Dunne's Irish-American wise fool was a resident of Chicago whose shrewd commentary dealt with urban and national political issues. He was noted also for his quotable insights into basic human nature. Rosten presented a Jewish-American character, from New York, who burlesqued the absurdities of formal English, and exposed the pedantry and lack of imagination of the academician. Hughes's "Simple" offered a New York Negro-American's perspective, in the wise fool manner, and Art Buchwald's newspaper columns on Washington and Paris society and national politics represent the continuance of this tradition in contemporary writing. The work of these four satirists, among others, helps prove that the contention that native American humor has been in an eclipse during the twentieth century is exaggerated, if not entirely erroneous.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The similarity of Brother Jonathan, the American comic figure of the rustic, simple, "common sense" character so often used for social and political satire, and the European tradition of comic clowns and fools, has not gone entirely unnoted in this country. As early as a generation before the Civil War, reports Benjamin T. Spencer in The Quest For Nationality, ". . . the editor of the North American Review, William Tudor, was convinced that European clowns had their counterparts in America. . . ." (p. 140). It does seem fair to say, however, that students of American literature have yet to study carefully the archetypal nature of their local wise fool, and the specific relationship of his anthropological and literary roots to both the structure and perspective of the satire in which he has been involved. It is equally correct and important to note that by limiting our recognition of Brother Jonathan to the role of a late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century rural bumpkin, we miss the full scope and import of an important motif which has had both a wider and more current usage.

This study is intended to demonstrate the universality of the wise fool motif by placing the creations of four

twentieth-century humorists, Finley Peter Dunne, Leo Rosten, Langston Hughes, and Art Buchwald, whose setting is urban rather than rural and whose spokesmen are superficially quite alien to the position of the native, rustic "country-bumpkin," in the full context and tradition of the wise fool archetype from its earliest anthropological origins, through its literary history in Medieval and Renaissance Europe, and its early American appearance in the person of Brother Jonathan and allied characters. In so doing we will have the opportunity to study the composition of the social and political satire which emerges from this context and tradition, and perhaps discover the sources of its popularity and success in this country.

Because the tradition of the wise fool is such an ancient and widely used one, the composition of this character is complex and multi-faceted. The complexity is increased by certain logical developments within the character himself. The study of this complex and often cloudy background material proves its usefulness when we recognize the merging of various strains of myth, popular belief, and social and literary convention, and their effects on the behavior of the American wise fool characters. Thus we find that the authority of the fool emerged from ancient tribal and religious attitudes, and his popularity and position <u>vis</u> a <u>vis</u> his audience resulted from various social and historical phenomena including the Renaissance, Reformation, and American Revolution. Additionally, we see that the

dimensions of his literary personality have developed from a tradition that includes the contributions of such significant writers as Erasmus, Cervantes, Rabelais, and Shakespeare.

I should like to express my sincere thanks to Professors John D. Russell and Carol Carlisle of the University of South Carolina, in whose classes I first became interested both in satire and in the wise fool, and Professors Russel B. Nye, Clyde E. Henson, Douglas T. Miller, and Joseph J. Waldmeir who have aided me in both this specific endeavor and in numerous other ways over the past few years. Additionally, engaging in a project such as this one has made me aware that the acknowledgments of the contributions of the author's spouse which so often preface academic studies are far more than perfunctory courtesies. The assistance of my wife, Joan, both material and spiritual, is indeed significant enough to warrant the statement that it would not have been possible for me to complete this study without it.

Chapter I

THE BACKGROUNDS OF THE WISE FOOL CHARACTER, AND HIS EARLY LITERARY HISTORY

It is both interesting and revealing to note that the origins of the character we call the wise fool are apparently closely parallel to the origins of satire itself. This parallel does not necessarily suggest a direct historical connection between the two, for one may find as much evidence to deny as to affirm such an assumption. Rather such a parallel might lead us to recognize that the universal impulse to correct a society through verbal condemnation of it, and the equally universal impulse to engage in celebrations characterized by licentious behavior, the inversion and burlesque of normal social order and convention, and a temporary lapse of sanity and sobriety, both appeal to very fundamental human and social forces. It reminds us that the traditions of literature are often governed by a complex network of unspoken and subliminal beliefs and inclinations, which help account for its structure, direction, and nature.

Robert C. Elliott, in the first two chapters of his important book, The Power of Satire; Magic, Ritual, Art, discusses the earliest records of satiric practice in Grecian, Arabian, Irish, and other civilizations, and finds that the origins of satire are connected with certain religious beliefs and attitudes toward magic, all of which suggest the acceptance of the concept that social criticism has direct physical consequences (pp. 3-47). The early satirist,

utilizing invective rather than humor, appealed to a widely held belief that verbal criticism was a vital force in society. This belief evolved from the primitive attacks of such early satirists as Archilocus, the Greek, and various Irish bards, to more formal festivals where social criticism was prominently featured, and finally to the literary satire that we find in the modern world.

The story of the development of the concept of the wise fool also begins with apparently universal primitive beliefs. Scholars have discovered remarkably similar rites of celebration involving the inversion of normal social order and the permission of social criticism and licentious behavior, among civilizations in all times and areas of the world, including American Indians, Asians, Ancient Irish, Persians, Hebrews, Greeks, Romans, and tribal Europeans.[1] Sir James George Frazer's monumental study, The Golden Bough (especially Part VI, "The Scapegoat") provides us with a thorough and fascinating account of these rites, using the Roman Saturnalia as the focal point of comparison. He describes the Saturnalia as

> . . . an annual period of license when the customary restraints of law and morality are thrown aside, when the whole population give themselves up to extravagant mirth and jollity, and when the darker passions find vent which would never be allowed them in the more staid and sober course of ordinary life. (p. 306)

Frazer describes the Saturnalia and parallel rites in Persian, Aztec, Egyptian, Buddhist, Greek, and Hebrew festivals, as connected with fertility and agricultural

concerns, and characterized by the practice of social inversion that is so important to the development of the wise fool. It is impossible to do justice here to the study of the belief-structure behind this complex social phenomenon, but we must note that the concept of the wise fool appears to be closely related to the practice, in these primitive agricultural rites, of selecting a minor member of society, perhaps a common farmer or soldier, elevating him to the position of "king for a day," and allowing him to rule over festivities characterized by absolute license (perhaps originally as consolation for the execution which followed his transient glory), mirth, and inevitably, social criticism and parody of social convention.

From this ancient tradition of a "Lord of Misrule," allowed this absolute license, a lengthy history, which we will trace here briefly, of social criticism connected with ceremonies including the temporary elevation of a chosen "common man" developed. It is easy to see in these early rituals the origin of the character's immunity, and the respect with which he is accustomed to being treated by the populace.

To this anthropological tradition of satire within the context of primitive quasi-religious rites, one must first add a few more of the ingredients which emerge from popular and religious ideas concerning madness and folly in the ancient world. There is an extremely interesting ambiguity in these attitudes that provides some of the primary features

of the composition of the wise fool. The ambiguity lies in the common belief of primitive societies that madness and folly, while being in themselves reprehensible characteristics, might at certain times and in certain ways provide the afflicted man with a variety of moral and metaphysical insights that are denied to so-called "normal" people. The concept resembles, in many respects, the time-honored notion that innocent children may be inadvertently more receptive to truth than their more sophisticated seniors. One may find beliefs of this sort expressed in the thought of ancient Greece, but it is to the Judaeo-Christian tradition, especially to later Christian philosophy, that one must turn for the clearest picture of these concepts as operational premises.

As one would expect to find, madness and folly are usually considered in the Judaeo-Christian tradition as the antithesis of wisdom, understanding, and morality. However when we examine certain Biblical writings, the source of the later ambiguity is evident, since it is often expressed that, in a theological sense, the aspiration toward wisdom is inherently futile and vain. Only God Himself, we are instructed, may be truly wise, and the only portion allotted to temporal man is a recognition of his condition of defined insufficiency, a perception requiring no vast intellectual achievements. Therefore the lowly fool may be even closer to theological truth than the wise man, since at least the former has no delusions about his ability to arrive at true

Wisdom. The fool, by avoiding the sin of Lucifer and of Adam and Eve, is actually closer to salvation and God's protection and love, than any other human being. A full historical account of the development of this concept is neither necessary nor feasible here. One may find it illustrated nicely in Ecclesiastes, which despite its many denunciations of folly and madness as evils to be avoided by the righteous man, also contains the admonition, "And I applied my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a striving after wind. For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow" (1:17-18).

In Christian thought, particularly of the medieval period, the concept of the "Fool in Christ," the dictum to "suffer fools gladly," and the idea that religious truth is to be found in instinctive acceptance and in naive belief rather than any intellectual understanding developed and existed parallel to scholasticism, as it later existed apart from, but parallel to Renaissance humanism.[2] This ambivalence toward madness and folly presents a problem (to be dealt with subsequently) of the simultaneous use of the term "fool" to connote both a negative, reprehensible quality, and an extremely positive and admirable one. As Barbara Swain puts it, in her book Fools and Folly During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance:

> To the conventional moralist and theologian the fool was an object of scorn. . . . But the conventional moralists and theologians were not the only writers

> to present the fool. Story-tellers and dramatists and poets as well as mystics and sceptics made use of him. In their accounts of his nature, his deficiencies often proved sources of power, and he was as often applauded as scorned. (p. 27)

But before examining this literary and didactic use of the fool, there is a related dimension to this concept that must be noted. It is perhaps one that comes directly from the Judaeo-Christian ideas, but possibly it is even more universally sanctioned: the belief in the magical and oracular potentials and powers of the madman.[3] In the words of Enid Welsford, in The Fool; His Social and Literary History:

> The madman is not always regarded as an object of commiseration. On the contrary there is a widespread notion which is not yet quite extinct that the lunatic is an awe-inspiring figure whose reason has ceased to function normally because he has become the mouthpiece of a spirit, or power external to himself, and so has access to hidden knowledge. . . . (p. 76)

From the three cultural phenomena discussed above, the Saturnalia and allied festivals, the ambiguous attitudes toward folly and madness in religious thought, and the equally complicated superstition and belief concerning the magical potential of madness, two traditions emerge that lead ultimately to a literary use of the wise fool. These are 1) the existence of professional fools and madmen (as well as dwarfs and other "grotesques") who are either kept by wealthy men or who travel about on their own, in either case providing entertainment through their "foolish" antics, and 2) the later continuation of various versions of

fool-festivals, which by the middle ages obscured most of the religious and magical qualities of the ancient fertility rites, but which retain many of their physical characteristics.

Enid Welsford traces the custom of keeping dwarfs, fools, and "grotesques" from the Grecian parasites, through Roman house-fools, to court-fools in medieval Europe (pp. 3-28). These professional "jesters" were originally actual "naturals," or genuinely afflicted or deformed individuals whose coarse antics amused those who availed themselves of the service. A combination of factors including the sincere affection of the employer, the above-discussed ambivalence toward madness and folly, and the universal tendency toward engaging in satire resulted in the policy of immunity for the jester. Quite logically, therefore, they could and did safely ridicule society, lampoon individuals, and offer satiric comment of contemporary religious and political affairs. Before long the posture of the fool was adopted by perfectly sane, often truly ingenious individuals for professional and political reasons. For example Enid Welsford notes:

> In Germany, as in other countries, the court-fools fall into two main classes, the real naturals, very often of peasant origin, and the witty impudent men who assumed folly as a convenient method of money making. . . . If we may believe the jest books, many of the fools at the German court were clever, observant men, deeply engaged in the religious controversies of the time. (pp. 138-139)

Thus through the middle ages there developed a class of professional buffoons who used the mask of folly as a shield from which they might launch social and political satire with impunity. For the sake of providing popular entertainment, these buffoons often formed traveling companies with shows consisting of juggling, song, and other light entertainment interspersed with humorous skits and anecdotes that could be bitingly and relevantly satiric. According to Barbara Swain, "Some early groups of semi-professional French actors adopted the costume and name of fool and so obtained a particular satirical and moral effect in certain of their plays, as well as the freedom to rough-house and to criticize the authorities" (p. 54). Gradually these primitive skits and jokes evolved into more sophisticated dramatic endeavors.

If the tradition of the court fool may be cited as a contributing factor to the development of wise fool literature, the influence of the Feast of Fools and of the Fool Societies provides an influence every bit as obvious and significant. As is noted by Welsford, Swain, Frazer et al., these medieval folk festivals and folly-celebrations were the clear descendants of ancient agricultural rites. As time progressed these festivals were transformed from mysterious fertility ceremonies to occasions for gaiety and the release of pent-up social tensions, which included satire along with other forms of "anti-social" and licentious

behavior. This transformation has been described by Enid Welsford:

> The growth of towns, the increasing importance of the bourgoise, the guild movement, the spread of education, did not leave the folk festivals unchanged. When a lively young clerk took the part of the traditional fool, he was not likely to rest content with an unintelligent repetition of the actions of his predecessors; on the contrary the role would afford him an admirable opportunity for dramatic experiment and satirical comment. (p. 200)

From these fool festivals there grew organizations called "Joyous Societies," which were, according to Welsford, ". . . associations of young men who adopted the traditional fool's dress of motley, eared hoods, bells and bauble and organized themselves into kingdoms under the rule of an annually elected monarch known as Prince des Sots, Mere-Folle, Abbe de Malgouverne etc. . . ." (p. 205). Involved with the fool festivals and fool societies were performances of religious parodies in which members of the lower orders of the clergy satirized either the church hierarchy or aspects of the religious service itself, and during which commoners and/or fools were elevated to temporary positions of ecclesiastical mock-grandeur. These various medieval customs developed into the "sottie," a more formalized wise fool satire that will be described below, and which affected the development of other forms of medieval drama significantly.

Before we can turn to our examination of the wise fool's literary history, however, one final aspect of the evolution of the character must be accounted for, if we are fully to

understand all of the subtleties of his composition. Thus far we have been dealing with fools-proper, whether real or pretended, i.e., characters representing either witlessness or madness. During the Renaissance, and with further encouragement from the Reformation, an additional dimension to the character of the fool was brought forward. This development is the tradition, equally ancient in origin, which presents the simple, rustic, unlettered country "plowman" in a role that is essentially quite similar to the one that we have been describing for the fool. There are philosophical nuances that separate the simpleton from the simpleman, but it was inevitable that the two would often be merged into a single character, or that the distinctions between the two would often be obscured. Thus the simple farmer or tradesman was accorded the same immunity and satirical privilege that the fool claimed. Arthur Ray Heiserman discusses this phenomenon in his book, Skelton and Satire:

> Generations of satirists had attacked the vices--particularly the clerical vices--of their times by assuming the role of the simple, unlettered countryman--the plowman whose virtue was itself an affront to the pride of nobleman, officer, and prelate. Such a persona could do nothing but speak out true and plain; he was no learned, weary poet falling into elaborate allegorical dreams. . . . (p. 192)

The inclusion of the rustic, pastoral, satiric mode into the range of the fool's postures and traditions is of an importance difficult to over-emphasize.[4]

Borrowing liberally from all of the traditions discussed above, a rich treasure of folkloric and literary uses of the

fool and rustic character for didactic and expository purposes developed. In the case of folk-tale appearances alone, Stith Thompson has indexed considerably more than one-thousand motifs in which the message is conveyed either by exhibiting folly, contrasting folly with wisdom, or using folly as an exposer of pretense and false wisdom.[5] It is, however, to the literary history of the wise fool that we may most fruitfully turn to study the multi-faceted, complex satiric figure in operation.

Since this study is basically concerned with twentieth-century urban American versions of wise fool satire, it is not within its scope to provide a detailed account of the full literary history of the motif, but a brief examination of several of the important examples from earlier writing is essential to an appropriate understanding of its operation. Our account of this history rightfully begins with medieval drama. In the very thorough study, The Medieval Stage, E. K. Chambers carefully traces the relationship of the above-mentioned satiric "sotties" to earlier folk festivals and religious rites (see Chapter IV). Concerning the popular dramas he notes, "Their full significance only appears when they are regarded as fragments of forgotten cults, the naive cults addressed by a primitive folk to the beneficent deities of field, wood and river, or the shadowy populace of its own dreams" (p. 94). From the "sotties" the fool found his way even into miracle and mystery plays, contributing substantially to the character, Vice, as well as to others.

Two aspects of the wise fool's medieval stage career are of particular interest to us here: the first is his enormous popularity and his wide appeal to unsophisticated audiences, a feature that is probably due as much to humorous antics as to any ideological reasons, the second is the increasing tendency for literary artists to turn to the fool for sober, even entirely non-humorous social and political satire. Between the quasi-comical satire of the popular drama and the religio-political satire of more sober literary endeavors, the fool indeed had a varied and important career in medieval literature.

Concerning the reasons for this wide popularity of the wise fool, Walter Kaiser notes:

> It is not hard to see how the humor he provided and the impunity he enjoyed made him irresistible to the literary imagination. His beguiling, child-like appeal guaranteed him the sympathy of the audience, and at the same time his traditional freedom from punishment made it possible for the author to have him speak out boldly. . . . Thus the license of the natural fool was appropriated for the artificial fool; his nonconformity was turned into iconoclasm, his naturalism into anarchy, and his frankness into satire. (p. 7)

Since there is no clearly defined and generally accepted dividing line between humor and satire, or for that matter between satire and didactic invective, it is often difficult to classify the literature that utilizes the wise fool in these terms. For the satirist, however, the general tendency appears to be to use the fool to deal with matters so serious and so realistic that he either loses, or all but loses, his persona as a fool. In many of the works that we

will be studying, we will find this "drift" in which the character evolves away from the very condition that provides his virtues as a literary device. It is sometimes hard to remember that the character of the fool is in any way associated with Folly, since the figure has become the obvious and absolute spokesman for Wisdom and Reality.[6]

To demonstrate this range of the wise fool from a clown with only the barest and most tenuous claims to wisdom, to a popular philosopher far removed from folly, one should trace the development of the role of Harlequin and his family, and the evolution of the character of Pulcinella in the commedia dell' arte from the fourteenth through eighteenth centuries. The commedia dell' arte was, in its earliest appearance, popular theatre that existed alongside the professional theatre of its time. It most probably is a development of the Roman Atellanae which have been described as "comedies and popular farces, parodies and political satire."[7] Several of the characters of the commedia dell' arte play an important role in the development of the dramatic use of the wise fool, particularly the Zanni, or comic servants (of which Harlequin is the most famous), and the scoundrel-fool Pulcinella. The Zanni of the commedia dell' arte range from pure simpletons whose behavior is exclusively physical, humorous buffoonery, to more sophisticated wise fools who achieve satiric and didactic results from lengthy and rather complex verbal duels with such personages as the Captain and the Doctor.

Zanni is a name sometimes used as a proper name for the comic servant, but the Zanni is also the term used to describe the role of the more familiar comic character of the commedia dell' arte, Harlequin. As Maurice Sand records in The History of the Harlequinade, Harlequin, and his "family" of similar characters, evolved over four centuries from the acrobatic buffoon to the wit and philosopher sans diploma (p. 65). The history of the character Pulcinella is also of considerable interest since in his very composition we find reflection of the ambivalent tendencies of literary wise fools. As Pierre Louis Duchartre describes him, Pulcinella is an inherently schizophrenic figure as the result of his unfortunately having had two fathers! "The 'upper' Pulcinella is intelligent, sensual, sly, keen; in him the blood of Bucco predominates. The 'lower' Pulcinella is a dull and coarse bumpkin" (p. 212). It is important to note that since the characters of Pulcinella and Harlequin were very widely known throughout the Europe of the fifteenth through the eighteenth century, the commedia dell' arte thus has had a profound direct influence on the traditions of the wise fool.

Throughout the Renaissance we find the fool, both as wise fool and as the butt of critical laughter, playing a large role in didactic and satiric literature. Sebastian Brant's Narrenschiff (known in England through Barclay's translation, The Ship of Fools) used the fool negatively, as symbol of the world's various follies and errors, presented in a roll-call of allegorical characters dressed in

motley (Swain, pp. 114ff.). Though Narrenschiff is important, largely because it was so widely known, it is to Desiderius Erasmus' The Praise of Folly that we turn for the first example of wise fool satire that is truly complex and significant. Analysis of The Praise of Folly is primarily useful to this study because it provides the opportunity of examining the full range of the character, as well as the problem of his drift or loss of persona.

As Walter Kaiser tells us:

> . . . Erasmus may be said to have given Europe the paradox of the Wise Fool. For though that personified oxymoron is at least as old as Socrates and Christ, and though its medieval ancestors and apologists are legion, its first modern, and most influential appearance is as the figure of Stultitia in the Moriae Encomium. (p. 21)

A study of The Praise of Folly provides an excellent opportunity to view the literary problems that stem from the ambiguous and complex tradition of the wise fool. As noted previously, this problem is often the result of a dual view of the fool as subject or representative of folly, and as exposer and critic of it. Thus Stultitia, in Erasmus' work, functions both as a negative fool whose oratory illustrates concepts with which the author disagrees, and as a wise fool whose insights present those Erasmus wishes to affirm. Hoyt Hopewell Hudson's helpful introduction to one of the more readily available translations of The Praise of Folly sheds some light on this problem by noting that Stultitia is consistently treated as a fool in the work, but she avails herself of the full scope of the fool's accepted stances, and

is thus allowed accidental flashes of wisdom and understanding that in no way change her essential character. Thus:

> . . . in the early part of the speech she seems to be the wicked folly of Christian and Hebrew morality; farther on she embodies a conception gained from the good-natured but shrewd fool of the courts; and finally (though not in the peroration) she becomes Christian folly, a conception having kinship with the tradition and doctrine of St. Francis of Assisi. (p. xxv)

Erasmus does not seem to have been at all disturbed by the paradoxical nature of his central character, though the dual nature of his Folly causes considerable problems for the reader who is not familiar with the philosophical positions taken elsewhere by the author. One wonders whether Erasmus' contemporary audience was fully aware of exactly what opinions they were supposed to derive from a reading of the work.

Before turning to the other truly outstanding example of the literary use of the wise fool, we might mention two other writers whose works contributed significantly to the literary tradition, Rabelais and Skelton. Rabelais, in the third book of Gargantua and Pantagruel, handles the problem of the fool's split persona that we have discussed above by distributing his duties among three different characters. As Kaiser notes:

> Though Panurge is the fool par excellence, in one sense or another every character in the Tiers Livre, with the possible exception of Gargantua, is a fool. (p. 103)
>
> Thus, in Rabelais' hands, the Erasmian fool is split up. By means of her irony, Stultitia was able simultaneously to be the foolish and the wise fool;

> but when, in the drama of Rabelais' narrative, these two contradictory types of fool confront each other, each is personified by a separate character. (pp. 127-128)

We emphasize this idea of the division of duty here because it is a method quite frequently employed by the American satirists in the wise fool tradition. Skelton's Colyn Cloute and other rustic fools contribute another important feature of the American fools, i.e., the usual reliance upon the rural posture, the plowman image, for the fool's identifying feature.

William Shakespeare was not the first Elizabethan dramatist to avail himself of the tradition of the wise fool for comic and satiric purposes, but he was in this, as in the other aspects of his art, the most important and noteworthy.[8] Scholars and critics such as J. B. Priestley, Walter Kaiser, Oscar Campbell, and Robert Hillis Goldsmith have quite thoroughly analyzed the Shakespearean contribution to the tradition, which includes both actual fool-characters such as Touchstone, Feste, and Lear's Fool, and others who are not really wise fools, in the main, but who have elements of the fool's nature in their personalities. The character most frequently discussed in this respect is Falstaff. Shakespeare presents virtually every dimension of the wise fool, from the clowning bumpkin to the inspired jester. As Goldsmith puts it:

> Shakespeare uses the tradition of the fool but transcends it. He gives us not merely a theatrical type but four complex and individual characters. Each of the four--Touchstone, Lavache, Feste, and Lear's Fool --is clearly differentiated from the others. I have

> tried to show that Touchstone is a comic realist astray in the forest of Romance, that Feste is an artist who observes the golden mean in loving and laughing, and that Lear's Fool embodies the Christian doctrine of wise folly on abandoning his prudence to follow his sick King. (p. vii)

Much of the credit for the survival of the full range of wise fool literature in America must go to the plays of Shakespeare, which exhibit graphically the potential of the character for comedy, satire, and philosophy.

What, then, are the basic characteristics and technique of wise fool social and political satire as one finds it in modern literature? The first and perhaps foremost quality of the fool is his license, which has derived from the impunity with which he spoke in the earlier periods to a more subtle allowance. In modern satire the license no longer necessarily affords the author disguise of intent or actual physical protection from punishment for verbal offenses, but rather it renders iconoclastic references concerning serious matters more palatable and less shocking or frightening to the audience than they would be if they came from the lips of a character less well-liked and traditionally tolerated than the wise fool. Leonard Feinberg writes in his book, Introduction to Satire, that the satirist uses the fool to

> . . . achieve distortion, indirection, and protection from the censor by pretending that it is the fool rather than the satirist speaking. The fool intersperses unpopular and forbidden truths among genuinely foolish remarks. And like the child and clown, who presumably do not know any better, the fool is permitted to express ideas which would be dangerous or vulgar in the mouths of 'normal' adults. (pp. 49-50)

Thus from sources quite similar to those which originally gave him license to speak, the fool also derives identification with his audience, using here the humility that he obtains by virtue of the pastoral aspect of his tradition, saying to the audience in effect, "Accept what I have to say since I am one of you, and we both know that our 'common sense' is the only true key to understanding."

The wise fool uses, in addition to his license to speak and his identification with his audience, the humor that may emerge from his antics and comments. From the persona of the wise fool the tendency to burlesque flows naturally. Exaggeration, understatement, reductio ad absurdum, paradox and irony, and other humorous devices are, by definition of his character, part of his bag of tricks; thus they are not prone to losing their effectiveness by appearing incongruous or false when they are used to satirize. The fool's burlesque ranges from "low burlesque" in which he parodies, by distorted emulation, the conventions of society or the actions and opinions of his adversary, to "high burlesque" in which he ridicules his subject by comparing it to a more rational norm.[9]

Two terms that are often used by literary critics who write on the nature of comedy and satire, eiron and alazon, apply usefully to the fool's burlesque techniques.[10] The wise fool may be used either in the role of the eiron, or the little man who triumphs over the giant and belittles him; or he may be the alazon, reduced to the position of

the fool by the obvious folly of his pretentious behavior. In either role he manages to make the audience regard the target of the satire as ludicrous.

The fool is admirably suited to satirizing by accident as well as by intent. An amusing example of how he uses his ignorance to expose the victim has been recorded by Stith Thompson, in the Folk-motif entitled "The King no Priest's Son." "A Pope in writing to a King says, 'To our dear son Fredrick.' Upon hearing this the fool cries out, 'that is a lie; he is no priest's son. I knew his father and mother and they were both honest people" (p. 154, J.1827). After all one cannot expect a fool to be aware of the convention of a priest addressing his parishioners as "my son," so the fool quite "innocently" makes his comments about the clergy. When he operates by intent, the fool is more likely to shed the motley in favor of the farmer's or worker's overalls, scratching his head and prefacing his bombshells with words to the effect of "I don't know too much about that but. . . ." In this position the fool asserts that his mundane experience makes him ironically more qualified to comment on important matters than his more sophisticated adversary.

The following chapters examine the construction and techniques of the wise fool satire as they have appeared in American literature, from the early character, Brother Jonathan, a rustic used both as a bumpkin and as a philosopher. They include examination of the later nineteenth-century humorists who adopted the persona of fool for the purposes

of social and political commentary, and more detailed analysis of the appearance of this "old wine" in a "new bottle" of the urban fool, an immigrant or new-comer to the sophisticated world of the city, whose method of exposing folly borrows from the many centuries of wise fool beliefs and wise fool literature. We will find that the modern wise fool's techniques have varied very little from those used by his predecessors, and even his basic attitudes are strikingly similar to those used by earlier authors to expose pomposity and pretense from a "down-to-earth" perspective.

Notes

[1]Most of the works that deal with the fool cited in the Bibliography begin with a survey of these anthropological phenomena, but see here particularly Sir James George Frazer, The Golden Bough (London, 1913), Vol. 9, pp. 306ff.; Peter Farb, Man's Rise to Civilization (New York, 1968), pp. 92ff.; Lucille Hoerr Charles, "The Clown's Function," Journal of American Folklore, 58 (January, 1945), 25-34.

[2]These concepts and their relationship to the ideas of Saint Paul and other Christian thinkers is discussed by Walter Kaiser, Praisers of Folly (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), p. 8.

[3]In a useful but highly technical study entitled Madness and Civilization (New York, 1967), Michael Foucault accounts for this phenomenon by asserting that it appeals to a universal and psychologically inherent need for a concept of knowledge that provides for intuitive, highly abstract, non-logical, and mystical thought, eschewing both rational and empirical methodology (p. 29). Further study and inquiry into these psychological and ideological bases of anti-intellectualism would help explain the complex human impulses that lie behind the wise fool's popularity.

[4]The intellectual dimensions of this idea and its relationship to the pastoral mode, European thought, and the history of anti-intellectualism is an area which is quite fascinating, but peripheral to this paper. Eugene Rice, Jr. makes some pertinent comments in his book, The Renaissance Idea of Wisdom (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), pp. 18-28.

[5]Motif Index of Folk Literature, Vol. 4, items J.1700-J.2749 (Bloomington, 1955), pp. 137-229.

[6]Michael Foucault's comments on the serious wise fools illustrate this point:

> In farces and soties, the character of the madman, the Fool, or the Simpleton assumes more and more importance. He is no longer simply a ridiculous and familiar silhouette in the wings: he stands center stage as the guardian of truth --playing here a role which is the complement and converse of that taken by madness in the tales and the satires. If folly leads each man into a blindness where he is lost, the madman, on the contrary reminds each man of his truth. . . .

Madness and Civilization, p. 23.

[7]Pierre Louis Duchartre, The Italian Comedy (New York, 1966), p. 18.

[8]Olive Mary Busby, Studies in the Development of the Fool in the Elizabethan Drama (London, 1923); Louis B. Wright, "Madmen as Performers on the Elizabethan Stage," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 30 (1931), 48-54.

[9]Useful definitions of these terms are provided in Meyer Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms (New York, 1957), pp. 9-11. A helpful discussion of the operation of satire, in these respects, is found in the chapter "The Mythos of Winter; Irony and Satire," in Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton, 1957), pp. 223-239.

[10]David Worcester, The Art of Satire (New York, 1960), p. 92.

> "The principal character types in Greek comedy are the buffoon, who makes fun for others, the ironical man, who makes fun for himself, and the imposter. The ironical man is called the eiron, or foxy, crafty one. He is a specialist in understatement; he is the close-mouthed Yankee who has no objection to being thought a fool. He will even encourage his detractors by speaking in a thick dialect, tugging his forelock obsequiously, or otherwise depreciating himself. The imposter, or alazon, representing the principle of overstatement, struts about in false security venting his heavy wit and braggadocio on the eiron. But the gods love a shining mark--everyone knows that--and the eiron grins secretly, the while his dense manner encourages his adversary to even greater extravagances. When fate has been tempted beyond endurance, the blow falls."

Chapter II

THE RURAL WISE FOOL IN AMERICA THROUGH THE NINETEENTH CENTURY: A BRIEF SKETCH

The concept of the wise fool has found frequent and varied expression during the course of the history of the United States. Early American social and literary history displays many examples of each of the aspects of this concept that were discussed in the first chapter. It is not surprising that the Christian concept of inspired folly is frequently expressed by American Puritan and other religious writers. John Cotton's sermon, "Purchasing Christ," provides an illustration of this idea that is not atypical: "If a man will be content to forsake all for Christ, he must first be a foole, and be content to be counted a foole, and heare every carnall man to count him a foole."[1]

Even the heritage of the folk festival, with its decidedly unpuritanical features was not entirely unknown in America. The incident at Merrymount, made famous (or rather infamous) by William Bradford's account of it in his history and by Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story "The Maypole of Merrymount," proves the existence of covert celebrations of this sort, despite official disapproval. As Bradford describes the incident,

> And Morton became Lord of Misrule, and maintained (as it were) a schoole of Atheisme. . . . They allso set up a maypole, drinking and dancing aboute it many days togeather, inviting the Indean women, for their consorts, dancing and frisking togither (like so many fairies, or furies rather;) and worse

> practises. As if they had anew revived and celebrated the feasts of the Roman Goddes Flora, or the beastly practieses of the madd Bacchinalians.[2]

Similarly one finds in America, a belief in the magical and supernatural powers of the madman, more often used to justify non-conformist or eccentric behavior than to provide prophecy. Such sentiments are expressed in literature by Emily Dickinson's "Much madness is divinest Sense/To a discerning Eye."[3] As is so often the case, though the more modern expression of the belief may have lost its direct reference to the original superstition, its effect relies on an unspoken and perhaps unconscious acceptance of ideas which are passed on through tradition.

The most significant American expression of the various concepts of the wise fool, however, is found in the promotion of the "common man," or "plowman," as a rustic philosopher, and in the assertion of the value of "natural knowledge" as opposed to authoritarian or empirical knowledge.[4] As Thomas Jefferson phrased it in an often-quoted statement, "State a moral case to a ploughman and a professor. The former will decide it as well, and often better than the latter, because he has not been led astray by artificial rules."[5] As John William Ward points out, this belief was one of the sustaining forces behind the popularity of Andrew Jackson; it directed the tone of Jackson's political campaigns and the various myths which grew up around him. The posture of "Nature's Nobleman" proved so popular and politically useful

that it was eventually adopted by anti-Jacksonian Whigs, and became an indelible part of the national ideology.

Soon Americans were advertising their primary virtues in terms of an image that had been used by British and Continental critics of democracy to ridicule the citizens of the new nation. Jonathan, the archetypal bumpkin, became a national heroic symbol.[6] As Richard Dorson puts it, in his article "The Yankee on the Stage,"

> With the rapidly mounting confidence of the early decades of the nineteenth century, noisily voiced in strident tones of Jacksonian democracy and the cult of the common man, the nation began to vaunt the uncouth image of itself. It found a secret pride in the bluntness and the cunning attributed to its stage likeness. The maundering vagabond was elevated to a bumpkin hero. Jonathan took his place with other crude and vigorous personalities in the gallery of heroes in homespun exalted by the boisterous thirties and the roaring forties. . . . (pp. 489-490)

In addition to the early literary use of the wise fool, it should be noted that the fool was also widely used in American folk tales and jokes in a manner quite similar to the European tradition discussed in Chapter One.[7] This folk tradition doubtlessly contributed considerably to both the construction of literary wise-fool satire and its acceptance by the American public. It should also be mentioned that the traditions of formal, classical satire were not unknown in America, and they too certainly aided in the development of wise-fool satire.[8]

From this background of religious, social, and cultural tradition, an archetypal American wise fool character soon

emerged to become one of the most prominent features of early American literature. One finds him most often, during these early years, as a regional "local color" type, as Yankee, Southern farmer, or Western backwoodsman. He also appears, however, as the universal simpleton or clown, as in the periodical, "The Fool." In this early satiric journal, the "editor," who is named "T. Brainless," informs us, "Now know all Fools by these Presents that I intend to keep my own secrets, and treat brother fools according to their folly."[9] The satiric commentary is then presented in the form of letters to the editor sent by such personages as "Simon Simple," "Dick Hairbrain," and "Harry Softskull."

These early figures were, as in the cases of many of the early European wise fools (e.g., Harlequin in the _commedia dell' arte_), basically negative, brainless bumpkins who exposed folly through their own ludicrous behavior, evolving only later to the higher stages of the wise fool. As Jennette Tandy writes in _Crackerbox Philosophers in American Humor and Satire_,

> The provincial philosopher is the most timeworn of our American character types. He has had full expression since his emergence as comic Yankee and Southerner. In each generation he has made fresh appearance as a jester, censor, and guide. After long periods of experimentation, his representation has narrowed down to the humble sage. (p. 172)

The first really important wise fool character in American literature is Brother Jonathan, the Yankee stage-bumpkin/rustic sage. The specific origin of the name Jonathan, and the direct connections between the Yankee of

the American stage and his foreign antecedents is a widely debated subject.[10] The stage-Yankee, whatever his debt to British, Irish, and other early sources might be, is a direct descendant of the central character of early New England folk tales. These tales presented the Yankee in a variety of ways, ranging from the role of purely comic bumpkin, through shrewd rustic peddler and practical joker, to unlettered philosopher. Richard Dorson introduces his collection of these tales entitled Jonathan Draws the Long Bow by noting:

> They [the Yankee yarns] reported, borrowed and created situations appropriate for their central actor; sharp trades, dupes, "saws," and endless clownish antics that resembled in plot but differed in tone from Old World tales of rogues, scalawags, and dolts. They emphasized salient traits of rural personality, uncontrollable curiosity, dismal naivite, impudence, low cunning, parsimony, and loutishness. . . . Preeminently the comic figure was a fool, an ignorant countryman baffled by urban ways, befuddled by modern machinery, legitimate game for dupes and hoaxes. (pp. 69-70)

When the Yankee began to appear on stage, he retained some of his low-comic attributes, as buffoon, dupe, and innocent clownish victim, but more frequently he began to be represented as "nature's nobleman," the concept of the national mythology concerning the virtues of the common man that has been discussed above. The nature of the character as he finally emerged after the Revolution has been described by James J. Quinn, Jr.: "When Jonathan first appeared on the stage, he reflected the young American Republic--somewhat insecure, yet proud, vital, and frank. During the first

half of the nineteenth century, the Yankee became the epitome, theatrically, of the Jacksonian spirit of democracy."[11] In the American drama the Yankee character, whether bumpkin or rural sage, was used primarily as a foil to expose the pretentions of would-be aristocrats and pompous frauds. He was well suited to this task since he was ". . . endowed with a distrust of aristocratic formality and sham and possessed of a wholehearted belief in the ability of the common man to shape his own destiny."[12]

The most important of the stage Yankees is certainly Jonathan, who was originally intended to be a minor figure in Royall Tyler's play, The Contrast (1787). As Arthur Hobson Quinn states in his introduction to the play (Representative American Plays):

> The Contrast is the second play written by an American to be produced in America by a professional company. It is our first comedy, and while its central theme is the contrast between native worth and affectation of foreign manners it is of especial significance as introducing to our stage in the character of 'Jonathan' the shrewd, yet uncultivated type of New England farmer which has since become known as the 'Stage Yankee.' (p. 45)

Though Professor Quinn is supported by several other critics in his judgment that the small part played by Jonathan in the play is its only significant literary contribution, it should be noted that the role of the play's hero, Colonel Manly, is of equal importance to the subsequent development of the wise fool character in American social and political satire.[13] Jonathan, in The Contrast, is basically an ignorant bumpkin who is easily duped and fooled. He is only

partially redeemed in the audience's eye by his basic moral goodness and innocence, and it is more luck than innate shrewdness that he escapes both moral and physical ruin in the plot.

Jonathan's role in the play is aptly illustrated by his reaction to the attempt, by the rascal servant to the foppish Billy Dimple, Jessamy, to entice Jonathan to forsake his fiancee Tabitha Wymen and court the more sophisticated servant girl, Jenny (Quinn, Representative American Plays, pp. 60-62). Jonathan is all too willing to learn Jessamy's technique of "gallantry" (though he confuses it with "girl huntry,") and he readily embarks on the quest that Jessamy has devised for him. Not only is Jonathan impressed by the foppish courtship ("six elegant bows" etc.), he fails to see that Jessamy's instructions are exaggerated parodies of the absurd mannerisms that even such a dandy as he would employ. Jonathan makes a fool of himself with the "lady," as he reports to Jessamy later (pp. 73-74), but ironically it is his inability to learn Jessamy's lessons that saves him, for he fails in his immoral endeavor, and emerges unscathed.

As a low-comic character, Jonathan is likable even at his most ignorant. He sits through a play, "The School for Scandalization," without being aware that he is in a play house, and his naive description of the actors and the dramatic action is most amusing. When he is told, by Jessamy, that he has been to the theatre, he exclaims, "Mercy on my soul! did I see the wicked players?--Mayhap

that 'ere Darby that I liked so, was the old serpent himself, and had his cloven foot in his pocket. Why, I vow, now that I come to think on 't, the candles seemed to burn blue, and I am sure where I sat it smelt tarnally of brimstone" (p. 65).

Colonel Manly, on the other hand, is not a bumpkin but a relatively simple (in the sense of the word that connotes unpretentiousness rather than unintelligence) man who provides the real moral contrast to the fops and frauds of the play. It is the Colonel's native common sense that truly exposes and defeats the "foreign vices" which have corrupted the new nation and threaten Jonathan. At the close of the play, Manly rescues the silly girl, Charlotte, from the clutches of the nefarious Billy Dimple, and thus removes the foreign influences of Dimple and Jessamy from the positions where they might corrupt the "pure" Americans, including Jonathan. Innocence has triumphed over experience, and Manly has learned ". . . that probity, virtue, honour, though they should not have received the polish of Europe, will secure to an honest American the good graces of his fair countrywoman, and I hope, the applause of THE PUBLIC" (p. 77). It is as much Manly's character, and the basic theme of the plot itself which is exemplified by it, that forms the basis for the later stage Yankees, as it is the more primitive Jonathan's.

The character of the Yankee in many of the later plays is one that is essentially a hybrid of Jonathan and Colonel

Manly. This contention is illustrated in another American play, Anna Cora Mowatt's social satire, Fashion (1845). In this play the central character, Adam Trueman, is a composite of the qualities of both Jonathan and Colonel Manly, and he is more akin to the former than the latter. As Constance Rourke notes in American Humor: A Study of the National Character, the theme of Fashion is ". . . almost a precise echo of the original Contrast, even to the Prologue" (p. 34). Adam Trueman is presented as a hard-working farmer, who through the exercise of his native common sense, moral integrity, and innate mistrust of foreign airs and material display, rescues his friend Mr. Tiffany from the clutches of frauds and villains who are almost identical to those found in The Contrast. Trueman is somewhat less dignified and refined than is Colonel Manly, making him a more believable spokesman of the typical "common man" than the Colonel could be.

Adam Trueman rescues the innocent American maidens, Gertrude and Seraphina, from the clutches of the foreigner, "Count" Jolimaitre, and protects his friend Tiffany from the blackmail attempts of the evil Snobson. As has been noted, both the theme and the plot of the play are virtually identical to that of The Contrast, and the former play ends, like the latter, in the triumph of Innocence over Experience. When the defeated pseudo-Count, who has now opted to become an American, attempts to explain his earlier deceitful conduct by asserting that he ". . . heard that in America, where

you pay homage to titles while you profess to scorn them--where Fashion makes the basest coin current--where you have no kings, no princes, no nobility--" Trueman, the simple Catteraugus farmer cuts him off and exclaims,

> Stop there! I object to your use of that word. When justice is found only among lawyers--health among physicians--and patriotism among politicians, then may you say that there is no nobility where there are no titles! But we have kings and princes, and nobles in abundance--of nature's stamp, if not of Fashion's,--we have honest men, warm-hearted and brave, and we have women--gentle, fair, and true, to whom no title could add nobility. (Quinn, p. 311)

This statement illustrates the evolution of the wise fool from the bumpkin whose innocent virtue overcomes his own stupidity to the naive, unsophisticated rustic hero whose common sense merges with his virtue to provide the antithesis to corrupted intelligence and knowledge.

Thus though the stage Yankee may have begun his career in satire as a low-comic bumpkin, through such characters as Adam Trueman and Jonathan Ploughboy (in Samuel Woodworth's play, The Forest Rose) he functions more as "nature's nobleman," the more serious common sense philosopher. As Richard Dorson puts it, in "The Yankee on the Stage,"

> No single hero, but a mock-heroic type, evolved in the long spate of Yankee plays. From his beginnings as a loutish servant in The Contrast in 1787 to his blackguard role in The Peddlar in 1821, the stage Yankee appeared as bumpkin or knave. But from 1825 on, when Jonathan Ploughboy emerged as hero in The Forest Rose, and "Yankee" Hill became identified with the part, the Yankee assumed increasingly heroic stature. (p. 65)

An additional development of the Yankee character as a device for satire may be seen in the creation of such figures

as Seba Smith's Major Jack Downing and James Russell Lowell's Hosea Biglow, among others of their type. Walter Blair, in Horse Sense in American Humor, quotes Seba Smith's explanation of the reasons why he created Jack Downing.

> . . . the author . . . wishing to show the ridiculous position of the legislature in its true light, and also, by something out of the common track of newspaper writing, to give increased interest and popularity to his little daily paper, bethought himself of the plan to bring a green, unsophisticated lad from the country into town with a load of axe-handles, hoop-poles, and other notions for sale, and while waiting the movements of a rather dull market, let him blunder into the halls of the legislature, and after witnessing for some days their strange doings, sit down and write an account of them to his friends at home in his own plain language. (p. 57)

The idea proved to be a fruitful one. The letters of the "innocent" Jack Downing, in "his own plain language," gained such wide popularity that Smith contrived to send the Major to Washington where he could report periodically of the activities of his new friend, Andrew Jackson. Before long Smith had numerous imitators, some of them (notably Charles Augustus Davis) audacious enough to borrow Jack Downing's name for their own creations. Seba Smith's Major Jack Downing is a rather ambivalent wise fool, neither purely bumpkin nor hero. He is naive enough to blunder blindly and innocently into certain situations where he does not belong, yet shrewd enough to ask the right questions and make the right comments once he gets there.

An excellent example of Smith's satiric technique may be seen in a letter from Major Downing concerning the

bestowal of an honorary Law Degree upon Andrew Jackson by Harvard University.

> Ye see when we were at Boston they sent word to us to come out to Cambridge, for they wanted to make the President a Doctor of Laws. What upon arth a Doctor of Laws was, or why they wanted to make the President one, I couldn't think. So when we came up to bed I asked the Gineral about it. And says I, Gineral, what is it they want to do to you out to Cambridge? Says he they want to make a Doctor of Laws of me. Well, says I, but what good will that do? Why, says he, you know Major Downing, there's a pesky many of them laws passed by Congress, that are rickety things. Some of 'em have very poor constitutions, and some of 'em haven't no constitutions at all. So that it is necessary to have somebody there to doctor 'em up a little, and not let 'em go out into the world where they would stand a chance to catch cold and be sick, without they had good constitutions to bear it. You know, says he, I have had to doctor the laws considerable ever since I been at Washington, although I wasn't a regular bred doctor.[14]

The satire of this incident is deceptively simple. Beyond the lightly humorous puns on <u>doctor</u> of laws and <u>constitutions</u>, lie two important, and to some degree contradictory, assessments of Andrew Jackson's personality and politics. Jackson is portrayed here as indeed unsophisticated, both through his choice of companions in Jack Downing and his own apparent naivete concerning the nature of the honorary degree; but he is also presented as a shrewd, common-sense president who <u>does</u> know enough about politics and congresses to "doctor" the laws of the country successfully. In this light sketch the image of the Jackson-Truman-Lyndon Johnson style president is superbly captured; the successful American president is portrayed as a man of no great intellectual talents or abilities, but one who has the political <u>savoir</u>

faire to control the actions of his more sophisticated colleagues, and to make the proper judgments despite his rather primitive decision-making process.

As Arthur P. Dudden states in The Assault of Laughter, "Jack [Downing] was both patriarch and prototype for generations of comic figures" (p. 26). Downing, and other early versions of this character such as Thomas Chandler Haliburton's "Sam Slick" for example, were widely popular during the first half of the nineteenth century.[15] Most of the humorists of this school are of less interest to the student of literature than to the historian, but many of the columns and sketches are still amusing.

From the literary standpoint the most successful of the nineteenth-century Yankee characters are to be found in James Russell Lowell's Biglow Papers. Lowell studied the Yankee character and dialect with scholarly objectivity, but he used his knowledge to write satire that frequently evidences the intensity of a person truly enraged by the conduct of his adversary. Primary among the factors that elevate the Biglow Papers above the level of the other representatives of this type of satire is Lowell's creation of three separate, well-developed characters. To introduce the common sense observations of the central character, the rustic philosopher Hosea Biglow, Lowell created Parson Wilbur, a pompous, narrow, but morally sincere New England cleric. For low-comic purposes, and to provide himself a negative fool with whom he might make the military mentality appear

ludicrous Lowell added to the cast an ignorant bumpkin named Birdofredum Sawin. In the Preface to the Second Series Lowell discusses the characters that he created:

> I need on occasion to rise above the level of mere patois, and for this purpose conceived the Rev. Mr. Wilbur, who should express the more cautious element of the New England Character and its pedantry as Mr. Biglow should serve for its homely common sense vivified and heated by conscience. The parson was to be the complement rather than the antithesis of his parishioner, and I felt or fancied a certain humorous element of the real identity of the two under a seeming incongruity. . . . Finding soon after that I needed someone as a mouthpiece for mere drollery, for I conceive that the true humor is never divorced from moral conviction, I invented Mr. Sawin for the clown of my little puppet show.[16]

This division of the wise fool character into three characters is similar to that of Rabelais's in Gargantua and Pantagruel, and it serves the same purpose as the shifting persona in The Praise of Folly: namely to add latitude and dimension to the satiric properties of the character. The practice also anticipates the use of dual and triple wise fool personae in the twentieth century. By employing Parson Wilbur, Hosea Biglow, and Birdofredum Sawin, Lowell could deal with the issues that concerned him (e.g., war, slavery, patriotism) from a wide variety of perspectives. All three of the characters are, in one sense or another, wise fools, but they are more than this, because they develop picturesque and individual personalities that extend beyond their stereotyped roles.

Hosea Biglow's simple moralism may be seen in his opinions on the key issues of his era. Concerning pacifism

he notes: "Wut's the use o' meetin' goin'/ Every Sabbath, wet or dry;/ Ef its right to go amowin'/ feller-men like oats and rye?" (Biglow Papers, p. 46). His view of slavery is stated: "Wy its jest as clear ez figgurs/ Clear ez one an' one makes two/ Chaps that make black slaves o' niggers/ Want to make wite slaves o' you" (p. 47). Birdofredum's more comic preaching speaks to the same issues in a different manner. He writes home from the Mexican War, after he has enlisted in search of glory and plunder:

> I spose you wonder ware I be; I can't tell, fer the soul o' me,/ Exacly ware I be myself,---meanin' by thet the holl o' me./ Wen I left hum, I hed two legs, an' they worn't bad ones neither,/ (the scaliest trick they ever played on me wuz bringin' on me hither,)/ Now one on 'em's I dunno ware;---they thought I wuz adyin',/ An' sawed it off because they said 'twuz kin' o' mortifyin';. . . .

With regard to the political power of the pro-slavery forces he notes: "There's one thing I'm in doubt about; in order to be President,/ It's absolutely ne'ssary to be a Southern resident;/ The Consitution settles that, an' also thet a feller/ Must own a nigger o' some sort, jet black or brown or yeller" (in Blair, Native American Humor, pp. 248-253). Lowell's points are driven home with equal effectiveness through Hosea's sober, common-sense analysis, and through the buffoonery of the ignorant Birdofredum.

In addition to the Yankee characters, the wise fool tradition in American literature is often represented by similar characters of Southern and Western humor. The tall tales of the American backwoodsman, and the humorous tales

of the Southern yeoman farmer, are neither primarily satire nor solely of the wise fool type, but their central characters frequently borrow from the tradition, and ultimately also add to it.[17] The heroes of the Southern and Western tales, such as Sut Lovingood and Simon Suggs for example, are perhaps closer to the "trickster" character than to the wise fool, but when their pranks, practical jokes, and boasts serve satiric purposes, they quite closely resemble Brother Jonathan.[18] From the Davy Crockett tales through the experiences Sut and Simon, among many similar figures, Southern and Western humor developed until it reached its peak in the comic writings of Mark Twain.

Kenneth Lynn traces the relationship of the traditions of Southwestern humor to Twain's comic writing in his book, Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor. He notes that Twain, for the purposes of satiric effect, wanted a persona that could function both through the low-comic practical joking and buffoonery of the frontiersman, and the more subtle verbal ironic commentary of the naive observer:

> The solution to the problem of finding a new persona for a new era was to fuse the Gentleman and the Clown of the Southwestern tradition into a single character. In the new dispensation, the vernacular figure became the narrator, and the stories he told were not at the expense of other people . . . but on himself. This persona Mark Twain would someday describe as an "inspired idiot," but he was more complex than that. For this was a character whose "preternatural shrewdness," as an English commentator on Twain's lectures put it, was "thinly veiled under the assumption of simplicity." His innocence, in sum, was a mask, and the audience's awareness of the fact was a part of the joke. (p. 148)

A thorough study of Twain's version of the wise fool deserves a separate volume, but two examples might serve to illustrate it. In an essay entitled "The Facts Concerning the Recent Resignation," Twain's character is a minor, though thoroughly pompous clerk of "the Senate Committee on Conchology." This wise fool seeks to educate various government officials with such advice as the following, delivered to the Secretary of War and dealing with the problem of pacification of the Indians.

> I said there was nothing so convincing to an Indian as a general massacre. If he could not approve of the massacre, I said the next surest thing was soap and education. Soap and education are not as sudden as a massacre, but they are more deadly in the long run. . . .[19]

Here Twain simultaneously comments on the stupidity of government officials, the brutality of United States policy toward the Indians, and the myth of the "noble savage." The use of the wise fool allows him to direct the satire in several different, even opposite, directions.

One of the best, and most famous appearances of Twain's wise fool character is that of the doctor in The Innocents Abroad. The doctor's specialty is upsetting the confidence and air of superiority and importance of the European guides that he encounters on the trip, by playing the fool and asking ludicrous questions. As Twain tells us, "The doctor asks the questions generally because he can keep his countenance, and look more like an inspired idiot, and throw more imbecility into the tone of his voice than any man that lives.

It comes natural to him." An example of this technique is seen in a guide's attempt at showing the party a bust of Christopher Columbus.

> 'Ah, genteelmen, you come wiz me! I show you beautiful, oh magnificent bust Christopher Colombo! Splendid, grand, magnificent!' He brought us before the beautiful bust---for it was beautiful---and sprang back and struck an attitude: 'Ah, look, genteelmen! Beautiful, grand--bust Christopher Colombo! Beautiful bust, beautiful pedestal!' The doctor put up his eyeglass---procured for such occasions: 'Ah---What did you say this gentleman's name was?' 'Christopher Colombo! Ze great Christopher Colombo.' 'Well, what did he do?' 'Discover America! Discover America, oh ze devil!' 'Discover America. No---that statement will hardly wash. We are just from America ourselves. We heard nothing about it. Christopher Colombo---pleasant name---is he dead?' 'Oh, corpo di Baccho! Three hundred year!' 'What did he die of?' 'I do not know! I cannot tell.' 'Smallpox, think?' 'I do not know, genteelmen! I do not know what he die of!' 'Measles, likely?' 'Maybe---maybe---I do not know---I think he die of somethings.' 'Parents living?' 'Im-posseeble!' 'Ah---which is the bust and which is the pedestal?'

In this hilarious scene, which continues at some length in the same vein,Twain's humor deftly touches upon the naivete of American travelers, the banality of guided-tours, and the attitude of the typical European guide, in a most memorable manner.

Mark Twain's writing led to a greater use of irony in the tradition of the wise fool humor, due to the success of his more subtle brand of satire. Twain's popularity on the lecture circuit encouraged others to bring the wise fool and his humor and satire to the platform, in addition to the newspaper column and the dramatic stage. The comic writing

of Mark Twain is far more sophisticated, and more readable today, than that of any of his predecessors or successors.

Other important comic writers and lecturers who used the wise fool, during the years from the Civil War to the end of the nineteenth century include Charles Farrar Browne ("Artemus Ward"), David Ross Locke ("Petroleum V. Nasby"), Robert Henry Newell ("Orpheus C. Kerr"), Henry W. Shaw ("Bill Arp"), and Edgar Wilson Nye ("Bill Nye").[20] These "literary comedians," as they are called by Walter Blair (Native American Humor, p. 102ff.), owe much to the wise fool traditions that preceded them, and they also contribute much to later uses of the motif. As Constance Rourke notes, "In themes, in tone, they belonged to the frontier. None of them was definitely localized; their lingo was far less regional than that of the oracles of an earlier day" (American Humor, p. 177). The emphasis of the literary comedians of the later-nineteenth century was less upon the creation of a "local color" character than upon the use of a nationally recognized stereotype for specific, issue-oriented political satire. According to Walter Blair, in an article entitled "The Popularity of Nineteenth Century American Humorists," "A large part of the humor between 1830 and the end of the century dealt with political themes" (p. 177).

The range of the personae employed by these later-nineteenth century American humorists is as wide as that of the other types of wise fool characters that have been discussed thus far. Their masks include the naive bumpkin and

the "inspired idiot," as well as the crackerbarrel philosopher and agrarian-yeoman hero. As Norris W. Yates notes, "The crossroads oracles carried on the traditions of the court fools and jesters in satirizing their readers in an era when the common man was the uncrowned king, at least in the official mythology."[21]

The satiric humor of Charles Farrar Browne's Artemus Ward can be viewed as representative of these humorists. As Jennette Tandy describes Ward's composition:

> The shrewdness of a Barnum was to be united with the stupidity of an unsophisticated itinerant exhibitor, who had gained his experience by roughing it in the West amongst the towns and villages of society where the more refined forms of amusement are comparatively unknown. The old showman was to have the smartness of a yankee combined with the slowness of one whose time had been chiefly spent among the backwoods. . . . (p. 136)

Walter Blair writes in Horse Sense in American Humor that "Charles Farrar Browne, it appears, started the great rush of humorists to the lecture platform" (p. 187). Browne's lecture style greatly influenced the other literary comedians, including Mark Twain, whose biographer Justin Kaplan (Mr. Clemens and Mark Twain) calls Twain "Artemus Ward's successor" (p. 86). In his essay, "How to Tell a Story," Twain discusses Browne's platform style. He notes Browne's use of the "nub, point, snapper, or whatever you like to call it" to end a humorous tale. He also notes Browne's technique of using ludicrous non sequiturs to create a humorous air of incongruity. As an example of this Twain cites one of Browne's jokes,

> I once knew a man in New Zealand who hadn't a tooth in his head"---here his animation would die out; a silent reflective pause would follow, then he would say dreamily, as if to himself, "and yet that man could beat a drum better than any man I ever saw."

Artemus Ward, as the innocent observer, also follows the tradition of Jack Downing by writing letters to the editor of the newspaper containing such remarks as: "My perlitercal sentiments agree with yourn exackly. I know they do, becawz I never saw a man whoos didn't," or "I have no politics. Nary a one. I'm not in the biziness. If I was I spose I should holler versiffrusly in the streets at nite and go home to Betsy Jane smellin of coal ile and gin, in the mornin" (Blair, Native American Humor, pp. 400-401).

Another of the more famous of the literary comedians was David Ross Locke, whose wise fool character, "Petroleum Vesuvius Nasby," in the words of Arthur P. Dudden, ". . . marshalled his mocking pen for the Union cause during the Civil War, against extremists of all persuasions, then after Appomattox directed it against the North's vindictive radicals. . . ." (p. 27). In a representative selection, Nasby as a draft dodger lists ten reasons why he should not have to fight, including such physical factors as "dandruff," "kronic katarr," and "verrykose vanes," concluding quite innocently with a disclosure of his real reasons:

> I dont suppose that my political opinions, wich are aginst the prossekooshin uv this unconstooshnel war, wood hev any wate, with a draftin orfiser; but the above reesons why I cant go, will, I make no doubt, be suffishent. (Blair, Native American Humor, pp. 410-411)

"Bill Arp," the creation of Charles Henry Smith, is another interesting character of this period. In his first four "letters to Abe Linkhorn" Arp is a pro-Union southern turncoat who is used to champion the southern point of view indirectly, through the negative impression of the character that the reader gets. Thus when he fears for his safety as a Unionist in the South, he writes "Linkhorn" and seeks to borrow the "Skotch cap and kloak that you travelled in to Washington," expressing both his own cowardice and the popular myth that Lincoln, through fear of the wrath of Southern sympathizers, travelled to his inauguration in disguise. Later Arp underwent quite a character change, becoming a common-sense fool who spoke directly for the South, threatening the Unionist, Artemus Ward, by writing him that "I hated a man so bad onst that all the har cum off my hed, and the man drowned himself in a hog waller that nite" (Blair, Native American Humor, pp. 421, 423). The progress of Smith's creation aptly illustrates both the flexibility and the potentiality for confusion of the wise fool device.

In his autobiography, Mark Twain notes that much of the work of the literary comedians had a very brief span of popularity. He writes of ". . . a dozen other sparkling transients whose light shone for a time but has now, years ago, gone out." Twain provides an insight into the causes of this phenomenon:

> Why have they perished? Because they were merely humorists. Humorists of the "mere" sort cannot survive. Humor is only a fragrance, a decoration.

> Often it is merely an odd trick of speech and of spelling, as in the case of Ward and Billings and Nasby and the "Disbanded Volunteer," and presently the fashion passes and the fame along with it. There are those who say a novel should be a work of art solely and you must not preach in it, you must not teach in it. That may be true as regards novels but it is not true as regards humor. Humor must not professedly teach and it must not professedly preach, but it must do both if it would live forever. By forever I mean thirty years. (pp. 297-298)

Only a fraction of the work of the literary comedians is relevant to the contemporary reader, but the best of such writers as Artemus Ward, Petroleum V. Nasby, and Bill Arp, like most of Twain's own humorous writing, is still both interesting and amusing.

The methodology of the wise fool social and political satire throughout the nineteenth century in America is not hard to describe. The wise fool character, usually himself a blend of bumpkin and rural philosopher, either directly addresses the audience with his observations, or he reports them to another character who is often also a wise fool. His means of conveying his message include the use of dialect, humor, ludicrous contrasts and distortions, and hyperbole and meiosis among other satiric devices. Bumpkins like the early Jonathan, tricksters and jokers or the Sut Lovingood type, common-man philosophers like Hosea Biglow, and ironic observers of the Mark Twain-Artemus Ward variety all use essentially these same techniques, albeit in different proportions and somewhat different styles.

Dialect helps the satirist in two ways; it creates a sense of identity, sympathy, or rapport between the persona and the audience, and it is an excellent source of humor, distortion, and contrast.[22] Rustic dialect forms a connecting link between the character and the type of comments he makes. It identifies him as the wise fool, and it permits him to "innocently" drop puns, double entendres, malapropisms, and other linguistic distortions that may serve the purpose of humorously inflating or deflating the subject. The comic dialogue may function to create contrasts between character, as for example by pitting the genial, relaxed, natural speech of the wise fool against a stuffy, prim, pompous or effete tone on the part of the object of ridicule.

The technique of distortion through inflation or deflation of the importance of the subject, utilizing hyperbole and meiosis for the task, is also quite natural from the perspectives of wise fool satire. When the satirist distorts the subject by overstating or understating it, it appears ludicrous and can no longer be taken too seriously or revered by the audience. The different postures of the wise fool character that have been referred to frequently thus far vastly increase the number of different combinations of techniques and approaches toward the subject possible in this mode.[23]

The American wise fool character of the nineteenth century was almost exclusively a rural figure.[24] He was portrayed either as the silly country bumpkin temporarily

at large in the wicked city, or the poor, humble, honest, simple farmer who is forced to confront the corrupt urban world. During the last decade of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth, the literary wise fool moved to the city along with so many of his real life countrymen. The reasons for this literary migration are not hard to understand. With the social migration to the city the newspaper readership was becoming increasingly urban, and with growing industrialization the urban worker began to provide a recognizable character that was admirably suited to the tasks of the wise fool.

In the early years of the century the character often appears to be an essentially rural type who has been transplanted in the city. For example "The Idiot," who is the central figure in John Kendrick Bang's several volumes of wise fool humor (e.g., Coffee and Repartee and The Idiot, N.Y., 1902), is a young stockbroker who is living in an urban boarding house. The character is scarcely an urban type, and the manner in which he does battle with such stereotyped city sophisticates as Mr. Pedagogue and Mr. Brief is virtually identical to the way Colonel Manly and Adam Trueman handled such foes.

Other early urban wise fools, such as Finley Peter Dunne's Mr. Dooley (the subject of Chapter Three), and William L. Riordan's "tongue-in-cheek" portrait of the archetypal Tammany leader, George Washington Plunkitt,[25] are genuine city types, though they still speak from the

perspective of the common man rather than the sophisticate. It should be noted, however, that the rural wise fool did not entirely disappear during the twentieth century. From the platform and in newspaper satire such figures as Will Rogers and Kin Hubbard kept the nineteenth-century traditions alive, and in cartoons the rural wise fool appeared as such characters as Al Capp's "L'il Abner." Additionally one finds elements of wise fool humor during the twentieth century in such characters as Ring Lardner's "Busher" and Don Marquis's cockroach, "archie" of archie and mehitabel.

It is important to mention that quantitatively the character of the crackerbarrel philosopher has not been as prominent during this century as he had been previously, as is pointed out by such students of American satire as Henry C. Carlisle.[26] According to Norris W. Yates in The American Humorist: Conscience of the Twentieth Century, the humorous figure most typical of twentieth-century comic writing is the "little man," a white-collar neurotic who is confused and oppressed by the complexities of modern civilization (p. 13). The "little man" is a character who borrows, in some ways, from the wise fool traditions, but both his basic description and his method deviate significantly from Brother Jonathan's.[27] During the twentieth century the "little man" figure has been used as a comic and satiric character in movies, cartoons, and television, as well as in literature. Among the more famous of these characters are

Charlie Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy, Dagwood Bumstead, and television's Gomer Pyle.

The bumpkin common-sense philosopher has been well represented throughout the century, both in terms of the quality and quantity of the satire in which he has been employed. From Dunne's late-nineteenth century-early twentieth century newspaper columns through the columns of Art Buchwald and Arthur Hoppe,[28] and the television comedy of Bill Dana's "Jose Jimenez," Brother Jonathan's progeny have been on hand to expose the pretensions of their countrymen and tarnish the grandeur of those subjects that are too close to being awesome, from the perspective of the wise fool.

Notes

[1]Quoted from Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, eds., The Puritans: A Sourcebook of Their Writing, Vol. I (New York, 1963), p. 332.

[2]Ibid., p. 108.

[3]Quoted from Thomas H. Johnson, ed., Final Harvest: Emily Dickinson's Poems (Boston, 1961), p. 101.

[4]Much has been written concerning the history of this concept in America, since it is generally viewed as one of the most significant features of American thought. Illustration of the idea and analysis of its backgrounds are provided by John William Ward, Andrew Jackson; Symbol for an Age (New York, 1962), particularly Chapters III, IV, and V; Russel Blaine Nye, The Cultural Life of the New Nation: 1776-1830 (New York, 1960), pp. 22-28; Leo Marx, The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Idea in America (New York, 1967); and Merrill D. Peterson, The Jeffersonian Image in the American Mind (New York, 1962).

[5]Quoted by John William Ward, op. cit., p. 49.

[6]Constance Rourke, The Roots of American Culture (New York, 1942), p. 117.

[7]See Ernest W. Baughman, Type and Motif-Index of the Folktales of England and North America (The Hague, 1966), entries J. 10 through J. 2722; and Benjamin A. Botkin, A Treasury of American Anecdotes (New York, 1957).

[8]See Carl Halliday, The Wit and Humor of Colonial Days (New York, 1912); and Bruce I. Granger, Political Satire in the American Revolution, 1763-1783 (Ithaca, New York, 1960).

[9]This periodical was published in Salem, Massachusetts, from February through April, 1807, and is available on microfilm.

[10]See Marston Balch, "Jonathan the First," Modern Language Notes, XLVI (May, 1931), 281-288; and the extended debate between Constance Rourke and J. De Lancey Ferguson in American Scholar, 4 (January, March, May, 1935).

[11]"The Jonathan Character in the American Drama," Dissertation Abstracts, XV (1955), 2193. Other useful accounts of the early stage Yankee include: Stanley L. Glenn, "Ludicrous Characterization in American Comedy from the Beginning

Until the Civil War," Dissertation Abstracts, XVI (1956), 400-401; and Francis Hodge, Yankee Theatre: The Image of America on the Stage, 1825-1850 (Austin, Texas, 1963).

[12]Richard Moody, America Takes to the Stage (Bloomington, Indiana, 1955), p. 110.

[13]Examples of Quinn's point of view are found in Constance Rourke, American Humor: A Study of the National Character (Garden City, New York, 1953), p. 24; and The Roots of American Culture (New York, 1942), p. 116, Leo Marx, op. cit., p. 113. For a critical approach that recognizes the importance of Colonel Manly and the play's theme, see Arthur Halline's introduction to The Contrast, in American Plays (New York, 1935), p. 4.

[14]In Kenneth S. Lynn, ed., The Comic Tradition in America (Garden City, New York, 1958), p. 91.

[15]See Walter Blair, "Down East Humor," Native American Humor (San Francisco, 1960), pp. 38-61.

[16]The Biglow Papers (Cambridge, Massachusetts), p. 156.

[17]For a general discussion of these two types of tales, see, in addition to Constance Rourke, American Humor, Mody C. Boatright, Folk Laughter on the American Frontier (New York, 1949); and Clement Eaton, "The Humor of the Southern Yeoman," Sewanee Review, 49 (April, 1941), 173-183.

[18]There is a large element of the "trickster" character in many of the American wise fools, and vice versa, though the characters are distinct ones. For a description of trickster see Roger D. Abrahams, "Trickster, the Outrageous Hero," in Tristram Potter Coffin, ed., Our Living Traditions (New York, 1968), pp. 170-178.

[19]In Walter Blair, Native American Humor, p. 523.

[20]See the various works by Blair, Rourke, and Tandy cited in the Bibliography, for discussion and illustration of the humor of these figures.

[21]The American Humorist: Conscience of the Twentieth Century (New York, 1965), p. 22.

[22]According to Richard Bridgman, who provides an excellent analysis of the literary uses of dialect in his book The Colloquial Style in America (New York, 1966):

> Not only does this kind of dialect writing reduce the pretentions of trite conventional words and phrases by clothing them in the outlandish

> garb of misspelling . . . it also forces more than normal attention upon the individual words, for most of them in such a passage must undergo translation to be understood. This necessarily keeps attention focused on the surface of the words. (p. 57)

Bridgman also notes that,

> From its inception, dialect,---what Henry James called "a hatful of queer pieces,"---frequently played the clown. Because it violates an accepted norm, very little effort is required to animate dialect's comic energies. (p. 52)

[23]An interesting account of the various tricks and techniques of the wise fool humorist is provided by Melville D. Landon, himself a wise fool lecturer and writer, and the creater of the character "Eli Perkins," in a lecture delivered by the latter in Kings of Platform and Pulpit (Chicago, 1890). Additionally, the various works pertaining to the history and art of satire cited in Chapter One are useful here.

[24]One important exception to this rule is the "B'hoy," an urban Irishman on the nineteenth-century American stage, of whom we shall have more to say in Chapter Three.

[25]Plunkitt of Tammany Hall (New York, 1905).

[26]American Satire in Prose and Verse (New York, 1962), p. xiv; and "The Comic Tradition," American Scholar, 28 (Winter, 1958), 98-108.

[27]Yates identifies the "little man" as a specie of wise fool, but distinguishes him from "the rustic sage" and the public spirited "respectable citizen," p. 12. While it is perhaps valid to call the "little man" character a wise fool, since the definition of the latter is so wide, the "little men" of such writers as James Thurber and Robert Benchley are employed in a manner that is quite different from that of the wise fools that have been dealt with in this paper. It is impossible to call this character a lineal descendant of Brother Jonathan--or for that matter of the fool-tradition discussed in Chapter One, in the same sense that the twentieth-century rustic and common sense philosopher clearly is. Yates's book itself makes this distinction tacitly, through the contrast of the treatments of such writers as Dunne, Hubbard, Lardner, and Will Rogers, and those of Thurber, Perelman, Benchley, et al. An interesting article that deals briefly with the transition from rural wise fool humor to urban humor of the predominantly "little

man" type is Walter Blair, "The Urbanization of Humor," in Robert Spiller, ed., A Time of Harvest (New York, 1962), pp. 54-64.

[28]Burton H. Wolfe, "Arthur Hoppe: The Return of the Newspaper Satirist," North American Review, 2 (September, 1965), 10-21.

Chapter III

FINLEY PETER DUNNE'S 'MR. DOOLEY': AN URBAN IRISH-AMERICAN WISE FOOL

Finley Peter Dunne's Mr. Martin Dooley, a Chicago bartender of Irish origin, is perhaps the best known wise fool in twentieth-century American literature. The Dooley pieces revived the tradition during the 1890's, and carried it forward into the first two decades of the present century. As Constance Rourke noted, "For a brief space in the 80's the oracle had gone into a partial eclipse, but in Mr. Dooley he rose again as if this homely figure stirred a deep-seated popular passion."[1]

Although Mr. Dooley is a middle class urbanite rather than a rustic or peasant figure, several students of American humor have acknowledged his similarity to the nineteenth-century crackerbarrel philosopher. Typical of this recognition is the comment by Arthur P. Dudden, in The Assault of Laughter, "Mr. Martin Dooley, Finley Peter Dunne's immortal saloonkeeper and public oracle, was a national institution at the turn of the century. He belonged to the great crackerbarrel tradition of Downing, Biglow, Ward, and Nasby, yet was infused with an urban and immigrant flavor all his own" (p. 285).[2]

Finley Peter Dunne, Mr. Dooley's creator, was a Chicago journalist who, like his character, was an Irish-American. He was born, on July 19, 1867, into an environment that has

been characterized as "Irish, Catholic, urban, and American."[3] Both Dunne's early life and his career as a journalist, which he began at the age of seventeen as an office boy for the Chicago Telegraph, are significant to the development of the Dooley sketches. At home he was surrounded by politics, and at work he learned in detail of the city of Chicago and the lives of its inhabitants. By the time he was twenty-one, Dunne had risen to the position of city editor of the Chicago Times, and had become knowledgeable and experienced as both reporter and writer.

In addition to his early encounters with politics and urban affairs, another aspect of Dunne's youth is relevant to his creation of Martin Dooley, that is, his early inclination toward satire, ready wit, and lively sense of humor. A situation recorded by Ellis serves to illustrate this. "His [Dunne's] contributions to the school paper were highly appreciated but seldom printed by the more timid editors who feared that Dunne's characterizations of fellow students and teachers were somewhat libelous" (p. 13). Dunne's love of joking, repartee, and satiric remarks provided for numerous amusing incidents throughout his life. Ellis records several of these in the biography, including Dunne's advice to Marshall Field, a notoriously frugal man. During a golf match, Dunne told Field to put a dollar on the ball, to improve his drive, since, the wit noted, ". . . all Chicago believes that you can make a dollar go farther than anyone in the world" (p. 108).

This feeling for humor was doubtlessly furthered by Dunne's acquaintance with two other Chicago journalists of a similar disposition, Eugene Field and George Ade. Of the many influences upon Dunne during his journalistic career, Elmer Ellis notes, ". . . most important of all was the presence in the same newspaper plant of Eugene Field. . . . No close friendship developed between Field and Dunne, but Field's very distinction in Chicago journalism made him an object of emulation. . . ." (pp. 22-23). Field's column, "Sharps and Flats," occasionally used dialect, often dealt with the mysteries of urban life, and frequently employed a dry humor similar to that found in the Dooley pieces. Dunne's friendship with Ade was closer than with Field, and while it is difficult to trace specifically the influences that these men had on each other, a reading of their respective humor columns and stories shows many similarities of both style and subject.[4]

Dunne and Ade were both members of the Whitechapel Club, along with Brand Whitlock, Fredrick Upham Adams, and several other "bright young men" of turn-of-the-century Chicago. As Elmer Ellis has reported, the club exposed Dunne to radical politics, sophisticated literary and philosophic debates, and a great deal of humorous--and practical--joking (pp. 47-57). Ellis describes the atmosphere of the club as "Bohemian, Rabelasian, and macabre" (p. 49), and notes that "To the young writers the most important feature of the club was the unplanned critical atmosphere which naturally dwelt in the

group" (p. 51). Through his association with Field, Ade, and the members of Whitechapel Club, Dunne sharpened his understanding of politics and people, and his wit, increasing his intellectual perception beyond the level to which his journalistic experience had already brought it.

Mr. Dooley was conceived during Dunne's tenure on the Chicago Evening Post, where his creator was encouraged to engage in writing humorous editorials as well as "straight" reporting.[5] In his Introduction to a collection of Dooley essays, Mr. Dooley at His Best, Dunne recalls the events surrounding the creation of his character:

> One day when I had left the Tribune and had gone to work on the Evening Post under a great managing editor, Cornelius McAuliff, I dropped into McGarry's for a drink. Jay Gould had died that day and Mr. McGarry passed some quaint remarks on this celebrated financier's career. I thought they were funny enough to quote, and I put them into a little piece for the Sunday Post, the evening paper's sickly paper which soon died of lack of nourishment from advertisers. I attributed them to a mythical "Col. McNeery."
>
> Afterwards, while I was writing editorials for the Post, we became engaged in a bitter fight with the crooks in the city council. McAuliff and I were both hot municipal reformers but our publisher wasn't so eager. He was nervous about libel suits and loans at banks that were interested in the franchises for sale in the council. It occurred to me that while it might be dangerous to call an alderman a thief in English no one could sue if a comic Irishman denounced the statesman as a thief. So I revived Col. McNeery and used him to bludgeon the bribe-taking members of the council.[6] (p. xxiii)

Jim McGarry, the man after whom "Col. McNeery" was patterned, complained to Dunne's employer about the columns, since it was quite apparent to his friends and customers that he was the model for the character. Dunne then changed the comic

Irishman's name to Martin Dooley, and moved his bar to Archer Avenue (which is called "Archey Road" in the sketches) and continued writing the columns on a weekly basis after 1893.

Apparently Dunne was attracted to the dialect essay primarily for the immunity it afforded him, although the true identity of Mr. Dooley's creator was known to many. As he notes in the same Introduction, "If I had written the same thing in English I would inevitably have been pistolled or slugged, as other critics were. But my victims did not dare complain. They felt bound to smile and treat these highly libelous articles as mere humorous skits" (p. xxiii). Eventually Mr. Dooley became far more than a mask behind which Dunne might hide for the purpose of engaging in comments on local politics. He was soon commenting on national and international affairs, the mores and lives of the people around him, and on a number of other topics ranging from golf to metaphysics. Dunne continued writing Dooley essays until the early years of the first World War, when he turned to non-dialect writing except for a brief try at reviving Mr. Dooley during 1922-1924.

Finley Peter Dunne's use of an Irish character for humor and satire was not without precedent in American literature. According to Jennette Tandy, in Crackerbox Philosophers in American Humor and Satire, "The sage of Archey Road was not an unheralded figure. Drama and vaudeville had long featured the Irish comedian. Private Mike O'Reilly [Charles

Halpine's Civil War wise fool] had ridiculed Gideon Welles and the monitors" (p. 160). Constance Rourke describes the "b'hoy" figure, a nineteenth-century stage character of the popular theatre, as one who was ". . . undoubtedly Irish in general ancestry but who soon merged with the riffraff of New York streets and water fronts."[7] The stage Irishman, Miss Rourke goes on to say, gradually became an urban figure (p. 117). During the 1890's, Thomas Beer points out in his chronicle of that decade, "Pat and Mike held endless colloquies in the comic weeklies; the pig and the goat watched through the shanty's door while a fat shrew belaboured her man with a skillet."[8] The stage Irishman was developed further in the plays of the Irish-American author, Dion Boucicault.[9]

Though Dunne was most certainly influenced by both his wise fool predecessors and the comic Irishman of his era, the world of Mr. Dooley is basically the world of Chicago's Irish-Americans which Dunne knew personally as a member of that community and as a reporter. Elmer Ellis reports Dunne's efforts to portray this world realistically:

> As he began to write of Mr. Dooley, Dunne found that he needed a better acquaintance with Archer Avenue, and in company with John McKenna he made several visits there, going the rounds of some of the saloons, meeting many Irish characters and listening to their talk. With these superficial things to use, and his own good memories of the Irish of St. Patrick's Parish to draw upon, he had what he needed for his work. (pp. 79-80)

Martin Dooley is described as an Irish-American who had come to this country as a young man. He is a middle class

entrepreneur, and a bachelor. His tavern on Archey Road is his forum for his "philosophizing." As Mr. Dooley tells us, "There's no better place to see what's goin' on thin the Ar-rchey Road" ("Peace," p. xi). Dooley is a careful and relatively successful business man, and in this respect he is rather different from most of his fellow wise-fools. In Dunne's words, "He [Dooley] is opulent in good advice, as becomes a man of his station; for he has mastered most of the obstacles in a business career, and by leading a prudent and temperate life has established himself so well that he owns his own house and furniture, and is only slightly behind on his license" ("Peace," p. xi).

Mr. Dooley's knowledge, however, is limited to that which he has acquired from his immediate experience and "th' pa-apers," his only reading matter. He champions this practical knowledge as the only type of any real value, and is decidedly cynical concerning "intellectualism" and "culture." According to Dooley, "They're on'y three books in th' wurruld worth readin'--Shakespeare, th' Bible, an' Mike Ahearn's histhry iv Chicago. I have Shakespeare on thrust, Father Kelly r-reads th' Bible f'r me, an' I didn't buy Mike Ahearn's histhry because I seen more thin he cud put into it" ("Peace," p. 106).[10]

In his concern with local matters and urban affairs, Dooley's "experience" is indeed useful to him. Mr. Dooley is a thorough urbanite from a distinctly urban background (as he notes in one of his essays, "Peace," p. 202). Van

Wyck Brooks, in The Confident Years: 1885-1915, sees Mr. Dooley as ". . . a symbol of the shift of interest from the country to the city. . . ." (p. 186). Brooks compares Dunne's creation to those of other writers of the period who dealt with the shift in America from a predominantly rural to an urban culture. According to Brooks, though many writers (e.g., Dreiser) wrote of rural people who migrated to the city, ". . . Dunne had written about city people, not country people who had come to the city, for he had grown up in his native Chicago in an Irish world that was represented in Mr. Dooley's saloon in Archey Road" (p. 191). In addition to being a proud student of urban life whose ridicule of the supposed glories of suburban and rural habitation are charged with an indignant iconoclasm (e.g., "The City as a Summer Resort," "Opinions," pp. 45-51), Dooley knows urban machine politics, reform movements, ethnic clashes, economic situations, etc. at first hand.[11]

Dunne's wise fool is a student of human nature, who believes that persons and personalities are the most significant aspects of all events, institutions, and ideas. In this he reflects the author's own belief that men are more important than things or institutions.

> As Time goes on, I find I have less fixed interest in the mere machinery of human relations--of politics, of society, of philosophy, and even of ethics. Some machinery is better than others, no doubt; and let us have the best, by all means, but remembering how little relatively, after all, depends upon it,--in comparison, I mean, with what depends upon the human and spiritual qualities of men themselves.[12]

This interest in human nature, and concern for "the human and spiritual qualities of men themselves," at times leads the Dooley material away from humor and satire. In such essays as "Fireman" ("Best," pp. 272-275) and "Shaughnessy" ("Countrymen," pp. 45-49), Mr. Dooley's discussions of human courage, heroism, tragedy, loneliness, and love border on pathos. As Elmer Ellis has stated, ". . . as Dunne began to picture the life of Archer Avenue, and through that, hold up a mirror in which humanity might see itself, he found himself frequently deserting satire and comic humor for pathetic and tragic sketches that were necessary to his total picture" (p. 81). Ellis goes on, however, to note correctly that ". . . the great majority of the pieces were humor, pure, simple and great" (p. 82).

Another important quality of the character, Martin Dooley, is his independence, which on most subjects makes him an objective, unbiased observer (exceptions to this rule, such as his anti-British leanings, for example, will be discussed below). Philip Dunne sees Dooley's independence as a key to his success.

> Indeed, Mr. Dooley's phenomenal success was based on this quality of aloofness. Not that Mr. Dooley didn't take sides. When the situation called for a blow, he hit and hit hard. But the blows fell impartially. You were not immune because you happened to be a Democrat or a Republican or a businessman, or a labor leader. ("Remembers," p. 101)

Though Louis Filler, in Crusaders for American Liberalism calls Dunne "Another early muckraker of the first importance. . . .,"[13] Fred Lewis Pattee notes that "He could reprove the

holy muck-raker as harshly as he did the muck-raked sinner."[14]

Behind Mr. Dooley's independence and objectivity is a cynical realism. His response to the idealism with which many of his friends greeted the Alaskan gold rush is indicative of this reserved attitude.

> Whin I was a young man in th' ol' counthry, we heerd th' same story about all America. We used to set be th' tur-rf fire o' nights, kickin' our bare legs on th' flure an' wishin' we was in New York, where all ye had to do was to hold ye're hat and th' goold guineas 'd dhrop into it. . . . But, faith, whin I'd been here a week, I seen that there was nawthin' but mud undher th' pavement, . . . an' that, though there was plenty iv goold, thim that had it were froze to it. . . . Me experyence with goold minin' is it's always in th' nex' county. If I was to go to Alaska, they'd tell me iv th' finds in Seeberya. So I think I'll stay here. ("Peace," pp. 100-102)

His attitude toward women's suffrage also expresses this same hard realism: "I'm not wan way or th' other. I don't care. What diff'rence does it make. . . . Annyhow, as Hogan says, I care not who casts th' votes in me counthry so long as we can hold th' offices" ("Says," pp. 38-39).

At times Dooley's experience, objectivity, and realistic outlook make it difficult to view him as a wise <u>fool</u>. Despite his lack of education and restricted sources of information, Dooley's discourses occasionally sound like the words of a professor translated into an Irish brogue. For example, his economic analysis of "Panics" examines the complicated subject of stock market fluctuations in accurate, though simply stated, detail ("Says," pp. 59-66). Dooley uses "Grogan the banker," "Mulligan, th' little tailor," and "th' shoe-store man" for his illustrations,

but the analysis is directly applicable to the world of high finance.

This sort of wisdom coming from Mr. Dooley reflects an inconsistency in the character, for he is basically a simple, unlearned man, and sometimes even a narrow-minded, misinformed one. As an ardent Irishman, Dooley accepts any alliances or any policies which offer the opportunity to strike out at Great Britain. At times this irrational Irish chauvinism is satirized by Dunne through Dooley's position on the topic. Thus Dunne, who at the start of the First World War urged American intervention on the side of the Allies, has Dooley allying with his arch-enemy and competitor, "Schwartzmeister," because of their common hatred of England ("Peace," pp. 213-217).[15] On the subject of Orangemen, Dooley's objectivity, objections to war, and nonpartisan aloofness vanish. While in theory he notes, "I suppose they [Orangemen] ought to be left walk about, an' I'm a fair man," when he sees one walk by he exclaims, "Jawn . . . if ye run up on th' roof ye'll find the bricks loose in th' top row in the chimbley. Ye might hand him a few" ("Countrymen," pp. 90-91).[16]

Thus Mr. Dooley ranges from wise explicator of complex philosophic and technical matters to practical, objective, common sense observer, to the negative fool who represents the object of the satire. Of these three roles, however, Martin Dooley is most characteristically the common-sense sage, whose observations are simple, practical, and worldly

rather than either terribly sophisticated or ridiculous. Many of the maxims are eminently quotable, and are familiar to readers of books on history, politics, and the social sciences. Among the more famous of these sayings are his evaluation of the role of Vice President, "It isn't a crime exactly" ("Dissertations," p. 115); the Supreme Court, ". . . no matther whether th' constitution follows th' flag or not, th' supreme coort follows th' illiction returns" ("Opinions," p. 26); and the medical profession, "I wondher why ye can always read a doctor's bill an' ye niver can read his purscription" ("Says," pp. 93-94).[17]

Some of these practical observations are indicative of the native shrewdness that has been traditionally the identifying feature of the American wise fool. Dooley notes concerning reform, "I've seen waves in rayform befure, Jawn, Whin th' people in this country gets wurrked up, there's no stoppin' thim. They'll not dhraw breath until ivry man that took a dollar in a bribe is sent down th' r-road. Thim that takes two goes on th' comity in the wave iv rayform" ("Countrymen," p. 35). "Life," says Mr. Dooley, ". . . is like a Pullman dinin'-car: a fine bill iv fare but nawthing to eat" ("Dissertations," p. 35). Rumblings of discontent in the nation do not disturb him, for he knows that "Th' noise ye hear is not th' first gun in a revolution. It's on'y th' people iv th' United States batin' a carpet" ("Dissertations," p. 261).

Mr. Dooley's remarks are usually made to one of his customers, Mr. Hennessy ("Hinnissy").[18] Hennessy is a narrow-minded, staunchly partisan man who serves as a foil for Dooley. In many respects he takes on qualities of the bumpkin or negative fool, comparable to Lowell's Birdofredum Sawin, for example, though he lacks the humorous, "clownish" properties of most of these characters. Walter Blair has described the function of Hennessy in his book, Horse Sense in American Humor: "Hennessy, a fool character, 'who had at best a clouded view of public affairs' and who suffered badly from credulity and horrible logic, asked an innocent question now and then to get the Sage started and to keep his tongue wagging. . . ." (p. 246). Hennessy can be counted upon to spout the Irish-Democrat "line" for Dooley's comment. He slavishly follows the lead of the "machine," and can be used to represent imperialistic, jingoistic, and other narrow sentiments. He condemns Dreyfus, for example, solely on the basis of the latter's Jewishness ("Peace," p. 234), and Booker T. Washington for being Negro ("Opinions," p. 207), providing Dooley the opportunity to object to this sort of ignorant and unjust prejudice on the basis of racial, religious, or ethnic affiliations.

In addition to Mr. Hennessy, Dunne often uses two other characters to add dimension to Dooley's perspective. He refers to Father Kelly and Hogan when he needs the opinions of more educated men on which to comment. As Norris W. Yates describes these two men, "Hogan is the eternal pedant,

'Who's wan iv th' best-read and most ignorant men I know. . . .' Father Kelly, the parish priest, is a common-sense philosopher in his own right, and is often quoted when Dunne wishes to stress Dooley's ignorance or narrow-mindedness rather than his shrewdness" (p. 94). In this manner Dunne achieves the full range of the wise fool character, both through the license of inconsistency in Dooley himself, and by the splitting of the persona through the introduction of additional characters. In this sense Hennessy, Dooley, and Father Kelly/Hogan parallel Lowell's trio of Birdofredum Sawin, Hosea Biglow, and Parson Wilbur.

Humor, of course, is central to Finley Peter Dunne's satiric technique. The humor of the Dooley sketches is light, dry, and amusing rather than broad or intense. Even when its object is to reduce the subject to the ridiculous, the humor is more generous and sympathetic than mocking or harsh. Philip Dunne's recollection of his father's thoughts on humor make the reason for this approach quite clear.

> "Humor," he told me, "especially political humor, is a privilege of the innocent and the secure. . . . No one can be permitted to laugh at a cause he must be carefully prepared to die for. The fanatic is the most humorless creature on earth, but he is the one the people will turn to more and more as fears and tensions grow less and less tolerable. Humor is only effective as a weapon when the victim has enough humor in himself to perceive that he has been wounded. . . . Humor goes hand-in-hand with the independent spirit. If one declines, so does the other. Only free people can laugh, and those who forget how to laugh may soon forget how to be free." ("Remembers," p. 213)

The humor of the Dooley pieces seeks to ridicule without encouraging hatred or scorn. It aims as much at correcting the

object of criticism by creating a sense of shame, as it does to rally opponents to the cause. Additionally, beneath its surface lies a sadness over the abuses it attacks, rather than anger. The laughter it engenders reduces the tension and abrasiveness surrounding the political or social issue rather than increases them. As Mr. Dooley remarks, "I don't think we injye other people's sufferin', Hinnissy. It isn't acshally injyement. But we feel betther f'r it" ("Observations," p. 275).

Dunne creates the humor of these essays through a number of devices common to wise fool literature. Like that of most of his predecessors, Mr. Dooley's dialect is one of the central features of his approach. Dooley's Irish brogue is quite realistic, though as its creator has noted, it is an Americanized Irish "with the difference that would naturally arise from substituting cinders and sulphuretted hydrogen for soft misty air and peat smoke" ("Peace," p. viii). According to Kenneth S. Lynn, "No American, not even Mark Twain, ever had a better ear for dialect than Dunne."[19] The spelling of certain words is inconsistent, but this probably reflects Dooley's poor spelling rather than Dunne's linguistic inaccuracy.

Dooley's dialect, in addition to the humor that it generates through providing opportunities for puns, malapropisms, garbled quotations, and other types of word-play, serves to identify him as a "man of the people." As has been noted, sentiments that would be either pretentious or

inflammatory in standard English are softened and made less objectionable in the mouth of the genial Irishman. Dooley thus may be permitted to discourse on topics "sacred" to his readers, and forgiven his satire when the reader disagrees with him or when he becomes extreme. His perspective is therefore that of the "insider," or friend (and perhaps alter ego) of the reader, rather than that of the supercilious prophet or preacher.

Comical puns are frequently employed by Dooley, and they appear to the reader as resulting "naturally" from either his dialect or his lack of education. He defines an "illegible" (eligible) political candidate as one "that can't be read out of the party" ("Opinions," p. 93, emphasis added). Emile Zola's famous "J'accuse" is rendered as "Jackuse," and the Frenchman is depicted screaming this accurate epithet at the opponents of Dreyfus ("Peace," p. 236). Similarly, a meeting between Mark Hanna and President McKinley, at which certain business interests were defended, is moved, by Dooley's pun, from Jekyl Island to Shekel Island, the slang term for money fixing the true interest of these politicians. Dooley's distortion of the English language also creates a sense of the ludicrous through the malapropism and the double meaning. A modern battle between the Greeks and the Turks is reduced to the comic by Dooley's comparison of it to "Leonidas at th' pass iv Thermometer" ("Peace," p. 111), and it is noted that President McKinley's cat has been named "gold bonds" because of the interest that

he drew ("Peace," p. 77). To Mr. Dooley, the military term "Right Dress" does not refer to a drill procedure, but to the over-emphasis on elaborate uniforms on the part of American officers ("Peace," p. 29).

The garbled or distorted quotation is another source of humor in Dooley's repertory. "Th' modhren idea iv govern-mint," we are told, "is 'Snub th' people, buy th' people, jaw th' people'" ("Philosophy," p. 252). According to Dooley's version of it, "Th' las' thing that happens to a pathrite he's a scoundhrel" ("Countrymen," p. 8). The distortion of language, in Dunne's work, as was the case in the writing of his predecessors, is an effective tool both for generating humor and making incisive satiric comments.

Another technique frequently employed by Mr. Dooley is comical physical description of a person, with the effect of an ad hominem attack. General Fitz-Hugh Lee is described in these terms:

> Did ye iver see a pitcher iv him? A fat ma-an with a head like a football an' a neck big enough to pump blood into his brain an' keep it from starvin'. White-haired an' r-red faced. Th' kind iv ma-an that can get mad in ivry vein in his body. Whin he's hot, I bet ye his face looks like a fire in a furniture facthry. Whin a ma-an goes pale with r-rage, look out f'r a knife in the back. But, whin he flames up so that th' perspi-ration sizzles on his brow, look out f'r hand an' feet an' head an' coupling pins an' rapid-firin' guns. ("Peace," pp. 10-11)

This description of the General transforms the traditional romantic picture of the leader with calm dignity and sober strength to a view of a man who, "when his face flames an' his neck swells an' his eyes like a couple iv illicthric

lamps again a cyclone sky, he'd lead a forlorn hope acrost th' battlemints iv hell" (p. 13).

The technique of the comical description is not confined to the portraits of people. Mr. Dooley describes "th' first gr-reat land battle iv the [Spanish-American] war. . . ." as an encounter between the soldiers and a pack of mules escaping from the corral:

> They dayscinded like a whur-rl-wind, dhrivin' th' astonished throops befure thim, an' thin charged back again, completin' their earned iv desthruction. At th' las' account th' brave sojers was climbin' threes an' tellygraft poles, an' a reg'mint iv mules was kickin' th' pink silk linin' out iv th' officers' quarthers. ("Peace," p. 14)

It is this sort of parody of news reports of the Spanish-American War that first earned the Dooley essays a national audience and reputation.[20]

Other features of Dunne's satire that are similar to the methods used by other American wise fool satirists include the use of the "tall tale," the vaudeville joke, vivid contrasts and incongruities, distortion by overstatement and understatement, and the "snub-ending" in which a witty or ironic remark suddenly reverses the tone of the entire piece. In "The Great Hot Spell," Mr. Dooley "tops" a remark about the heat by spinning a yarn about "Th' Siptimber iv th' year eighteen sixty-eight" when a break in the heat allowed him to step from the ice-box long enough to find out that the thermometer read "four-hundred an' sixty-five" ("Countryman," pp. 180-184). "The Education of the Young" serves as an opportunity for comment on how

a vocation is chosen: "'Th' kid talks in his sleep! 'Tis th' fine lawyer he'll make.' Or, 'Did ye notice him admiring that photygraph? He'll be a gr-reat journalist.' Or, 'Look at him fishin' in Uncle Tim's watch pocket. We must thrain him f'r a banker'" ("Philosophy," pp. 243-244).

The satirist frequently relies on incongruity and contrast to make his point. Besides the contrasting of characters, Dunne achieves this effect linguistically through such sentences as: "All over this land onhappily mated couples ar-re sufferin' almost as much as if they had a sliver in their thumb or a slight headache" ("Says," p. 5). The effect here is to reduce the effectiveness of the arguments in favor of divorce, by comparing marital difficulties with very minor physical ailments. Similarly, in discussing the great literary men of the Victorian era, Dooley makes his comment by a simple incongruous list: "Think iv th' gran' procession iv lithry men,--Tinnyson an' Longfellow an' Bill Nye and Ella Wheeler Wilcox an' Tim Scanlan. . . ." ("Peace," p. 173).

The incongruity and contrast is often the result of Dooley's overstatement or understatement. His description of the scientific testimony at a murder trial ridicules the court's reliance on "expert testimony":

> "Thin they call in a profissor from a college. 'Profissor,' says th' lawyer f'r the State, 'I put it to ye if a wooden vat three hundherd an' sixty feet long, twenty-eight feet deep, an' sivinty-five feet wide, an' if three hundherd pounds iv caustic soda boiled, an' if the leg in a guinea pig, an' ye said yestherdah about bi-carbonate iv sode, an' if it washes up an' washes over, an' th' slimy slippery stuff, an' if a

> false tooth or a lock iv hair or a jawbone or a goluf ball across the cellar eleven feet nine inches--that is, two inches this way an' five gallons that?' 'I agree with ye intireley,' says the profissor. . . ." ("Peace," pp. 142-143)

This mock testimony continues for two pages, but Dooley could have saved the court all the trouble; "What th' coort ought to have done was to call him up, an' say: 'Lootgert, where's ye're good woman?' If Lootgert cuddent tell, he ought to be hanged on gin'ral principles; f'r a man must keep his wife around th' house, an' whin she isn't there, it shows he's a poor provider" (p. 142).

Similarly, Dooley comments on the scientific debates over Darwin's theories by burlesquing the language used by the "experts":

> "Well, thin, listen to th' pro-fissor: 'Such habits not on'y tended to develop the motor cortex itself,' he says, 'but thrained th' tactile an' th' kin--th' kin--I'll spell it f'r ye--k-i-n-a-e-s-t-h-a-t-i-c--pronounce anny way ye plaze--senses an' linked up their cortical areas in bonds iv more intimate assocyations with th' visyool cortex--'. . . .
> "Fr'm what he said I guess that th' pro-fissor that wrote it meant to say that the raison man is betther thin th' other animals is be-cause iv what's in his head." ("Will," pp. 82-83)

Most of the columns end with Mr. Dooley "clinching" the argument, either with a funny remark or one of his famous common-sense observations. Thus a lengthy and idealized discussion of the "past glories" of war ends with such dialogue as: "'Oh, I suppose all wars has been alike,' said Mr. Hennessy. 'Maybe so,' said Mr. Dooley. 'They're like th' rest iv life. It's on'y th' prisint that ain't romantic'" ("Will," p. 211). A discussion of heroes and great

men of history comes to a comical close when Mr. Hennessy asks about a Dooleyism ("As Hogan says, ivry man is a hero excipt thim that have vallays."): 'Be th' way,' said Mr. Hennessy, 'ye spoke of vallays. What is a vallay, annyhow? What does he do?' 'A vallay,' said Mr. Dooley, 'As I undherstand it, is an English gentleman who has arose be conscientious wurruk to th' position iv a boot-jack" ("Will," p. 113).

Though there are many different subjects on which Mr. Dooley comments, most of them may be classified in one of two categories: the exposure of hypocrisy and pretension, and the analysis of the contemporary social situation. The first category includes frequent examinations of such issues as nativism, imperialism, war, ethnic groups, politics, oratory, and reform from the perspective of the cynical "realist" who is not readily swayed by appearances. In the words of Louis Filler, "The cardinal sin, to Dunne, was pretence, and it was this which enabled him to see through the illusions of the racists, and the related attitudes of jingoes and 'patriots,' whom he had occasion to examine."[21]

Imperialism, whether American, British, French, or German, understandably provided a target for a man of Dooley's iconoclastic temperament. Kenneth S. Lynn, in The Comic Tradition in America, makes the point that "To a great extent, Dunne's Irish Catholic perspective was responsible for his incisiveness" on this subject (p. 404). While this is undoubtedly a valid contention, Mr. Dooley's attitude

toward imperialism also parallels that of Lowell's character Hosea Biglow and of Mark Twain very closely.[22] The common-sense philosopher, Irish or not, objects to imperialism because he sees through the pomposity, bravado, and hypocritical masking of self-interest behind religious or political slogans, and because of his sympathy for the treatment of the oppressed "little man" at the hands of his more powerful foes.[23]

Examples of Dooley's observations on this topic are plentiful. As a realist Dooley cannot see the usefulness of colonization: "Hogan says we've got to fight f'r th' supreemacy iv th' Passyfic. Much fightin' I'd do f'r an ocean, but havin' taken th' Phillippeens, which ar-re a blamed nuisance, an' th' Sandwhich Islands, that're about as vallyable as a toy balloon to a horseshoer, we've got to grab a lot iv th' surroundin' dampness to protect thim" ("Says," pp. 100-101). Additionally, Mr. Dooley tends to identify with the victims of these international adventures:

> Th' Lord f'rgive f'r sayin' it, Hinnissy, but if I was a Chinyman, which I will fight any man f'r sayin', an' was livin' at home, I'd tuck me shirt into me pants, put me braid up in a net, an' go out an' take a fall out iv th' in-vader if it cost me me life. ("Philosophy," p. 78)

Dunne's satiric pieces on the Spanish-American War are among his finest. As Elmer Ellis notes, "The excess of emotionalism, the examples of bombast and bluff, the wartime oratory and journalism, and the striking cases of incompetence in Washington, all lent agility to Dunne's imagination"

(p. 111). Perhaps the most famous and most frequently reprinted Dooley column, "A Book Review," finds the sage criticizing Theodore Roosevelt's book, The Rough Riders, for its romantic account of its author's exploits. Dooley concludes the review by noting that the title of the book should have been "Alone in Cubia!" ("Philosophy," pp. 13-18).

Dooley is harshest in his criticism of the generals, "war experts," and jingoists. In "War and War Makers," he observes, "I wisht it cud be fixed up so's th' men that starts th' wars could do th' fightin'. Th' trouble is that all th' prelimin'ries is arranged be the matchmakers an' all they'se left f'r fighters is to do th' murdherin'" ("Philosophy," p. 46). When, at the end of the war, many "heroes" sought to gain public office on the strength of their war records, Dooley responded:

> 'Annyhow,' said Mr. Dooley, 'Mighty few iv th' rale heroes iv th' war is r-runnin' f'r office. Most iv thim put on their blue overalls whin they was mustered out an' wint up an' ast f'r their ol' jobs back--an' sometimes they got thim. Ye can see manny as tin iv thim at th' rollin'-mills defendin' th' nation's honor with wheelbarh's an' a slag shovel.' ("Peace," p. 91)

Mr. Dooley's defense of the "little man" is carried over in his attitude toward nativism, racism, and intolerance. Van Wyck Brooks sees Mr. Dooley as the spokesman for the large number of immigrants in America: "Mr. Dooley spoke for them all in his scorn of the Eastern Anglomania, the 'dilute Englishman, the dudes around New York,' as he called them. . . ." (p. 187). In several columns Dooley

scores the treatment of Black-Americans and American Indians, and the rampant anti-Semitism of the era. As has already been noted, Dunne often used Mr. Hennessy to represent these prejudiced attitudes, and Dooley to expose them. One of Mr. Dooley's reflections on the plight of the Negro is remarkably relevant to the race issue today. He responds to Hennessy's query, "What's goin' to happen to th' naygur?":

> 'Well,' said Mr. Dooley, 'he'll ayther have to go to th' north an' be a subjick race, or stay in th' south an' be an objick lesson. Tis a har-rd time he'll have, annyhow. I'm not sure that I'd not as lave be gently lynched in Mississippi as baten to death in New York. If I was a black man I'd choose th' cotton belt in prifrince to th' belt on th' neck fr'm the polisman's club. I wud so.'
>
> 'I'm not so much troubled about th' naygur whin he lives among his opprissors as I am whin he falls into th' hands iv his liberators.' ("Philosophy," p. 217)

Another favorite target of Mr. Dooley's wit is the inflated oratory of the period.[24] Mr. Dooley says of oratory, "Iv-ry nation injyes some kind iv a crool spoort, an' afther-dinner orathry is th' same with us as bull-fightin' is with the Spanyards" ("Will," p. 133). He also maintains:

> I guess a man niver becomes an orator if he has anything to say, Hinnissy. If a lawyer thinks his client is innocint he talks to th' jury about th' crime. But if he knows where th' pris'ner hid th' plunder, he unfurls th' flag, throws out a few remarks about th' flowers an' th' bur-rds, an' asks th' twelve good men an' thrue not to break up a happy Christmas, but to send this man home to his wife an' childer, an' Gawd will bless thim if they ar-re iver caught in th' same perdicymint. ("Dissertations," p. 23)

Mr. Dooley's views on the subject of social and political reform are of considerable historical interest to the student of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries

in America. Though as a journalist Finley Peter Dunne was an ardent opponent of political corruption and immorality, he shared his wise fool's skepticism concerning both the motives and the effectiveness of reformers.[25] Dooley often suspects reformers of using "muckraking" as a convenient stepping-stone to political office, and of a lack of sincere interest in the needs and desires of the people. He also doubts that people really want reform, or that they are capable of sustaining a reform movement for any length of time ("As a people, Hinnissy, we're th' greatest crusaders that iver was--f'r a short distance") ("Opinions," p. 154).

As an urban citizen of Irish background, Dooley is also aware that more often than not, it is the "machine" that protects his interests, against the attacks of reformers who in reality represent the social elite.[26] According to Richard Hofstadter, "Early civic reform was strongly tainted with nativism" (p. 178). Mr. Dooley was well-enough acquainted with the urban politicians to recognize them as the crooks that they were, and to realize that ultimately "the people" suffered from this sort of government; but as a realist and pragmatist, and as a cynical student of human nature, he could rarely ally himself with the reformer.

Mr. Dooley's coverage of every day domestic life is as diversified as is his view of the political issues of the day. Jennette Tandy acknowledges this range when she writes, "Mr. Dooley is perhaps the most versatile of our political and social satirists. He disposes of golf, women's suffrage,

grand opera, college professors, lying, with a lambent equanimity which is not above shedding sparks" (p. 162). Though a bachelor, Mr. Dooley has quite a bit to say about the "weaker sex." In a piece entitled "On the Power of Love," Dooley attributed a prizefighter's success to the support of the man's wife, "An' Fitz looked over his shoulder an' seen her face, an' strange feelin's of tendherness came over him; an' thinks he to himself: 'What is so good as th' love iv a pure woman? If I don't nail this large man, she'll prob'ly kick in me head'" ("Peace," p. 166).

In a somewhat more serious vein, Dooley is indeed conservative on the subject of woman's rights. "WOMAN'S RIGHTS? What does a woman want iv rights whin she has priv'leges?" ("Observations," p. 253). He applauds the approach of his friend Donahue to handling "the new woman." When "Molly Donahue have up an' become a new woman," and her husband ". . . seen her appearin' in th' road wearin' clothes that no lady shud wear an' ridin' a bicycle,. . . ." Donahue refused to go to work or do the heavy chores until his wife capitulated ("Peace," pp. 136-140). On the subjects of traditional family roles, education of the young, and respect of elders, Mr. Dooley squarely opposed innovation.

He also comments on such domestic matters as the impossibility of keeping New Year's resolutions ("Peace," p. 95), religion ("Rillijon is a quare thing. Be itsilf it's all right. But sprinkle a little pollyticks into it an' dinnymite is bran flour compared with it") ("Will," p. 182), and

the game of golf. Dooley's description of the latter activity is classic:

> Ye're supposed to smash this little grenade fr'm place to place an' here an' there an' up an' down an' hither an' yon with an enormous insthrument iv wood or iron, ontill in due time ye get to what is called a puttin'-green. Ther's a little hole with a tin can in it in th' middle iv this place, an' whin ye're within a fut or two iv this hole, ye take a small hammer out iv th' bag, an' ye hit th' ball four or five times till it tumbles into th' hole. Thin ye wipe th' cold sweat fr'm ye'er brow, write down '5' on a little card, an' walk away a few feet an' do it all over again. ("Will," pp. 147-148)

There has been considerable controversy concerning an evaluation of Mr. Dooley's permanent place in American literary history. Opinions on the subject range from eulogizing the pieces as quaint reminders of a forgotten era, to praising them as timeless examples of the best in American social and political satire.[27] Many critics contend that Dooley's dialect inhibits the contemporary reader's appreciation of his observations. Thus Elmer Ellis suggests that "The most dated element in the Dooley stories turns out to be the dialect, and that Dunne himself recognized that ". . . if the Dooley essays were to live they would have to be rewritten in ordinary English" (p. 307).[28]

If the dialect inhibits the reader's appreciation of the essays, it does not totally negate it. Though it may become tiresome in reading an entire volume, it barely limits the effect of any single short piece. The major factors that do render the Dooley sketches "dated" are the unfamiliarity of many of the specific references they

contain; the inclusion detail that only Dunne's contemporaries can easily recognize; and the fact that only a limited number of the many pieces deal with more universal aspects of human nature. The best Dooley columns are as humorous and revealing today, in dialect or "translated," as they were when they were written, but they represent only a small per cent of the canon. Unfortunately, much of Dunne's finest satire is in the larger group of pieces no longer relevant. As Gerald W. Johnson has observed, ". . . it is possible that a satirist purchases immunity at the price of transience."[29]

Today one most frequently encounters Mr. Dooley's wit in anthologies of American humor, or through the many appearances of his quotable common-sense observations in history and political science texts. Remembering Mark Twain's dictum that a humorist who preaches may achieve an "immortality" of thirty years (see Chapter Two, p. 46), it may regretfully be conceded that the era of Dooley's wide popularity is drawing to a close, but the essays doubtlessly will continue to be of interest to the student of American life during the period 1890-1920, and to the student of American literary styles. Additionally, it is possible that certain of them may survive intact because of Mr. Dooley's insight concerning man's virtues and follies.

Notes

[1]American Humor, op. cit., p. 226.

[2]Other critics who find the Dooley pieces comparable to the rest of nineteenth-century wise fool literature include Constance Rourke, Jennette Tandy, Norris W. Yates, and Walter Blair, all cited in the second chapter, and Dunne's biographer, Elmer Ellis, in Mr. Dooley's America: A Life of Finley Peter Dunne (New York, 1941).

[3]Ellis, p. 3. Additional biographical information is provided by Dunne's son, Philip, in the latter's comments in his edition of Finley Peter Dunne's loosely organized "memoirs," Mr. Dooley Remembers (Boston, 1963).

[4]Norris Yates's chapter on Ade, "George Ade, Student of 'Success,'" in The American Humorist, provides some useful comments on the writers of "The Chicago School" at the turn of the century (pp. 61-80). His chapter on Dunne's work, "Mr. Dooley of Archey Road," is also useful here (pp. 81-99).

[5]Ellis's account of the circumstances surrounding the creation of the Dooley series is found on pp. 58-101 of his biography of Dunne.

[6]Many of the Dooley essays are reprinted in nine different volumes (eight authorized, one, What Dooley Says, a "pirated" edition that Dunne had removed from the market); and there are six volumes in which certain selections from these volumes are again reprinted. Additionally, virtually every twentieth-century anthology of American humor and satire includes selections from Mr. Dooley. The following abbreviations will be used for further references to Dunne's writing: "Dissertations," Dissertations by Mr. Dooley (New York, 1906); "Best," Mr. Dooley at His Best, Elmer Ellis, ed. (New York, 1938); "Countrymen," Mr. Dooley in the Hearts of His Countrymen (Boston, 1899); "Peace," Mr. Dooley in Peace and War (Boston, 1898); "Will," Mr. Dooley on Making a Will and Other Necessary Evils (New York, 1917); "Opinions," Mr. Dooley's Opinions (New York, 1901); "Philosophy," Mr. Dooley's Philosophy (New York, 1906); "Remembers," Mr. Dooley Remembers, Philip Dunne, ed. (Boston, 1963); "Says," Mr. Dooley Says (New York, 1910); "Observations," Observations by Mr. Dooley (New York, 1902).

[7]American Humor, p. 116.

[8]The Mauve Decade, p. 109.

[9]Ibid., p. 104.

[10]It should be noted that although Dunne realized that he had much in common with his character (He once signed a personal letter, "Dooley D.," Ellis, p. 107), the writer's reading habits and attitudes toward intellectual and cultural pursuits were quite different from those of his character. In a letter to his son, Philip, Dunne discusses the relative merits of such writers as Montaigne, Joyce, Gide, Cellini, Gibbon, and Proust ("Remembers," pp. 22-24). Philip Dunne argues that ". . . in Peter Dunne as a personality there was no trace of Mr. Dooley," but this evaluation appears to be considerably overstated ("Remembers," p. 53).

[11]Some interesting background material on these subjects, which helps to illuminate the views advanced by Dooley, is found in Richard Hofstadter, The Age of Reform (New York, 1955), pp. 174-186. Elsewhere in the book Hofstadter calls Dunne ". . . one of the shrewdest commentators of that age. . . ." (p. 22).

[12]"Scientific Management," in The World of Mr. Dooley, Louis Filler, ed. (New York, 1962), p. 214.

[13]"The First Muckraker," p. 58.

[14]The New American Literature: 1890-1930 (New York, 1930), p. 108.

[15]Philip Dunne explains his father's position on this matter in considerable detail:

> Many Irish-Americans in the First War adopted what we learned to call later an isolationist position. They were not so much pro-German as fanatically anti-British. . . . My father was one of the exceptions, not the only one, but perhaps the most prominent and influential among Americans of Irish descent. At the risk of seeming to labor the point, I repeat that he looked on the world through purely American eyes. . . .
>
> My Father didn't like the British as a nation. . . . He simply considered it his duty as an American to stand for our entry into the war as a matter of self defense ("Remembers," pp. 54-55).

[16]Norris W. Yates describes this side of Dooley's character and notes, "Not only does Mr. Dooley's reason desert him at times--as when he wants to throw bricks at various old enemies--but he can't possibly keep well informed. All he reads is the 'pa-apers,' and the data in his mind are a weird mixture of truth and misinformation" (p. 87).

[17]Philip Dunne has collected and "translated" many of these famous quotes in his edition of his father's "memoirs" ("Some Observations by Mr. Dooley," "Remembers," pp. 303-307).

[18]In some of the earlier columns, "Jawn" McKenna functioned in the same role as Hennessy.

[19]The Comic Tradition in America (Garden City, New York, 1958), p. 404.

[20]Robert Hutchinson, in his Introduction to a collection of re-printed Dooley essays, discusses the events surrounding the popular national reception of such Spanish-American War pieces as "On His Cousin George," in Mr. Dooley on Ivrything and Ivrybody (New York, 1963), pp. iv-v.

[21]Introduction to a collection of reprinted "Dooley essays," Mr. Dooley: Now and Forever (Stanford, California, 1954), p. xiv.

[22]See, for example, Lowell's pieces on the Mexican War, in The Biglow Papers, and such essays by Twain as "To a Person Sitting in Darkness," or other essays on the Sandwich Islands or Philippine questions.

[23]In an article entitled "Literary Aspects of American Anti-Imperialism," Fred H. Harrington contends, "Dunne did not embrace the whole ideology of the anti-imperialist movement, but he rendered the cause great service by openly sympathizing with the Filipinos and by making fun of the jingoistic, over-enthusiastic expansionists," New England Quarterly, X (December, 1937), 664.

[24]Barnet Baskerville, in "19th Century Burlesque of Oratory," attributes "a substantial influence" in the decline of the popularity of bombastic oratory to "a small group of 19th century humorists" including many crackerbarrel philosophers such as Artemus Ward, Bill Nye, Petroleum V. Nasby, and Orpheus C. Kerr, American Quarterly, XX (Winter, 1968), 726-743. Of Dunne's role he notes, "With detached good humor, but with deadly effectiveness, Finley Peter Dunne's Martin Dooley deflated the pretentious utterances of political orators by dwelling playfully upon their lyrical qualities. . . ." (p. 741).

[25]Both Elmer Ellis and Philip Dunne treat this matter in detail in their biographical accounts of Finley Peter Dunne.

[26]This complex and paradoxical situation is discussed by Richard Hofstadter who notes, ". . . it was the boss who saw the needs of the immigrant and made him the political instrument of the urban machine. The machine provided quick

naturalization, jobs, social services, personal access to authority, release from the surveillance of the courts, deference to ethnic pride. In return it garnered votes, herding to the polls new citizens, grateful for services rendered and submissive to experienced leadership" (p. 177).

[27]For example, Gilbert Seldes, writing in 1957, assures his reader that his piece is "almost certainly the last ever written about Mr. Dooley" The Seven Lively Arts (New York, 1957), p. 111. F. L. Pattee notes, "A generation has come that does not read Mr. Dooley; long ago was he outmoded, but he will not pass completely into limbo where most of the American comic entertainers have gone" (pp. 109-110). On the other hand, Seldes himself offers a contradicting viewpoint by asserting, "Nearly everything serious in Dooley has the same relevance, and one reads about war experts and 'disqualifying the enemy' (in relation to the Spanish-American and Boer Wars) with a slightly dizzying sensation that this man has said everything that needed to be said twenty years in advance of his time" (p. 123).

[28]In recognition of this opinion, Philip Dunne has endeavored to "translate" a few of the Dooley essays in his edition of his father's "memoirs" ("Remembers," pp. 272-307).

[29]"Mr. Dooley's Creator," New Republic, 149 (December 21, 1963), p. 23.

Chapter IV

LEO ROSTEN'S 'HYMAN KAPLAN': AN URBAN JEWISH-AMERICAN WISE FOOL

Like Finley Peter Dunne, Leo C. Rosten, the creator of a Jewish-American wise fool character named Hyman Kaplan, was raised and educated in the city of Chicago. Rosten was born in Lodz, Poland, in 1908, and at the age of two was brought to the United States by his parents. Of his early experiences in Chicago he has written, "In my youth, I lived on the west side of Chicago. It offered all who inhabited that rough-and-tumble section of the city the vitality of life: crowds, noise, challenge, conflict, camraderie, sidewalk poets, alley crooks, front-step seminars--plus the priceless dream of someday moving to a nicer neighborhood."[1] Rosten was educated in the Chicago public schools, and received advanced degrees, including the Ph.D. (1938) from the University of Chicago.

Rosten's literary career, which reflects both his professional training as a sociologist and his interest in fiction and humor, has included the writing of such widely different types of literature as adventure and mystery stories, humorous articles and sketches, an extremely successful novel, and such serious sociological studies as The Washington Correspondents; Hollywood: The Movie Colony; The Movie Makers; and Religions in America. His literary works include a number of "pot-boilers," published under the

pseudonym "Leonard Ross," the critically acclaimed novel Captain Newman, M.D., and a large number of short columns and articles (e.g., "The World of Leo Rosten," a regular feature in Look magazine), as well as the Hyman Kaplan stories.[2] His most recent book, The Joys of Yiddish (New York, 1968), is a humorous lexicon that serves both as a scholarly guide to the language and as an anthology of Jewish jokes and anecdotes, with which most of the words are illustrated.

As a humorist Rosten has used the wise fool character on a number of occasions in addition to the Hyman Kaplan stories. Concerning a well-known and frequently anthologized satiric sketch, "An Open Letter to the Mayor of New York," Rosten notes, "I tried to write this appeal to reason in various ways, but they all suffered from one inexcusable defect: they reeked of virtue, which is boring. The device I finally hit on, inventing an obvious idiot who defends the Mayor, seemed to me both amusing and effective."[3] In this amusing satire, both a positive and a negative fool are employed. J. R. Jukes, the "obvious idiot," reports the views of a man (Leo Rosten) whose "innocent" complaints concerning the noise, crime, air pollution, and other civic defects of New York are both comical and devastating. Jukes's ignorance, reflected by his poor spelling and inability to defend the mayor against Rosten's charges, adds to the effect of the protestor's "common-sense" observations.

Another example of Rosten's use of this device is the short sketch "The Broads were very Skinny, or Pop Art, Shmop Art, Leave Me Alone."[4] This satiric study of modern art and its pretentious patrons also follows the epistolary pattern, with the report of a character called "Vern" to his friend "Lefty." "Vern" is nonplussed over the attention given to one objet d'art, "Because in that window is a garbadge pail, full of custard, and across the pail in pukey purple letters is the word--BEING--and in the goo are maybe 100 popsikles covered by a Fish-net in which a U.S. FLAG is planted! And across our Stars & Strips is posted--NOTHINGNESS. So help me, Lefty, I am not slipping you no baloney" (p. 90).

Perhaps the most sophisticated of Rosten's uses of the wise fool is in his novel, Captain Newman, M.D.[5] A thorough study of this novel is unnecessary here, but among its characters are such wise fools as Corporal Laibowitz, whose "home remedies" for mental patients are as effective as they are unorthodox and seemingly absurd; several mental patients whose disorders reflect more wisdom than madness; and the "down-to-earth," original, creative, psychiatrist Captain Newman, whose approach is neither naive nor foolish, but which reflects certain aspects of this motif in its practical refutation of established, orthodox, and officially sanctioned procedures. Indeed the central theme of the novel is the paradox of the "insanity" of conforming, unimaginative, and "proper" officials, contrasted with the "sanity" of the bizarre but humane members of an army mental ward, both

staff and patients. Captain Newman, M.D. is frequently hilarious, but it is not really a "humor novel," for it makes some serious, often tragic, comments about human beings and the society that they have created.

Rosten would agree with those students and writers of humorous literature who assert that such social commentary lies behind good comic writing. In the Preface to The Return of H*Y*M*A*N K*A*P*L*A*N he defines humor as ". . . the affectionate communication of insight."[6] He further acknowledges the instructional value of humor in the Preface to The Joys of Yiddish (pp. xxiii-xxiv). Rosten's wit and sense of humor permeate his work, including some of his non-fictional writing. For example, a serious discussion of dialect writing in the Preface to "Return" soberly advises the reader to see an "admirable study" by Arthur Winsome Platt, Humor, Dialect and Catharsis, but the footnote to the reference states, "On second thought, don't try. Professor Platt taught at Rutgers for years, but was asked to resign when they discovered he wasn't real. I just made him up to add the weight of authority to my argument. I hope this teaches you not to be impressed by footnotes" (p. 16).

Hyman Kaplan was invented, his creator notes, for economic rather than pedagogical purposes, however.

> It was 1935, I was living in Washington, wallowing in research on the Capital's corps of newspapermen, for my Ph.D. Thesis. It had been awarded a "field fellowship" from the Social Science Research Council. . . .

> I slaved away in Washington for a year, when I fell in love with a Model A Ford. I saw it on a used car lot and it was going for $125. My heart pined for the black beauty, a rakish two-seater with a canvas top and a rumble seat. . . .
>
> To get the $125, I wrote a story one weekend about a character I called Hyman Kaplan. It was vaguely based on a student I had briefly known in a nightschool class I had occasionally taught to help pay my way through college. The story was sold to the New Yorker and Annabelle [his name for the car] was sold to me.
>
> I had not the faintest notion of writing more than one Kaplan story, but soon Annabelle needed a tire, so I wrote another. . . .
>
> I submitted all my writing under a pen name, Leonard Q. Ross, because I felt indentured to the S.S.R.C., and was fearful of my humorless professors back in Chicago, before whom I would have to appear with an indigestible doctoral dissertation.[7]

Hyman Kaplan is portrayed as a Jewish-American immigrant attending a night school, the American Night Preparatory School for Adults, in New York City. The basis in Rosten's experience for the stories provides an interesting parallel to the sources of Dunne's "Mr. Dooley," Hughes's "Jesse B. Semple," and many other wise fool characters. In this regard, a dialogue in which Rosten answers typical questions that he had been asked concerning the background of his character is instructive:

> "Are the Hyman Kaplan stories true?"
>
> Yes, they are all true--but they never happened.
>
> "Were you ever a teacher in a night school for adults?"
>
> Yes, I taught (I thought) for about two years, as a bootleg substitute for an instructor in a night school on the West Side of Chicago. . . . I committed pedagogy for an instructor who had sensibly suffered a nervous breakdown. . . .
>
> "Why did you move the scene from Chicago to New York?"
>
> It seemed natural. It seemed appropriate. It seemed inevitable. Stories about immigrants in a night school just have an irresistible tropism for

> that marvelous carnival of a city. Besides, New York has an annual mean rainfall.
> "Did you actually have a student like Hyman Kaplan?"
> No. Life is not that beneficent. . . .
> Mr. Kaplan is, I suppose, the projected image of certain traits of personality, nourished by narcissism and pushed to the outermost boundaries of yearning. A famous psychoanalyst once analyzed Mr. Kaplan and concluded he was my alter ego. I sometimes think it is the other way around.
> "Were you Mr. Parkhill?" [Parkhill is the school's instructor and Kaplan's opposite and foil] .
> I don't know. But I also don't know who else he could have been, or where else he could have come from. ("Return," pp. 11-13)

As was true of Mr. Dooley, Hyman Kaplan was not without predecessors, both in traditional Jewish and earlier American literature. Nathan Ausubel, in A Treasury of Jewish Humor, notes the traditional use of fools in Jewish folk literature. According to his account, negative fools (shlimiels, shmendriks, shmiggeges) were often used for didactic purposes by Jewish writers (pp. 380-381). Additionally, one finds, in the Jewish tradition, the common-sense, "crackerbarrel" philosophers, whom Ausubel terms "Synagogue-Stove Sages" (pp. 568-569). Ausubel writes of these characters:

> They touched on every problem, personal, communal, national, and international with the air of spoofing authority that comes quite naturally to simple people who always find the short cut to the most complicated problem. It's the kernel and not the outer husks that they seek for in truth. With ironic amusement they viewed the mess that the powerful of the earth, the learned and the wise made out of human affairs. (p. 568)

Earl Rovit draws the parallel between Jewish and American wise fool characters more specifically in his article "Jewish Humor and American Life"; "It is also true that the Yiddish schliemiel-figure and the schnorrer have their native

American counterparts in such eighteenth- and nineteenth-century folk creations as Brother Jonathan and Poor Richard. . . ."[8]

Jewish-American predecessors of Hyman Kaplan include Montague Marsden Glass's early twentieth-century popular characters "Potash and Perlemutter" ("Abe" and "Mawruss") among others. Of these two wise fool characters Jennette Tandy notes, "They introduce the reader to a new world of idiom and social tradition. It is a far cry from the sarcastic brevities of the rustic philosopher to the involved meanderings, the 'olav hasholem's of Abe and Mawruss. Yet the pair are true provincials."[9] Norris W. Yates includes Hyman Kaplan in a list of characters who are in the tradition of "dialect humor based on the uncouth English of immigrant minorities."[10] In addition, among the several reviews that cite Kaplan's place in the American wise fool tradition, Louis Untermeyer's "A Naturalized Natural" notes the similarity of Hyman Kaplan and Mr. Dooley.[11]

Like Dunne's wise fool, Rosten's is ". . . the very apostle and epitome of urban civilization. . . ." ("Return," p. 26). Hyman Kaplan has been in America for fifteen years, and is a cutter in a New York dress factory. As his creator describes him:

> This Mr. Kaplan was in his forties, a plump, red-faced gentleman, with wavy blond hair, <u>two</u> fountain pens in his outer pocket, and a perpetual smile. It was a strange smile, Mr. Parkhill remarked: vague, bland, and consistent in its monotony. . . . Mr. Kaplan was an earnest student. He worked hard, knit his brows

> regularly (albeit with that smile), did all his homework, and never missed a class. ("Education," pp. 4, 6)

Elsewhere, however, Mr. Parkhill notes,

> But, unfortunately, Mr. Kaplan never seemed to learn anything. His spelling remained erratic, his grammar deplorable, his sentence structure fantastic. There was only one word for Mr. Kaplan's idioms--atrocious. As for Mr. Kaplan's speech, if anything it grew more astounding from day to day. ("Education," p. 164)

Mr. Kaplan's teacher is also disturbed by his pupil's exuberance which he expresses, among other ways, by placing multi-colored stars between the letters of his name on all of the work that he does for class, and by what Parkhill calls "his [Kaplan's] cavalier attitude to reality, which he seemed to think he could alter to suit himself" ("Return," p. 55). This latter feature is perhaps the essence of Kaplan's personality. Kaplan defies all established rules of language and logic with "innocent" abandon, and while he is always "wrong," somehow his private "reality" often paradoxically makes more sense than the officially accepted one. As Rosten tells us:

> Mr. Kaplan did not deny that English had rules--good rules, sensible rules. What he would not accept, apparently, was that the rules applied to him. Mr. Kaplan had a way of getting Mr. Parkhill to submit each rule to the test of reason, and Mr. Parkhill was beginning to face the awful suspicion that he was no match for Mr. Kaplan, who had a way with rules of reason entirely his own. ("Return," p. 58)

In fact, Mr. Parkhill secretly suspects that Kaplan "is a--well, a kind of genius" ("Return," p. 59). "For a long time Mr. Parkhill had believed that the incredible things

which Mr. Kaplan did to the English language were the products of a sublime and transcendental ignorance," but, "The more Mr. Parkhill thought this over the more he was convinced that it was neither ignorance nor caprice which guided Mr. Kaplan's life and language. It was Logic. A secret kind of logic, perhaps. A private Logic. A dark and baffling logic. But Logic" ("Education," p. 152). Kaplan is not consciously aware of his intuitive genius, so he submits meekly to correction, after he has made his point.

In this sense Kaplan represents a departure from the most common American wise fool character, the crackerbarrel philosopher, and is closer to the medieval wise fools of the sotties, or of Skelton and Erasmus. His insights are "innocent," and almost "inspired" rather than the result of practical experiences. After one of his "wrong/right" interpretations, "Mr. Kaplan smiled with the sweet serenity of one in direct communication with his muse" ("Education," p. 35).[12] Hyman Kaplan is another example of the tendency toward inconsistency in wise fool characters, however, for despite his almost mystical insights, he is still a fool. Like that of Erasmus's Folly, Kaplan's divine wisdom emerges from the mouth of a very human, and imperfect, being.

He can, for example, be quite intolerant of his classmates (though in fairness it should be noted that some of them are also less than tolerant of his errors). On several occasions he ridicules the Italian heroes Garibaldi, Dante, and Mazzini when an Italian member of the class uses them as

examples ("Education," pp. 95, 134, "Return," p. 91).[13] He also can resort to sophistry to win his battles with his fellow students, as he does when he defends the contention that newspapers can be either masculine or feminine by offering the "Harold Tribune" as an example ("Education," p. 162), or when he escapes censure for his sentence, "If your eye falls on a bargain pick it up," by claiming he was writing to a man with a "gless eye" ("Return," p. 90).

Kaplan is not basically a negative fool, however, for the author usually uses him to expose rather than represent folly. He is essentially a genial, kindly man, who primarily wants to help his classmates and Mr. Parkhill. Like many of the wise fool characters, including Mr. Dooley, Kaplan occasionally becomes quite serious, and the tone of some of the pieces is closer to pathos than humor. When, for example, one of the students, Mr. Teitleman, is humiliated into leaving the class, Kaplan is noticeably upset over the incident ("Education," pp. 117-128). Mr. Kaplan is a sincere defender of his own "private logic," devoted to the task of improving his command of the language, and unwilling to accept arbitrarily rules and procedures that do not make "sense" to him.

Another of the character's virtues is his concern with what he terms "dip thinking," as opposed to the petty, trivial, grammatical exercises that he is assigned. For Kaplan each speech or composition exercise is an opportunity for speculative thought, rather than the easier task represented

by the less ambitious but more "correct" work of some of the better students. After one particularly awful attempt, Kaplan answers the charge that there are too many mistakes by claiming, "Dat's because I'm tryink to give dip ideas" ("Education," p. 17). In one of his compositions Kaplan writes:

> Sometimes I feel sad about how some people are living. Only sleeping eating working in shop. Not thinking. They are just like Enimals the same, which dont thinking also. Humans should not be like Enimals! They should Thinking! This is with me a deep idea.
>
> Now we are having in school the axemination--a comp. Mostly will the students write a story for Comp. But I am asking, Why must allways be a story? Mr. P. must be sick and tierd from storys. Kaplan, be a man! No Story! Tell better about Thinking something! ("Education," p. 174)

To make his point in these stories, Rosten contrasts Kaplan's attitude with that of several other characters, the most important of whom is the teacher, Mr. Parkhill. Parkhill is a pedant-fool who has an excellent command of language (Latin as well as English), but who lacks Kaplan's imagination, vision, and willingness to innovate. As has been noted, Rosten feels that Parkhill as well as Kaplan represents an aspect of his own personality.

> "Not all of me, I hasten to add, is Mr. Parkhill, nor all of him me. Part of him, I suspect, is that portion of me which is conventional, slow-witted, virtuous beyond belief. Other facets of him, which are not me, I deeply envy and admire: infinite patience, kindliness, restraint, an incorruptible faith in man, and unshatterable faith in his perfectibility." ("Return," p. 13).

Parkhill is portrayed as a stereotypical "WASP," cool, reserved, proper, and sincere. He is a graduate of a school

with the Anglo-Saxon name of Tilsbury, and is by his own admission rather out of place in his present urban, immigrant environment ("Return," pp. 108-109). His defense of his work at the night school, though said in jest, is revealing; "Why, Aunt Agatha, just as your father brought God to the heathen, I bring Grammar to the alien" ("Return," p. 110). He is truly concerned about his students, but he is also capable of treating them with sarcasm at times, particularly in the case of Hyman Kaplan. His self-assurance often proves his undoing, as when he smugly and patronizingly insists that Kaplan is speaking of "a big department store," when the latter is asking about the correct use of the polite expression "I big de pottment" ("Education," p. 12). Most frequently, however, Parkhill is simply the unwitting victim of his own "correct" language and logic, a system that makes him worry about teaching the distinction between "It is I" and "It is me," while Kaplan solves the dilemma with the "logical," "It's Kaplan" ("Education," p. 175). Parkhill is forced, by both his training and personality, to insist upon his traditional comparisons and antonyms rather than accept such Kaplanisms as "good, better, high-class," "bad, voice, rotten," or "new-second-hand," which are obviously more descriptive ("Education," pp. 20-23).

Besides Parkhill, Kaplan is contrasted with some of the more conventional, and better, students in the class. Most formidable of these adversaries is Miss Rose Mitnick, a shy, serious, and able, if humorless and unimaginative student.

As David Macaree points out, "There are conformists like Miss Mitnick who accept rules without questions and gain praise thereby . . . but lose the chance of living more richly as we recognize when we see her composition which contains no ideas, dip or otherwise, but is pedantically accurate. With these Hyman is at war" (pp. 336-337). In the confrontations that take place between the proponents of the Parkhill/Mitnick perspective and Kaplan's alternative, portions of the class side with each faction. In Kaplan's corner one finds, most frequently, Sam Pinsky ". . . in spirit a man fashioned by his Maker for the express purpose of playing Sancho Panza to Mr. Kaplan's Don Quixote" ("Return," p. 23). The conflicts that take place between these two groups provide much of the humor and most of the opportunities for social commentary in the Kaplan sketches.

One of the many examples of these battles is the one which takes place over the class's criticism of Mr. Kaplan's letter to his brother, Max ("Education," pp. 43-54). After criticizing Kaplan's spelling, grammar, and usage throughout the body of the letter, Miss Mitnick has the temerity to challenge Mr. Kaplan's use of "your animated brother, Hymie" as a signature. Having just defended the use of three exclamation points after the salutation by arguing that his affection for his brother would be understated by any fewer, Kaplan is prepared to defend the appellation "animated." He refuses to consider such common terms as "dear" or "fond,"

since they are clearly inappropriate to the degree of enthusiasm that he wishes to convey. Finally he agrees to replace "animated"--with the "Poifick" substitute, "Megnificent!" (p. 53). Despite the unorthodoxy of Kaplan's conclusion to his letter, he does make the more orthodox alternatives appear feeble and insincere.

The most common subject of the confrontation is, naturally, the English language, so dialect plays an even greater role in the Kaplan stories than it does in most other American wise fool works. Rosten's interest in language and dialect reflects his divided career, for he is a serious student of the subject as well as a dialect humorist, as evidenced by The Joys of Yiddish. Concerning the art of writing comic dialect he notes:

> Comic dialect is humor plus anthropology. Dialect must seduce the eye to reach the brain. It must tantalize without irritating, and defer without frustrating. It must carry a visual promise to the reader that what he does not instantly recognize can be deciphered with ease and will be rewarded by pleasure. The reader must be cued into making what he thinks is his own special and private discovery--a discovery of delight which, he suspects, neither the character nor the author fully appreciates.
>
> Dialect is not transcription. Nothing is more depressing than a passage of broken English exactly transcribed from the spoken. The "accurate ear" for which a writer is praised is as inventive as it is accurate. It is creative, not literal, for the writer transforms what he hears into that which you could not. ("Return," p. 14).

Rosten's structural device, in the Kaplan stories, of the meetings of an elementary class in English for immigrants is thus a particularly fortunate one for the writing of dialect humor. The linguistic difficulties of Mr.

Parkhill's students provide a natural opportunity for an interesting and hilarious examination of the English language, semantics, and logic.[14] The various foreign accents of the students lead them into a plethora of malapropistic errors.[15] Thus Kaplan discourses on the virtues of "Abraham Lincohen," "Judge Washington" ("Education," p. 96), "Shanghai Jack" (the Chinese leader) ("Return," p. 23), or on the musical comedies of the British team of "Goldberg and Solomon" ("Education," p. 67). He also blunders into such happy mistakes as "heaven a good time" ("Education," p. 33).

As has already been noted, Kaplan's comparison of adjectives and antonyms is often comical and expressive, though inaccurate. "To eat," for example, is presented as "eat, ate, full," and the opposite of "inhale" is, of course, "dead" ("Return," p. 25). The pun is, for Kaplan as for his fellow dialect-wise fools, unavoidable and expressive. During an examination he asks about the permissibility of "holdink bladders," creating an embarrassing situation for Mr. Parkhill out of the simple problem of keeping his paper from becoming smudged ("Education," p. 165). His term "autocrap" for King George III ranks with his denunciation of that tyrant's use of "missionaries" to do the fighting for him ("Education," pp. 97-98). Kaplan's fluidity in punning rescues him from some uncomfortable situations at times, as when, in reference to the exploits of Patrick Henry, he claims ". . . I will always edmire the glorious pest." When Miss Mitnick corrects his pronunciation of "past," he responds,

"To a tyrant like Kink Judge, . . . vat else vas Patrick Henry bot a glorious pest?" ("Return," pp. 105-106). Mr. Kaplan also does some amusing things with famous quotations, as did Mr. Dooley. For example, he renders the famous military admonition of the Revolutionary War, "Don't shoot 'till their eyes toin white" ("Return," p. 93).

In addition to their comic dialect, the Kaplan stories provide excellent examples of other techniques common to American wise fool literature. The contrast between Kaplan's exaggeratedly enraptured speech on the glories of nature and the dull, prosaic grammatical corrections of it, for example, provides a humorous comment on the insensitivity of pedants ("Education," pp. 25-31). Kaplan creates a sense of incongruity, in one of the stories, by linking the serious and frivolous aspects of the American newspaper:

> Vat <u>is</u> a newspaper? Ha! It's a show! It's a comedy! It's education! It's movvellous! . . . . Even the edvoitismants in de paper is a kind lesson. An' ufcawss de odder pots a newspaper: de hatlininks, de auditorials, de cottoons, de fine pages pictchiss on Sonday, dat ve callink rotogravy sactions. . . . An' in newspapers we find ot all dat's heppinink all hover de voild! Abot politic, crimes, all kinds different <u>scendels</u> pipple makink, abot if is goink to be snow or rainink, an' ufcawss--'spacially in U.S.--all abot Sax! ("Education," pp. 159-160).

One of the most comical passages in these stories concerns Kaplan's effort at explicating the famous "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow" soliloquy from Shakespeare's "Macbeth." Parkhill tells the class who wrote the piece, but forgets to place it in context. Kaplan is certain the

speech represents the thoughts of "Julius Scissor," recited ". . . in a tant, on de night bafore dey makink Julius de Kink from Rome." Kaplan goes on:

> So he is axcited an' ken't slip. He is layink in bad, tinking: 'Tomorrow an' tomorrow an' tomorrow. How slow dey movink! Almost cripps! Soch a pity de pace! . . . . De days go slow, fromm day to day, like leetle tsyllables on phonograph records fromm time. . . . 'An' vat about yestidday,' tinks Julius Scissor. Ha! 'All our yestiddays are only makink a good light for fools to die in de dost! . . . . An' Julius is so tired, an' he vants to fallink aslip. So he hollers mit fillink, 'Go ot! Go ot! Short candle!' So it goes ot. . . . But he ken't slip. Now is bodderink him de idea fromm life. 'Vat is de life altogadder?' tinks Julius Scissor. An' he gives answer, de pot I like de bast. 'Life is like a bum actor, strottink an' hollerink arond de stage for only van hoar bafore he's kicked ot. Life is a tale told by idjots, dat's all, full of fonny sonds an' phooey!' ("Education," pp. 137-139)

Rosten relies heavily on the effect of the surprise, humorous, "snub ending" in these tales. Typical of this technique is Mr. Kaplan's earnest remark to Mr. Parkhill, after the class had finally conquered the "W-V" pronunciation problem by laboriously converting "ooo-eee" into "w's" for each word. After Parkhill, flushed with the success of his pedagogical device, urged additional practice to perfect the newly acquired ability, Kaplan replies, "Practice? . . . Fromm nah on, ve vill voik vit dobble-youss till ve vouldn't iven vhisper--."

Though the techniques are quite similar, the Kaplan sketches differ considerably from most of the other representatives of American wise fool dialect humor in that they seldom make any direct references to contemporary events or

specific social or political issues.[16] Superficially they are simply gently humorous portrayals of the linguistic struggles of a comical immigrant. The element of social satire in Hyman Kaplan's story becomes obvious only when one considers the implications of the battle of non-conforming "genius" and personal, original intensity versus sterile pedantry and humorless rigidity.[17]

Additionally, the stories provide a satiric contempt on the infantile and unstimulating approach to basic education in America. Kaplan's love for "dip thinking" is thwarted by the puerile and idealized accounts of American history presented by his teachers, which he, like many American school children accepts literally and unquestioningly. The highly formalized, mechanical, and uncreative assignments he is given reflect our educational system's emphasis on learned response rather than developed abilities. Kaplan's insistence on altering the accepted forms to fit his own particular desires and needs (as, for instance, when he writes a "personal business letter" to his uncle, mixing the business form with terms of personal affection), and his patient, friendly, but completely stubborn adherence to his positions despite the overt hostility of the authority (Parkhill) and his peers (Mitnick et al.), suggest a social function, in the work, that transcends "mere humor."

It is possible that Rosten's indirect rather than specific satire[18] has earned the Kaplan stories a more permanent place than is enjoyed by most wise fool humor. None of these

pieces are really dated, as are many of Dunne's for example, and they are unlikely to be dated as long as conformity and pedantry exist, and as long as learning a language is difficult. The characterization of Kaplan, Mr. Parkhill, and the others, in addition to Rosten's clever use of language and ability to create funny situations are responsible for the wide popularity of the stories, and these qualities are ones that affect a work's universality and longevity.

Notes

[1]The Many Worlds of Leo Rosten (New York, 1964), pp. 3-4.

[2]The Many Worlds of Leo Rosten, an aptly titled anthology, provides selected examples of Rosten's various writings.

[3]Ibid., p. 7. The piece is reprinted here, pp. 8-13.

[4]Harpers, 231 (October, 1965), 90-91.

[5]New York, 1956, 1961.

[6]p. 14. Future references to the two volumes of collected Kaplan pieces will use the following abbreviations: "Education," The Education of H*Y*M*A*N K*A*P*L*A*N (New York, 1937, 1965); "Return," The Return of H*Y*M*A*N K*A*P*L*A*N (New York, 1959).

[7]The Many Worlds of Leo Rosten, pp. 27-28. The first collection of these stories, "Education," was published under this pseudonym (distinguished from the other pseudonym, "Leonard Ross," of the "potboilers" by the addition of the 'Q.'). The second collection, "Return," appeared under the author's real name.

[8]American Scholar, 36 (Spring, 1967), p. 243. Rovit's spelling of "schlimiel" is a commonly used variant, but Rosten, in The Joys of Yiddish, argues for the omission of the 'c.' Rosten's lexicon is the best available source for brief descriptions and illustration of these character-types, and Ausubel's book provides more lengthy stories in which they are used.

[9]Crackerbox Philosophers in American Humor and Satire (New York, 1925), p. 163.

[10]The American Humorist, p. 335.

[11]Saturday Review, 16 (August 21, 1937), p. 5.

[12]David Macaree takes a similar approach to Kaplan's "errors," in an article entitled "The Study of Humorous Fiction and The Education of H*Y*M*A*N K*A*P*L*A*N, English Journal, 57 (March, 1968), 334-338. According to Macaree, Kaplan's function is ". . . to educate his teacher to the kind of insight that he possesses intuitively" (p. 337).

[13]Kaplan also resorts to ad hominem attacks at times, commenting on the weight or marital status of a classmate, or calling on a "Litvak," which in addition to identifying

the student as a Lithuanian, connotes "an erudite but pedant type--thin, dry, humorless," or "A sharp trader, a corner-cutting type--and one whose piety is shallow," according to Rosten's Yiddish lexicon (p. 209) ("Return," p. 74).

[14]In an amusing article entitled "Wallop Yon Horse with a Parachute," Rosten examines the problems that can be raised by attempting to speak an unfamiliar language. The title represents the result of a tourist's attempt at requesting an umbrella in "guide book" Spanish, Look, 30 (March 8, 1966), 16.

[15]Evan Esar, in The Humor of Humor (New York, 1952), uses the term "macaronic humor" to define the comic effects of an inappropriate or inaccurate juxtaposition of different languages (p. 96). In the strictest sense of the definition, the malapropisms of Rosten's characters are not macaronic, since foreign words are rarely incorporated into English sentences, but the distortion is often created by a similarity of sound between English words and words more familiar to the immigrants. It would be useful to employ this term with regard to these types of errors, since it would aid in distinguishing malapropisms of this sort from the more common errors which result from ignorance or simple misunderstanding. Esar's definition is perhaps sufficiently liberal for this purpose, since he says of macaronic humor, "In addition to prose and verse specimens, and combinations of living and dead languages, it makes use of other multilingual fusions of spelling, pronunciation, and word use" (p. 96). Additional examples of this type of linguistic error in the stories include Mrs. Yanoff's recitation concerning Mary's little lamb "with fleas white like snow" ("Return," p. 114), and the various requests for explanations of such expressions as "monkey ranch" and "a sleeping of the tong" ("Education," p. 56).

[16]There are a few notable exceptions to this rule, as when Kaplan writes a piece criticizing the "sweat shop" labor conditions in his dress factory ("Education," p. 16), or when he tells the class that he missed the funeral of his friend Jake Popper "Becawss de funeral vas in de meedle of de veek, . . . an' I said to mineself, 'Keplen, you in America, so tink like de Americans tink!' So I tought, an' I didn't go. Becawss I tought of dat dip American idea, 'Business bafore pleasure!'" ("Education," p. 103).

[17]This approach to the Kaplan stories is supported by David Macaree's analysis of their ultimate meaning, in his article, "The Study of Humorous Fiction and The Education of H*Y*M*A*N K*A*P*L*A*N," pp. 36-38. He notes that the book may be considered as ". . . a social document illustrating the difficulty of assimilating the gifted person into the group. . . ." (p. 338). Macaree also asserts that "The

education of Hyman Kaplan becomes an education by Hyman Kaplan in the things that matter, and these are far more than items in elementary English" (p. 338).

[18]According to Rosten's definition of the term satire, it should not be applied to this material, since the author defines it as "focused bitterness." He defines the term burlesque as "the skewing of proportions," which would apply nicely, and, as was noted above, he calls humor "the affectionate communication of insight," a definition also quite applicable ("Return," p. 14). If satire is defined as criticism through ridicule, or a similar definition that does not depend upon connoting anger or bitterness, the term would accurately describe the result of Mr. Kaplan's encounters.

Chapter V

LANGSTON HUGHES'S 'JESSE B. SEMPLE': AN URBAN NEGRO-AMERICAN WISE FOOL

The place of Langston Hughes's Jesse B. Semple ("Simple") in the tradition of American wise fool literature has been noted by several critics, including Hughes's bibliographer, Donald C. Dickinson. According to Dickinson, "His penetrating wit is in the high tradition of the so-called crackerbox philosophers, Josh Billings, Mr. Dooley, and Artemus Ward. If in Simple's case the crackerbox has been converted to a bar stool the total effect is pleasantly the same."[1] Hughes suggests his awareness of the similarities between his Negro-American wise fool and other such characters in world literature, when he writes in one of his two autobiographical volumes that he ". . . began to read Don Quixote in the original, a great reading experience that possibly helped me to develop many years later in my own books a character called Simple."[2]

Langston Hughes, like Leo C. Rosten, had a widely varied literary career, of which the "Simple" stories represent only one small part. His published work includes several volumes of poetry, a collection of plays, a novel, a number of books on Negro history and culture, and many articles on writing and on the condition of Negro life in America.[3] Hughes was a member of the famous informal group of black artists during the 1920's whose work constituted

what has been called the "Harlem Renaissance," and he played a significant role in the development of a realistic, original, and racially-oriented black literature. Born in Joplin, Missouri, in 1902, Hughes lived at one time or another in each of the three major urban black ghettoes (Chicago, Washington, D.C., New York), as well as in Mexico, France, Russia, and other foreign countries. His life and his work are characterized by a peculiar blend of intellectualism and education (including a B.A. degree from Lincoln University in 1929), and an understanding of and proximity to the culture and lives of lower class, "man-on-the-street" black people.

Hughes began the "Simple" sketches as columns in a Negro newspaper, the Chicago Defender, in 1943.[4] The stories quickly became immensely popular, enjoying a wide following both in the United States and abroad.[5] Unlike the wise fool writing of the nineteenth-century humorists and the work of Finley Peter Dunne, however, the "Simple" pieces are rarely anthologized (except in books devoted to Negro writing), and have received little scholarly attention.[6] James Emanuel is indeed justified in claiming, "A deeper analysis of the Simple books should be made. It is worthwhile sociologically to synthesize Simple's comments on American delusions, white liberals, foreigners, Negro leaders, and the South. It is profitable esthetically to comprehend how ingeniously he extracts humor from absolutely

odd notions, expressed and implied etymologies, turnabouts, and the illusoriness of race itself" (p. 157).

Considering the gravity of the social and political issues concerning the black man in this country, one well might ask why Langston Hughes chose humor as the vehicle for his comments on them. He answers this question in some of his several comments on the writing of humor. To begin with, he notes that many features of the prejudices American whites have toward blacks are inherently funny. In an article entitled "White Folks Do the Funniest Things," Hughes writes, "Some incidents of Jim Crowism which I personally have experienced have amused me more than they have angered me--due as nearly as I can analyze them, to their very absurdity."[7] He goes on to tell of being served through a hole in the wall of a segregated lunch-shack, and of his difficulty in leaving a "whites-only" waiting room when a law officer refused to let him leave through the front (and only) door. The title of this article is derived from a black newspaper boy's view of the absurdity of national affairs, in a comment very reminiscent of Dunne's Mr. Dooley, "'We ain't even got the Philipines,' he said, 'and here we are grantin' 'em freedom! White folks do the funniest things!'" (p. 46).

In the foreword to Simple Stakes a Claim, Hughes laments the absence of humor in the black magazines. "The serious colored magazines like the Crisis or Phylon do not publish humor even if given to them free. These magazines evidently

think the race problem is too deep for comic relief. Such earnestness is contrary to mass Negro thinking. Colored people are always laughing at some wry Jim Crow incident or absurd nuance of the color line" (pp. 11-12). Nancy Levi Arnez and Clara B. Anthony support this contention in their study, "Contemporary Negro Humor as Social Satire."[8] They point out that Negro humor has developed through three separate stages, from "in-group" self-criticism, to stereotyped "half-truth caricatures," and finally to the more mature "public humor" which proudly creates a self-image based on an essentially realistic characterization (p. 340). Unlike many Negro critics and editors, Hughes realized that Negro humor had evolved to a type of commentary that was useful to the Negro's self-and-public image, rather than detrimental to it.

In The Book of Negro Humor, Hughes (its editor) says of humor:

> Humor is laughing at what you haven't got when you ought to have it. Of course, you laugh by proxy. You're really laughing at the other guy's lacks, not your own. That's what makes it so funny--The fact that you don't know you are laughing at yourself. Humor is when the joke is on you, but hits the other fellow first. Humor is what you wish in your secret heart were not funny, but it is, and you must laugh. Humor is your own unconscious therapy. (p. vii)[9]

This aspect of humor, "laughing to keep from crying," is an important feature of Hughes's approach in the "Simple" material.[10] It is the touch of pathos in Simple's humor that leads Arthur P. Davis to say of him, "In this light Simple

is no longer a comic character but a black Pagliacci. Underneath all of his gaiety and humor there is the basic tragedy of the urban Negro and his circumscribed life" (p. 28). Simple expresses the therapeutic value of humor in the face of adversity, in his own amusing way, when he responds to the charge that "Nothing you say sounds funny to me" with "Laugh anyhow . . . if you do not laugh, you might get mad, that is no good for brotherhood."[11]

In the foreword to Simple Stakes a Claim, Hughes gives another reason for treating racial matters humorously. "Humor is a weapon, too," he says, "of no mean value against one's foes" (p. 12). Humor is used as a weapon in these stories in a variety of ways, from ridiculing the enemies of the black man; to providing a gentle corrective to liberals and other well-meaning but unrealistic or insufficiently motivated friends of the Negro; to criticizing blacks who either "disgrace the race" or are less militant or "race conscious" than Hughes would like them to be. Since Simple's humor additionally makes him likeable, it is an important factor in making his "message" more readily accepted by a sympathetic audience.

In all of his writing, Langston Hughes concerned himself with a realistic approach to the daily life of his fellow Negroes. He revolted against the romantic idealization of Negro "heroes" and the didactic "Horatio-Algerish" works of some of his contemporary black writers, and was therefore frequently condemned by black as well as white

critics who disapproved of his militancy and his realistic treatment of the so-called "unsavory" aspects of Negro life.[12] During the last years of his career (he died in 1967), Hughes concentrated even more intensely on portraying the life of the ghetto Negro. As Donald C. Dickinson wrote, shortly before Hughes's death:

> Harlem is Hughes's principal subject and inspiration during recent years. Aside from two academic appointments he lived this period in New York, close to his favorite people, the urban Negroes. His poetry, more than ever, reflects the rhythms of contemporary jazz, while his major literary figure, Jessie [sic] B. Semple, is drawn wholly from the street life of the city. (p. 82)

Hughes's account of the origin of his character, Jesse B. Semple, reflects this literary interest, and, in its barroom setting, provides an interesting parallel to Dunne's recollection of his creation of Mr. Dooley (see p. 58). Simple was born, Hughes tells us, as the result of a barroom encounter with a neighbor who worked in a war plant and made "cranks." Hughes inquired as to the function of those "cranks," and the following dialogue ensued:

> I said, "What kind of cranks?"
> He said, "Oh man, I don't know what kind of cranks."
> I said, "Well, do they crank cars, tanks, buses, planes, or what?"
> He said, "I don't know what them cranks crank."
> Whereupon his girlfriend, a little put out at the ignorance of his job, said, "You've been working there long enough. Looks like by now you ought to know what them cranks crank."
> "Aw, woman," he said, "You know white folks don't tell colored folks what cranks crank."
> That was the beginning of Simple. I have long since lost track of the fellow who uttered those words. But out of the mystery as to what the cranks of this world crank, to whom they belong, and why,

> there evolved the character in this book, wondering and laughing at the numerous problems of white folks, colored folks, and just folks--including himself. (Foreword, "Who is Simple?" "Best," pp. vii-viii)

All of the incidents and characters in the "Simple" stories are based on the author's own experiences in Harlem, and as he notes, ". . . it is impossible to live in Harlem and not know at least a hundred Simples, fifty Joyces, twenty-five Zaritas, a number of Boyds, and several Cousin Minnies--or reasonable facsimilies thereof" ("Best," p. vii).

Like many of the wise fool characters, Simple is at different times both a positive and a negative figure. Like Mr. Dooley, for example, he is an inconsistent character in that he sometimes represents and sometimes exposes that which the author wishes to criticize. Simple is often portrayed as a naive bumpkin or clown (particularly in his domestic affairs), and he at times represents a violent and random extremism that both he (in calmer moments) and Hughes ultimately reject. However, even when Simple is cast in this role, Hughes is sympathetic with his character's position, for Simple always means well in his tangled domestic adventures, and his extremism is one for which there are understandable causes.

In the majority of the stories Simple is not the negative "bumpkin" fool, but the more positive figure, the "common-sense" philosopher. Like Hyman Kaplan, Simple is uneducated, but not stupid. As Donald C. Dickinson states, "In his conversation Simple reveals an insight born of the

streets, of low-paying, back-breaking jobs, of Saturday night parties, and Sunday prayer meetings" (p. 99). He appeals to his practical, experiential knowledge in his debates with his more educated and sophisticated drinking partner: "I do not care what you know out of a book, you also have to know a lots out of life" ("Wife," p. 161). Simple feels no sense of inferiority because of his lack of formal schooling, and he confidently holds forth on any and every subject.

At times, in fact, Simple's common-sense observations are so involved and sophisticated that he comes close to losing his mask as a wise fool. For example, in one of his attacks on the slow pace of racial integration in the South, he delivers an analysis of international politics which asserts that the "third world" forces of "Nasser, Nehru, and Chou" will ultimately force America to correct its treatment of black Americans, because of our need to protect our image in the world ("Claim," pp. 66-72). In the same manner he examines the road to political success in the ghetto, feigning a belief that "politicianer" is a synonym for graft, and concluding with an astute observation of the relative importance of an attractive platform rather than actual results to a politician's future ("Claim," pp. 17-19). In discussions such as these some of Simple's statements sound as if, exclusive of the dialect, they might more easily be attributed to a well-educated journalist or a professor of political science.

Above all Simple is a Negro. As Arthur P. Davis maintains, "Our first impression of Mr. Jesse B. is that however unpredictable he may be in other things he is thoroughly consistent in one respect: first, last, and always, he is a 'race-man'--a fourteen carat, one hundred percent, dyed-in-the-wool race man" (p. 22). Accused of bringing race into every topic he discusses, Simple counters, "I do . . . because that is what I am always coming face to face with--race" ("Claim," p. 58). A participant in the Harlem riots (of 1943), Simple is a militant advocate of civil rights who is essentially suspicious of, and hostile toward, whites. He is capable of praying that ". . . when Christ comes back this time . . . I hope he smites white folks down!" ("Mind," pp. 16-17). Yet when he is asked whether or not he includes Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt in this blanket condemnation of the white race, he exempts her readily. In addition he is objective enough to recognize and appreciate the fairness or benevolence of some white people, such as a man who gave him a dime for ice cream when he was a little boy, a white couple who stood up with him at his city-hall wedding, or an Irish-American policeman who sided with a black taxicab driver in a dispute with a belligerent Southern tourist.

Simple, like Mr. Dooley and Hyman Kaplan, differs from the nineteenth-century American wise fools such as Major Downing, Orpheus C. Kerr, Josh Billings, Petroleum V. Nasby, Bill Arp, and others in that he is a thoroughly urban character. Though he was born in rural Virginia ("I would be

borned in a state named after a woman. From that day on women never gave me no peace"--"Mind," p. 4), and though he is "country" in his taste for "soul food" and his occasional nostalgia for the laziness and serenity of his boyhood, Simple repeatedly reaffirms his love for Harlem and his unwillingness to leave the city: "I will not return to the country, North or South. No backwoods for me. I am a big-city man myself. My roots is here" ("Sam," p. 46). He rarely ventures beyond the borders of Harlem, and when he does the trip usually has some rather disastrous results for him. A brief trip to New Jersey, for instance, ends in Simple's losing a fight, catching cold, having to push the stalled car off of the George Washington Bridge, and getting into deep trouble with his fiancée ("Wife," pp. 87-90). Simple feels comfortably at home in Harlem. He answers the query, "What is it you love about Harlem?" by asserting, "I feel like I got protection . . . from white folks. . . . Furthermore I like Harlem because it belongs to me" ("Mind," p. 31).

The "Simple" sketches are in the form of dialogues between Simple and a bar-room companion who has been identified as Langston Hughes, but is called "Boyd" by the author in the preface to The Best of Simple (p. vii) and the musical comedy that was based on the stories ("Simply Heavenly," 1957). Simple also refers to him twice by that name, in Simple's Uncle Sam (pp. 72, 152).[13] Boyd is described by Hughes in the character notes for "Simply Heavenly":

> Boyd: Boyd has probably been halfway through college before his army service in Europe. Serious-minded, pleasant-looking, trying to be a writer, perhaps taking courses at New York University on the last of his G.I. money. Almost every Harlem bar has such a fellow among its regular customers, who acts sometimes as a kind of arbiter when "intellectual" discussions come up. (New York, 1959, p. 4).

Though he is less militant and more "objective" on racial matters than Simple, Boyd is not really an "Uncle Tom," nor is he one of the members of the black bourgoisie or corps of Negro "spokesmen" that Simple attacks frequently. Like his drinking buddy, and like Hughes, Boyd is truly at home in the bars and on the streets of Harlem, where he may be found "observing life for literary purposes" ("Mind," pp. 18-19). Boyd has two functions in these stories. As an intellectual, rationalist, and objective observer, he provides a perspective different from Simple's, correcting the latter's excesses (it is he, for example, who brings up Mrs. Roosevelt when Simple tries to condemn <u>all</u> whites). As a pedant-fool, or "foolish wise man," his function is reversed and he provides an opportunity for Simple to challenge unwarranted idealism or unrealistic assessments of the Negro's status in America.[14] Thus when Boyd pontificates on the correlation between a cold climate, energy and ambition, and racial progress, arguing that the American Negro has advanced beyond other blacks because "Cold weather makes you get up and go, gives you life, vim, vigor, vitality," Simple is set up to put this absurd theory to rest by noting, "It does not give me anything but a cold" ("Wife," p. 198).

Comical dialect is, for Hughes as it was for Dunne, Rosten, and most of the nineteenth-century American wise fool writers, a key feature of his satiric technique. Simple's Harlem dialect identifies him as a lower-class Negro to help establish his persona, as well as provide opportunities for revealing linguistic "errors."[15] As is typical of the American wise fool character, Simple's speech is marked by puns, malapropisms, double-entendres, and other types of wordplay. One of his better puns, for example, allows Simple to make a double play on the name "Butts," when writing a letter to a Negro "leader" of that name. This letter has been prompted by Dr. Butts' assertion that America is the best country in the world for the black man, and that things are getting better all the time. Simple responds: "Dr. Butts, I am glad to read that you writ an article in The New York Times, but also sometime I wish you would write one in the colored papers and let me know how to get out from behind all of these buts that are staring me in the face. I know America is a great country but--and it is that but that has been keeping me where I is all these years" ("Wife," p. 227).

The malapropism is another important feature of Simple's comical dialect. He goes to "noteriety republicans" for income tax aid ("Mind," p. 120), and has the dangerous habit of addressing judges as "Your Honery." When Boyd corrects Simple's references to "Negro Hysterians," Simple ignores the correction, and in the discussion that follows, makes

the error appear appropriate ("Claim," p. 186). Simple continually capitalizes on words that sound alike, or can be distorted conveniently. When Boyd announces that white folks are currently "resolving to do better," Simple replies that "They have been resolving for two hundred years. I do not see how they need to resolve anymore. I say, they need to solve" ("Mind," p. 193). Similarly, he answers the excuse that the poor treatment he receives in a local restaurant is the result of "untrained personnel" with the cynical comment, "person-hell!" ("Mind," p. 55). Another of his favorite tricks is to puncture the inflated posture of anyone who tries to win an argument with him by using "ten-dollar words." When Joyce, his girlfriend, tries to make him back down on his charge that she has been flirting with the bar-room piano player by shouting, "Don't insinuate," Simple is set up to answer, "Before you sin, you better wait" ("Mind," p. 80).

The word-play in the "Simple" columns is both humorous and effective for conveying Simple's point graphically and emphatically. Boyd asks Simple if he intends to block the divorce action taken against him by his first wife, Isabel, by "cross-filing," and Simple responds with, "I would not cross that wife of mind no kind of way, . . . with a file nor otherwise" ("Mind," p. 228). As is often the case with "folk wisdom," the aphorism is employed by Simple to convey his message. His advice to young men concerning the dangers of romance is summed up as, "Midsummer madness may bring

winter sadness," and to young women, "If a chick wants to go straight, she shouldn't shake her tail gate."[16]

In addition to his use of dialect, Hughes employs vivid contrasts to illustrate the points that he wishes to make. Often he contrasts Boyd's idealism with more practical observations made by Simple. On several occasions Boyd generalizes concerning the improved status of the black man in America, and Simple replies by specifically contrasting this view with a picturesque description of his own status and lack of progress. Boyd: "How wonderful . . . that Negroes today are being rapidly integrated into every phase of American life from the Army and Navy to schools to industries--advancing, advancing." Simple. "I have not advanced one step. . . . Still the same old job, same old salary, same old kitchenette, same old Harlem and the same old color" ("Claim," p. 53).

Another type of contrast juxtaposes a serious, tense point with the "snub-ending" so frequently used by the wise fool satirist, easing the tension and helping to make the argument less objectionable. After Simple lists in detail the suffering to which whites would have to voluntarily subject themselves if they were to truly understand the plight of the Southern Negro, Boyd exclaims that if he were white he would never go that far in the cause of civil rights. Surprisingly, Simple concurs, causing Boyd to triumph, "Then you would not be very good either." "No," said Simple, "but I would be white" ("Claim," pp. 31-32). A denunciation

of the state of Mississippi in which the state's name is rendered acrostically as standing for such things as Murder, ignoramus, Satan, and other similar harsh terms is softened by homor when Simple gets to the last three letters: "After which I will double the P, as it is in the spelling. Excuse the expression, but right over Jackson, which is the state capital, I will p-p. . . . Now I come to the final letter which is I--meaning me--who will spell as I fly, M-i-s-s-i-s-s--yes--I-pp-i!" ("Claim," p. 166).

If perhaps Simple tends to understate racial progress by insisting, in his debates with Boyd, upon using his own status as the only yardstick against which it can be measured (at that he overlooks his "progress" from a boarding house to the kitchenette that he occupies), he is as prone to exaggerate his woes in a most picturesque manner. The list of torments to which his feet have been subjected exhausts the reader almost as much as they must have Simple:

> These feet have stood on every rock from the Rock of Ages to 135th and Lenox. These feet have supported everything from a cotton bale to a hongry woman. These feet have walked ten thousand miles working for white folks and another ten thousand keeping up with colored. These feet have stood at altars, crap tables, free lunches, bars, graves, kitchen doors, betting windows, hospital clinics, WPA desks, social security railings, and in all kinds of lines from soup lines to the draft. If I just had four feet, I could have stood in more places longer. As it is I done wore out seven hundred pairs of shoes, eighty-nine tennis shoes, twelve summer sandals, also six loafers. The socks that these feet have bought could build a knitting mill. The corns I've cut away would dull a German razor. The bunions I've forgot would make you ache from now till Judgment Day. ("Mind," p. 5).

Like his American predecessors in this mode, Hughes incorporates the tall-tale and comical, burlesqued description into his wise fool's repertory. As James Emanuel notes, "The exaggerations of the tall tale, often heard in the animated exchanges in Negro barber shops and lounging places, seems a natural endowment of Simple's" (p. 159). Simple's flights into the realm of fantasy include imagining himself a Bunyanesque giant avenging segregation all over the world (South Africans are warned, "Apart your own hide!") ("Claim," p. 26), a member of the Supreme Court, and a diplomat presiding over a summit meeting ("Sam," pp. 160-163). He also conjures up a reversal of the traditional roles of blacks and whites in the rural South, in which a "Mammy Eastland" appeals to kindly, paternalistic "Master Simple" for his support of her "good" white church ("Sam," pp. 127-132). Perhaps the most intriguing of his fantastic schemes is a "pose out" protest, in which Negroes all over the country will disrobe at the same prearranged time to shock Americans into a more decent treatment of its black citizens" ("Sam," pp. 107-109).

A typical example of the burlesqued description in the "Simple" pieces is Simple's portrayal of Mrs. Sadie Maxwell-Reeves, a pretentious Negro "Society" lady. "She is built like a pyramid upside down anyhow. But her head was all done fresh and shining with a hair-rocker roached up high in front, and a advertised in Ebony snood down her back, also a small bunch of green feathers behind her ear

and genuine diamonds on her hand" ("Mind," p. 86). In descriptions such as this one, as in the other techniques used by Hughes, the humor is based on an exaggeration or distortion of reality, and it stings as it provokes laughter.

There are two broad categories into which virtually all of the "Simple" sketches may be placed: race and women. Within these two categories Simple concerns himself with a number of topics including the pretensions of the Negro middle class (e.g., Mrs. Maxwell-Reeves), national political and economic policies, relationships between relatives, and the merits of urban life, among others; but he almost always relates these subjects to one of the two basic ones. Simple is not ashamed of his participation in the Harlem riots, and he has little faith in non-militant solutions to racial problems. Boyd, on the other hand, champions the N.A.A.C.P. approach of ". . . propaganda, education, political action, and legal redress," but Simple retorts that when he went out "looking for justice," it was with two bricks ("Mind," pp. 167-168). Hughes's position with regard to these two options, as it is found in the "Simple" material, appears to be that Boyd's approach is preferable, but it cannot win the support of people like Simple as long as it continues to achieve fewer concrete results than more violent actions.

Another of Simple's frequently voiced complaints is that national politics, as reported in the press, are more concerned with international affairs than with the immediate problems that he sees all around him in Harlem. He is also

disturbed that naturalized citizens and second or third generation Americans are soon afforded full-citizenship, whereas blacks whose ancestry is often American as far back as Colonial days are perpetually treated as second-class citizens. Simple doubts the sincerity of white liberals, and is suspicious of Negroes who are less militant than he. When Boyd describes as non-sequitur reasoning Simple's comparison of the American bombing of Hiroshima to a beating he once received from a white man, Simple asserts that if you cannot see the connection between two such incidents, "you are not colored" ("Sam," pp. 121-123).

Simple also criticizes the conduct of "sassy" black clerks and waitresses, but he reserves most of the satirical remarks that he directs at members of his own race for Negro "Society" (e.g., Mrs. Sadie Maxwell-Reeves) and Negro "Leaders." He criticizes the black "elite" and the black bourgoisie for their attempts at emulating white society and their lack of concern for the culture, and other members, of their own race. One of the pieces on this subject, "Banquet in Honor" is perhaps the most powerful sustained example of Hughes's satirical writing[17] ("Mind," pp. 83-90). In this sketch Simple, at the insistence of his girlfriend Joyce, attends a dinner given by a Harlem cultural society in honor of an aged black artist who was ignored by the Negro upper- and middle-classes when he most needed, and was able to profit from, their support. Simple reports the event to Boyd, describing such entertainment as the singing of "O

Caro Nome" (which Simple reports as "O Carry Me Homey"), and the comically flamboyant introduction of the artist by Mrs. Maxwell-Reeves. The speaker's rather powerful and unusual banquet speech is Hughes's statement to Negroes who fail to support black artists and the "genteel" black critics who attacked his treatment of "nitty gritty" literary subjects throughout his career:

> You think that you are honoring me, ladies and gentlemen of the Athenyannie Arts Club, when you invited me here tonite? You are <u>not</u> honoring me a damn bit! I said, not a bit. . . . The way you could have honored me if you had wanted to, ladies and gentlemen, all these years, would have been to buy a piece of my music and play it, or a book of mine and read it, but you didn't. Else you could have booed off the screen a few of them Uncle Toms thereon and told the manager of the Hamilton you'd never come back to see another picture in his theatre until he put a story of mine in it, or some other decent hard-working Negro. But you didn't do no such thing. You didn't even buy one of my watercolors. You let me starve until I am mighty nigh blue-black in the face--and not a one of you from Sugar Hill to Central Park ever offered me a pig's foot. (p. 87)

Naturally Simple is the only one at the banquet who appreciates this sort of speech, and his noticeable response of loud laughter embarrasses his fiancée terribly. He concludes his report of the evening by noting, "They wouldn't buy none of his art when he could still enjoy the benefits. But me, I'd buy that old man a beer <u>any time</u>" (p. 90). Hughes also employs Simple to satirize the Negro slick magazines ("Claim," pp. 96-101), the move to the integrated suburbs by status-conscious blacks ("Claim," pp. 114-117), and similar aspects of the Negro middle class of which he disapproves.

Another popular target of Simple's wrath is the Negro "leader" who claims to speak for the black masses, but shuns Harlem and the other black ghetto communities, or who advises patience and hard work from his position of prosperity. This is the theme of Simple's above-mentioned letter to Dr. Butts, in which he tells the "spokesman," ". . . we have too many leaders now that nobody knows until they get from the white papers to the colored papers and from the colored papers to me who has never seen hair nor hide of you. Dear Dr. Butts, are you hiding from me--and leading me, too?" ("Wife," pp. 225-226). Simple calls such leaders "Cellophane Bandannas," his term for "Uncle Toms" who mask their obsequious behavior behind a sophisticated, or politically moderate facade ("Claim," pp. 126-130).

Simple's relations with his opposite sex are complicated, amusing, and the subject of some of his more universal wise fool observations. "Women," he maintains, "is a sweet worriation." He qualifies his authority to make this observation by asserting:

> I know womens. I've been married twice, and the sames as married more than once before, and between that. But from Isabel, my first, through Zarita, right on up to Joyce, I have never really won an argument yet. If a woman does not get the last word now, she will still be heard then. Oh, yes, a woman is not like a man. A man thinks the argument is over and done with. But no! A woman will not place a period.[18]

Some of the most entertaining of the "Simple" stories are those in which he matches wits with his shrewish landlady and her pampered dog, flirts with Zarita, a happy-go-lucky

bar-girl, explains his way out of trouble with his exacting fiancée, Joyce, or re-tells the adventures of his troublesome cousin, Minnie.

The topics of the satire in the "Simple" stories are, for the most part, still relevant. The racial problems on which he comments are as worthy of attention today as ever, and Simple's approach to them is now perhaps more characteristic of typical Negro attitudes than it was in the 1950's and early 1960's. Yet it would be erroneous to contend that these stories are of interest solely for their comments on the race question. Simple, like Mr. Dooley and Hyman Kaplan, offers insights concerning more general aspects of human behavior, and he and Boyd reflect a timeless contrast of basic human attitudes. Indeed it is rewarding to study this material both for the content of its political and social satire from the perspective of the American Negro, and stylistically, for the effects that Hughes is able to create through his characterizations and wise fool humorous devices.

Notes

[1]A Bio-bibliography of Langston Hughes (Hamden, Connecticut, 1967), p. 98. A similar recognition is made by J. Saunders Redding in his perceptive review of Simple Speaks His Mind, entitled "What It Means to be Colored," New York Herald Tribune Book Review (June 11, 1950), 13.

[2]I Wonder as I Wander: An Autobiographical Journey (New York, 1956), p. 291. This volume covers Hughes's life during the years 1930-1938. Another volume, The Big Sea (New York, 1940), traces his earlier life. These two volumes are of interest for their insights into such subjects as the Harlem Renaissance and Soviet Russia during the 1930's, as well as for their account of Hughes's own growth and development as a writer.

[3]A good critical study of Hughes's fiction is James Emanuel, Langston Hughes (New York, 1967).

[4]It is interesting to note the connection with Chicago that is shared by Dunne, Rosten, and Hughes, though the setting of the wise fool pieces of the latter two writers is in New York. After 1962 the "Simple" columns appeared in the New York Post.

[5]James Emanuel notes that "After the third Simple book, a minimum of a hundred and twenty-nine reviews were available in periodicals and newspapers, forty-one of them foreign. . . ." (p. 150). Donald C. Dickinson goes so far as to claim, "The world knows the American Negro best through Hughes's sketches of Jessie [sic] B. Semple" (p. 118).

[6]Both Emanuel and Dickinson devote a few pages to Simple, treating him essentially from a sociological perspective (pp. 154-160, pp. 95-100, respectively); and two articles, Arthur P. Davis, "Jesse B. Semple: Negro American," Phylon, XV (Spring, 1954), 21-28, and Heinz Rogge, "Die Figur des Simple in Werke Von Langston Hughes," Die Neuren Sprachen, 12 (1955), 555-566, also approach the work in this manner. The German article is essentially a re-statement of Davis's.

[7]Common Ground, 4 (1944), 42.

[8]Phylon, 29 (Winter, 1968), 339-346.

[9]Compare this statement with Mr. Dooley's "I don't think we injye other people's sufferin', Hinnissy. It isn't acshally injyement. But we feel betther f'r it" (pp. 68-69),

or Nathan Ausubel's remark in his Introduction ("Why Jews Laugh") to A Treasury of Jewish Humor, "What do you suppose makes Jews joke so much about adversity? It is the instinct for self-preservation. By laughing at the absurdities and cruelties of life they draw much of the sting from them" (p. xvi).

[10]This term, which comes from an old blues song and is used by Philip Sterling for the title of his anthology of Negro humor (New York, 1965), is comparable to the expression "laughter through tears" that, as Ausubel notes, Jewish folk philosophers used to characterize their traditional type of humor (p. xvi).

[11]Simple Stakes a Claim, p. 173. The following abbreviations will be used for further references to the five different collections of "Simple" pieces: "Claim," Simple Stakes a Claim (New York, 1953); "Mind," Simple Speaks His Mind (New York, 1950); "Wife," Simple Takes a Wife (New York, 1953); "Sam," Simple's Uncle Sam (New York, 1965); and "Best," The Best of Simple (New York, 1961).

[12]Hughes's handling of these themes, and the battles that he fought with critics over it, is discussed by both Emanuel and Dickinson in their discussions of his work. In an article devoted to this question, "The Negro Artist and The Racial Mountain," The Nation, 122 (June 13, 1926), 692-694, Hughes wrote:

> But then there are the low-down folks, the so-called common element, and they are in the majority--may the Lord be praised! The people who have their nip of gin on Saturday nights and are not too important to themselves or to the community, or too well fed or too learned to watch the lazy world go round. . . . They furnish a wealth of colorful, distinctive material for any artist because they still hold their own individuality in the face of American standardizations. And perhaps these common people will give to the world its truly great Negro artist, the one who is not afraid to be himself. (p. 693)

[13]Though the identification of Hughes as Simple's interviewer, made by both Dickinson (p. 97) and Davis (p. 21), is an obvious one--the interviewer shares Hughes's external description as to skin color (light-brown), region of birth, education, etc.--it would be more accurate to retain the name, Boyd, in discussing him, since he frequently expresses opinions that are inconsistent with positions adopted by Hughes elsewhere in his writing. In fact, in the "Simple" stories, Simple more often speaks for Hughes, against

"intellectual" objections raised by Boyd, who is, at times, the target of the criticism. Hughes's relationship to Simple and Boyd is comparable to Rosten's relationship to both Kaplan and Parkhill.

[14]As Arthur P. Davis assesses it, the Simple/Boyd relationship has more significant and subtle dimensions than that of a purely literary device of conflict-generating contrast. "The clash and interplay of these [Simple's "man-of-the-streets" and Boyd's black intellectual] attitudes furnish much of the humor in Simple, but they also serve a deeper purpose; they point up and accentuate the two-level type of thinking which segregation tends to produce in all Negroes" (p. 22)

[15]In addition to these functions, Arthur P. Davis sees the dialect employed by Hughes as indicating a number of complex aspects of his personality, including his values, status, relationship to "in-group" thinking, and mood, or attitude toward particular questions (pp. 25-26).

[16]These and others of Simple's sayings on women are collected in The Book of Negro Humor, p. 146.

[17]Another contender for this designation might be a "non-Simple" short story entitled "Professor," reprinted in the volume Something in Common and Other Stories (New York, 1963), pp. 135-142.

[18]The Book of Negro Humor, pp. 137-138.

Chapter VI

ART BUCHWALD: A CONTEMPORARY URBAN WISE FOOL SATIRIST

The political and social satire produced by the contemporary columnist, Art Buchwald, represents the continuing tradition of the wise fool character in America during the twentieth century. As has been noted in Newsweek magazine, "Buchwald's gleeful goading of the President puts him squarely in the tradition of the nation's great newspaper satirists. . . ."[1] Both the perspectives and the techniques of Mr. Buchwald's widely syndicated columns can be compared, in many respects, to the works of such crackerbarrel wits as Seba Smith, Charles Browne, Mark Twain, and Will Rogers.

Like Finley Peter Dunne, Leo Rosten, and Langston Hughes, however, Art Buchwald is an urban rather than a rural figure. He has, in fact, been described as ". . . a sort of citified Will Rogers."[2] For the past seven years Buchwald has been an "insider" in Washington, D.C., and before that he gave his American readers insight into the cosmopolitan world of Paris, France. He does differ from the above three writers, though, in that he does not write from the perspective of an immigrant, or a member of a minority group (although he is of Jewish descent).

Art Buchwald's presentation of himself as an urbanite is a legitimate one, since he was raised in New York. A biographical account of his life prior to his career as a

journalist notes:

> Buchwald grew up in a succession of New York City foster homes, after the death of his mother when he was 6. Reunited briefly with his father and three sisters, he ran away from home at 16 to enlist in the Marines during World War II. . . . When Japan surrendered, Buchwald enrolled in USC [University of Southern California] and spent three years there 'getting A's in subjects I liked and D's in those I didn't.' He almost failed an English course in humor, but edited the college humor magazine and wrote a variety show.[3]

After his three years of college, Buchwald took his G.I. Bill money and went to Paris, eventually getting a job covering nightclubs, restaurants, and the activities of American celebrities for the European edition of the New York Herald Tribune. "Buchwald's success was practically instantaneous. Reviewers soon were comparing him with that other 'innocent abroad,' Mark Twain."[4]

In 1962, Buchwald moved from Paris to Washington, for what was supposed to be a two-year temporary assignment covering the nation's capital. By 1964 more than two hundred newspapers were printing his column, and he had clearly become America's most important political satirist.[5] In addition to his thrice-weekly column (written for the Washington Post since the demise of the Tribune), Buchwald gives humorous lectures (at a fee of $1,500) and writes for such periodicals as McCalls, the Saturday Review, Look, Playboy, and the Ladies Home Journal. He has brought his humorous political analysis to television, covering elections and serving as a guest on interview-shows, and to the press in the form of "tongue-in-cheek" interviews in which

he retains, as his own personality, the wise fool characterization of his column.[6]

Like most American satirists, Buchwald relies heavily upon humor as the vehicle of his social commentary. Though he is capable of intense sentiment, he is rarely found discussing any issue seriously. As he has declared, "My secret of being funny is to treat important things facetiously and facetious things very importantly."[7] Dean Acheson has cited Buchwald's faculty for capturing the absurdities in actual events and ideas, and the range of the humorous devices with which he exposes them. "Buchwald brings to his satire the genius of hitting upon the most absurd of the absurdities around him and a rare gift for dialogue that runs the gamut of humor from the subtle to the Rabelaisian to the hilarious" (p. 1). The humor of Buchwald's satire does not, however, make it ultimately gentle or genial; he uses humor as a weapon, destroying his target under the protective cover of laughter and his wise fool persona. According to Leonard C. Lewin, in his review of one of Buchwald's books, "Buchwald at his best has a deceptive simplicity which can be devastating; he is concise, unelaborate, and, incidentally, very funny."[8]

Art Buchwald's wise fool posture is a complex one. Since he does not write in dialect, he does not have the immediate identification as an uneducated "man on the street," but he compensates for this by appearing to be an "innocent" or naive reporter who is rather bewildered and at loss among

the "great people" of Paris or Washington. In this manner he gains the sympathy of the reader, who feels that Buchwald is just an "average citizen" viewing an exalted world which the reader can visit vicariously. As a guest at an important French vineyard, for example, Buchwald naively tries to imitate the elaborate ritual for wine-tasting, but ends up deflating the gravity and pompousness of that ritual by sipping the wine and noting, "It sure puckers the inside of your mouth," or "It tastes like cotton" (instead of velvet), and spitting it on the floor of the salon, instead of the cellar.[9] Similarly, Buchwald promotes his reputation as "the Washington expert" by attending a New York banquet and after studying the weekly news-magazines and the network news programs, confidently answers questions on topics about which he knows nothing. When he is finally completely stumped, he claims that the answer is privileged information that he cannot reveal to the general public ("Capitol," pp. 21-22). Buchwald does not claim to be well-read, but when someone asks him if he read an important book he counters, "No, I didn't read the book, but his wife went to school with my wife," using "one-upsmanship" to cover his naivete ("Safe," p. 250).

As the "innocent" reporter, Buchwald occasionally functions as a negative fool, ridiculously agreeing with the proponent of the view that he wishes to expose. This often provides him the opportunity to magnify the erroneous position by carrying even further than its original proposer had

intended. Thus, when a Congressman argues that the taxpayer has a right to coverage of all White House social events, Buchwald agrees and adds that he feels that the President's eating breakfast, and playing with his children should not be exempt from news coverage either ("We didn't elect a man so he could turn into a recluse!") ("Capitol," pp. 105-107). He defends General Motors's unofficial "investigation" of the safety-crusader, Ralph Nader, by noting, "We can't allow people like Mr. Nader to invade the privacy of General Motors" ("Society," p. 110). Buchwald's positive response to a National Rifle Association editorial that encouraged people to buy guns leads to an hilarious "arms race" between the columnist and a fellow customer in the gun shop, culminating in the author's purchasing a (gift-wrapped) bazooka ("Lied," pp. 50-51). As the negative fool, Buchwald proves to be both gullible and rash, exposing the various foibles of government or society by a distorted representation of them, in a classic wise-fool manner. In this pose he resembles such negative fools as Birdofredum Sawin, Mr. Hennessy, and Boyd, among others.

In addition to his poses as the "innocent observer" and the negative fool, Buchwald also presents himself as the common-sense philosopher. He shrewdly shows the reader how to make a recalcitrant French electrician repair a heater by doubting the man's ability to do the job, demonstrating that common-sense psychology can achieve results which neither money nor heart-rending appeals can accomplish ("Write," p.

24). Buchwald answers the question of why college students revolt by noting:

> The reason the college students are doing so much demonstrating is that there is no one in class to teach them anymore, and the students have nothing else to do. Almost every full professor is either writing a book, guest-lecturing at another university, or taking a year off to write a report for President Johnson.
>
> Therefore, he has turned over his course to a graduate instructor who is either working on his Ph.D., traveling on a Fulbright scholarship, or picketing in Montgomery, Ala. So he in turn has turned the class over to one of the brighter students who is never there because he works on the college newspaper, is a member of the student senate, or is a delegate to his national fraternity. ("Society," p. 181)

Buchwald's common-sense observations include such remarks as ". . . you won't find one leader in the world today who isn't willing to mediate a just peace--for somebody else" ("Society," p. 52), and, after his wife has become inordinately upset over their son's stealing five cents, "all ten-year-old boys have criminal instincts. . . . Stealing and lying are part of growing up" ("President," p. 110). He offers "translations" of diplomatic terms in a manner very reminiscent of Mr. Dooley; e.g., "Restraint--Something you tell another country to show when your own personal interests are not involved" ("Lied," p. 84).

When working from the perspective of the common-sense philosopher, Buchwald, like many of his predecessors, occasionally appears to be so wise that his fool-persona becomes suspended. Thus his explanation of the European Common Market transcends "common-sense," and is a complex analysis, in

plain language, that shows the knowledge and intelligence of a seasoned European correspondent. Part of this lengthy economic and political analysis reads:

> After World War II Europe was in a mess and so the United States started the Marshall Plan to get it back on its feet. In twelve years Europe got back on its feet and formed the Common Market to put the United States out of business. The United States would now like to make a deal with the Common Market, but some American business groups don't like the idea, because they don't want European goods flooding the American market.
>
> The object of the Common Market is to break down tariffs between European countries at the same time that they raise them against the outside world.
>
> Europe is split between the Inner Six and the Outer Seven. Great Britain was leader of the Outer Seven, but has asked to become a member of the Inner Six. The only trouble is the British are afraid if they join the Inner Six they'll lose the Commonwealth, which will then turn to the United States for trade. ("Safe," pp. 140-141)

The explanation goes on in this vein, presenting information and insights that are hardly the product of common-sense alone. Buchwald's shrewd understanding of American society is reflected in his observation of the role of public image in defining success or status in this country:

> The success of a person in this country is really dependent on how much exposure he has had, and the more exposure you have, the shorter your career is. The Press creates these things. And then the press gets mad at itself and wants to knock them down. . . . We have the success syndrome here which is drilled into us from the start. You have to be a success, and we have the communications to do it overnight. And at the same time we just don't have the patience to absorb it.[10]

The form of most of Buchwald's columns, like that of many of the American wise fool writers is that of a dialogue, frequently between Buchwald, as the newspaper interviewer,

and another character. The second character is not consistently the same person; Buchwald "interviews" celebrities, "experts," highly-placed "friends," his family, and a host of other foils for his satire. Often these characters themselves represent aspects of the wise fool character. He introduces such figures as the "ugly American," a negative fool who teaches how not to behave abroad through his repulsive behavior. In one column an American tourist badgers the stewardness, annoys his fellow passengers, and terribly embarrasses another American sitting next to him on the plane. The bore finally turns to his countryman and says, "Well, I enjoyed sitting next to you and talking to you. We Americans in Europe have to stick together, or they'll take us for a ride" ("Write," p. 77).

One of the most commonly used characters in Buchwald's repertory is the pedant-fool, the learned antithesis of the common-sense philosopher who has been discussed above as Dunne's Hogan and Father Kelly, Rosten's Mr. Parkhill, and Hughes's Boyd. Buchwald interviews such pedant-fools as Professor Heinrich Babelmeir, who holds the "Billie Sol Estes Chair of Taxation at the University of Pecos." Professor Babelmeir leads the reader through the intricacies of current tax manipulation policies, inadvertently showing that the specific tax proposals of the Kennedy administration are working at cross-purposes. As Babelmeir describes it, "Tax reform is when you take taxes off things that have been taxed in the past and put taxes on things that haven't

been taxed before" ("Capitol," p. 89). Buchwald asks the "dumb" questions, but the expert's endorsement of the confused and idiotic policies he portrays indicates which one is the fool.

Another example of the "expert" as fool is found in the description of a staff meeting of U.S. military officers. After General Patent of the Army, General Wings of the Air Force, and Admiral Bilge of the Navy scream at each other over whose function includes which activities, they conclude their childish argument by fighting and throwing water pitchers as though they were nursery-school students ("President," pp. 64-65). Similarly, a college professor is interviewed during a riot on his campus, displaying an extreme naivete and an unrealistic lack of concern over the actions of his students. As they lead the professor to a scaffold, he replies to Buchwald's offer to get the police, "I wish you wouldn't. . . . If we don't let the students try new methods of activism, they'll never know for themselves which ones work and which ones are counter-productive" (April 24, 1969). As a typical wise fool character, Buchwald continually exposes the lack of practical knowledge and common sense on the part of well-educated, highly-placed authorities.

In addition to his interviews with "experts," Buchwald carries on humorous dialogues with celebrities, such as Bill Dana, Alan King, Gary Cooper, etc., interesting personalities, shop-keepers, taxi-drivers, repair-men, and his wife and children. In one of these dialogues, he interviews the

mythical "Nubam of Lemon," whose problems with a gigantic entourage in Paris are representative of the actual visits of certain Arab leaders to that city. Despite the Nubam's large number of wives and concubines, he concludes the interview by noting that he has "got a few good numbers to call while the girls are out shopping" ("Write," p. 135). Buchwald also reports of dining out with the wealthy John Paul Getty, while the billionaire grumbles about how much cheaper the meal would be at his home ("Write," pp. 136-137). An "overheard conversation" between three American couples in Paris presents memorable satiric dialogue. After complaining about everything that they have seen, and showing their "sophistication" by boasting of what they have deliberately avoided seeing, the dialogue concludes:

> The first wife said, "We're not coming back to Europe next year."
> The second wife said, "We won't be back in the next five years."
> The third wife said, "We'll probably never come back."
> The first husband said, "If I had it to do all over again I wouldn't have come to Paris."
> The second husband said, "You can say that again."
> The third husband said, "We're lucky we didn't go to Paris."
> "But," protested the first husband's wife, "you're in Paris right now."
> "What?" the third husband said. He took out his itinerary. "By heaven you're right. Wait till I get that travel agent when I get home." ("Write," p. 80)

Although Buchwald does not use the immigrant, rural, or lower-class dialect that is characteristic of the American wise fool character, he does employ many of the same linguistic devices as his predecessors, including the pun,

malapropism, double-entendre, and "quip" or brief, one-line joke. The title of one of his books, I Chose Capitol Punishment, is illustrative of his use of the pun. Buchwald's puns have improved over the years, going from making a horrible reference to cashing "a bad Czech," or writing about the girl in Warsaw whom the men would not touch "with a ten-foot Pole" ("Caviar," pp. 7, 12), to defending a company which made girdles with an American flag pattern by noting that the Stars and Stripes does represent "the foundation of our liberty" ("Society," p. 100). He also describes the tourist festivals of the mythical country "Lovlost," as the Whaling festival and Whine festival, both dealing with noise-making rather than sea-mammals or beverage-production ("Write," pp. 293-294). A parody of a "Joe Pyne-type" insulting interview program is called, by Buchwald, "Couth Wants to Know" ("Lied," p. 64), and the U-2 plane incident is categorized as a part of President Eisenhower's "Open Spies Program" ("Dollars," p. 177). Other Buchwald puns include his claim that the word diet evolved from the verb to die ("Write," p. 208), and that "It turns out there is a lot of ferment in the French wine business" ("Write," p. 190).

His tenure in Paris gave Buchwald a penchant for bilingual word-play. Realizing that the majority of his readers know both French and English, Buchwald offered a sophisticated linguistic humor that capitalized on distortions of meaning resulting from literal translation, and

incongruity emanating from the juxtaposition of the dissimilar languages. His famous attempt at explaining the game of baseball to the French, "Le Bazbal Made Easy" (reprinted in Art Buchwald's Paris) provides an example of this technique:

> Each man must try to catch the bazbal with his moufle (glove). The opposing team sends one frappeur (batter) at a time to the assiette maison, or home plate. . . .
>
> As each man gets on a sac the man in front of him advances to another sac (there are three sacs plus the assiette maison) and a player is required to touch all four of them before he scores a course (a run).
>
> There are nine innings for each team and the team scoring the most courses is the winner. If it wins enough games it will play for the Serie mondiale (World Series) and make a lot of money (sacs). (pp. 38-39)

In addition to this amusing description of baseball, Buchwald entitles a quick-service lunch counter, "Déjeuner de Trois Heures" ("Caviar," p. 88), and translates General De Gaulle's formal remark to President Eisenhower, "Le Maréchal Montgomery m'a chargé de vous transmettre, Monsieur le President, l'expression de sa haute considération" as "Monty says hello" ("Write," pp. 272-273).

An Interpol Police inspector is named, by Buchwald, Sergeant Vendredi, to parallel the famous television policeman played by Jack Webb ("Write," p. 186). Other comical names for characters in some of these columns include "Pia Callous," an opera star ("Write," p. 169), "Horace Turnover," the man in charge of U.S.-Soviet friendship ("Lied," p. 154), "Jean Pensepas," a government official in charge of "thinking

the unthinkable" ("Lied," p. 187), and "Higgenbottom Hand-out," a professional lobbyist in Washington ("President," p. 176). Buchwald's description of the various positions on U.S. military activity includes the term "Chickens," as well as "Hawks" and "Doves," providing a humorous alternative title for those who are opposed to war for practical rather than political reasons ("Capitol," p. 170).

Many of Buchwald's columns derive their humor from quips or jokes which often used to provide the "snub ending" for which American humor is justly famous. A discussion of the Middle-Eastern situation is concluded, for example, by Buchwald noting, "Wouldn't it be a wonderful world if all the armies were staffed by Egyptian officers?", and his companion replying, "That . . . is the only solution to peace in our time" ("Lied," p. 77). The proud parents of a college protester who is described as an utter anarchist conclude their report of his graduation (at which he walked out) by informing the columnist, "He's applied for training jobs with IBM, Time-Life, Inc., and the Ford Motor Company. He figures there's a much better future with a large corporation than trying to start out on your own" ("Lied," p. 17). The cynical quip effectively makes the author's point as to the seriousness and longevity of the protest. A report on the activities of retired military officers prompts the quotation, "Old soldiers never die--They just write their memoirs" ("Write," p. 231).

Buchwald also uses the technique of vivid contrasts in his satirical writing. He contrasts the idealism of a newly-appointed Washington bureaucrat, Mr. Sinecure, with the more mundane attitudes of his underlings, in the following dialogue. Sinecure concludes his patriotic introductory address by proclaiming, "This is a bright new day for the department. The dark clouds that hovered over this building for the past eight years will disappear and it is my fervent prayer that you and I will walk together in the sun once more. Now I'll accept questions." An employee responds, "Since Washington's birthday falls on a Saturday . . ., can we take off Monday and still be paid?" (February 16, 1969).

This same technique contrasts the romantic view of the activities of lawyers and doctors found in television scripts, with a more realistic view. Buchwald has his version of the real-life Perry Mason responding to a mother's plea for him to defend her innocent son, "Wait a minute, madam. Before you go any further, I'll have to ask for a retainer. . . . How much can you afford? Legal costs are expensive. If he pleads guilty, I'll make a deal with the District Attorney and save you the expense of a long drawn-out jury trial." Similarly, the realistic portrayal of Dr. Kildare, according to Buchwald, would have the physician referring the patient to a specialist and collecting ten dollars, without even examining him ("Capitol," pp. 122-123). The cynical wise fool is unwilling to accept any idealization that is not consistent with his every-day experience.

One of Buchwald's most amusing contrasts describes a naval officer losing his fight to beat a parking ticket at the Pentagon; "The Captain paid his two dollars and, looking like Billy Mitchell after his court-martial, left the room. I will always remember his words as we said good-bye. They were: 'I regret that I have only one Chrysler to give to my country'" ("Capitol," p. 38). The ludicrous juxtaposition of the trivial and the significant is used, by Art Buchwald, as effectively as it is by any other American satirist.

With the possible exception of Mark Twain, Buchwald is also as deft in his use of irony and antithesis as any other American writer.[11] A classic example of his ironic technique is his famous description of what Senator Barry Goldwater would have done in Vietnam, had he rather than Lyndon Johnson been elected President:

> Every once in a while, when I have nothing better to do, I wonder what the country would be like if Barry Goldwater had been elected President of the United States. Based on his campaign and his speeches, it is a frightening thing to imagine. For one thing, we would probably be bombing North Vietnam now if Goldwater were in office.
>
> As I see it, this is what would have happened. The Viet Cong would have blown up an American barracks. Using this as an excuse, Goldwater would immediately call for a strike on military bases in North Vietnam and announce a "new tit-for-tat policy." ("Society," pp. 11-12)

The "guessing" continues, following the implications of Goldwater's speeches, but the exact pattern of President Johnson's actual actions. It concludes with the additionally ironic remark, "But fortunately, with President Johnson

at the helm, we don't even have to think about it" (p. 12).

Buchwald's ironic commentaries include an interesting complaint by a Negro who saved his money to move out of the ghetto so that his children would receive a better education. The father notes that the busing program now required that he send his children back to the same school from which his sacrifice had wrested them ("President," pp. 120-121). Another ironic account portrays the FBI infiltration of the Communist Party as resulting in an entirely FBI-controlled Party running J. Edgar Hoover for President on the Communist ticket! ("Capitol," pp. 172-174). Also illustrating the sophisticated use of this technique (which is probably Buchwald's best) is his report of how the mythical country, "Lovlost," lost all of its few Communists because American aid made these citizens too affluent to remain Communist. This loss in turn made the country forfeit the American aid which again in turn made the country really become Communist ("Write," pp. 275-277). The plausibility of these highly ironic twists of fortune makes this story revealing as well as humorous, for it depicts the superficiality of our foreign aid policy, as well as its tendency ultimately to have extremely different results from those for which it was intended.

Buchwald is also a master of the art of parody. One famous parody, of a press conference supervised by President Eisenhower's press-secretary, James Haggerty, was so believable that it brought an angry denial from Haggerty, who

completely missed the satire and called the article "Unadulterated rot."[12] In this parody the banality of these news conferences, as well as the pettiness of the information sought by the press is scored. Several questions are devoted to the President's going to sleep, including the following dialogue:

> Q. Jim, whose idea was it for the President to go to sleep?
> A. It was the President's idea. He was tired and decided to go to sleep. . . .
> Q. Jim, did the President speak to anyone before retiring?
> A. He spoke to the Secretary of State.
> Q. What did he say to the Secretary of State, Jim?
> A. He said: "Good night, Foster."
> Q. And what did the Secretary say to the President?
> A. He said: "Good night, Mr. President."
> Q. The Secretary didn't say: "Pleasant dreams"?
> A. Not to my knowledge. I have nothing on that.
> ("Caviar," pp. 165-166)

This scintillating dialogue is carried on, with similar and even more trivial questions and answers, for two pages. Buchwald also parodies television shows (e.g., the Joe Pyne-type shows, "Lied," p. 64; a Huntley-Brinkley Space broadcast, "Society," pp. 134-135), and a number of other familiar events. The parodies are exaggerations of reality, and as such they serve a satiric as well as a comic function.[13]

Additionally, Buchwald's comic arsenal includes the tall-tale, forays into the world of fantasy, and absurd or bizarre solutions to complex problems, and he uses these devices for the same effects for which they were used by Dunne, Rosten, and Hughes, as well as the nineteenth-century American rustic humorists. Some of his descriptions of

European tourist attractions are indeed reminiscent of Mark Twain. For instance he describes the "Gazpacho Festival," in which after a parade and dance, the procession leads to the main square of the village;

> . . . where tourists who have paid anywhere from six thousand to ten thousand fandangos are seated in specially built stands to watch the hilarity. In the exact center of the square is a pile of cobblestones which the natives have collected all year long. The natives dance around the pile and then, at a signal from the mayor, each person picks up a cobblestone and suddenly starts throwing it at the tourists. No tourist can escape, and when all the visitors are stoned to death the festival is considered over. After the square is cleaned up the natives take off their colorful costumes and put them away for another year.
>
> There have been some protests from neighboring towns about this fiesta, but the people of Gazpacho always reply, "We don't like tourists and this usually teaches them a lesson." ("Write," p. 97)

Buchwald's fantasies include his serving as adviser to such political leaders as Khrushchev and De Gaulle (e.g., "Safe," pp. 237-240), and a scheme in which nudity will become required at all political conferences to ". . . show that both parties have nothing to hide. . . ." (July 10, 1969). He frequently gives bizarre "inside tips" on the news, asserting, for example, that the recent Six-Day War in the Middle East was really a means for Russia to deliver arms purchased from her by Israel, without political embarrassment ("Lied," pp. 80-81).

His comic solutions include a "Selective Praying" policy to solve the Prayer-in-school issue, in which children pray only before examinations (at which time, he assures us, there are no atheists) ("President," pp. 83-84),

and a plan to drop new automobiles on Hanoi, so the Vietnamese will take care of killing themselves ("Lied," p. 35). One column claims, "I have the Buchwald plan to solve the gold outflow. Instead of going on the gold standard, we should go on the used-car standard and make used cars into bars, like they do gold, because we have a lot more used cars than we do gold."[14] With these humorous techniques Buchwald makes the reader drop the guard of his particular political and social prejudices and laugh, possibly even before he realizes the deeper implications of what he is laughing at.

Before he moved from Paris to Washington, Buchwald was primarily a rather genial social satirist and humorist, whose wit was only occasionally either caustic or particularly pointed toward significant subjects. He specialized in such domestic humor as a recollection of the noise made by his children on New Year's morning ("Safe," pp. 157-158), the problems faced by his hard-working, harried wife (e.g., "Capitol," pp. 71-75), or the ground rules for children at play in the exclusive Parc Monceau ("Write," pp. 30-32). His satiric writing during this period was, with a few exceptions, limited to critical portraits of Americans abroad and accounts of the French bureaucracy.

The shift from Paris to Washington, in 1962, brought out the best in Art Buchwald, in terms of both technique and subject matter. As Buchwald himself notes, "When I was writing from Paris, it was fun and games. I came to

Washington to write satire and Washington is THE place to write satire."[15] In the Preface to his first collection of Washington columns, Buchwald humorously comments on the often-voiced thesis that contemporary events in Washington are too serious to be treated satirically:

> Many people warned me that I was making a big mistake going to Washington, D.C. They pointed out that it was perfectly all right to make fun of the French but it's another matter making fun of Americans. Besides, they say people take themselves very seriously in Washington and there is no room for frivolity in the nation's capital at this time.
>
> Well, I have no intention of being frivolous. No country of 180,000,000 people and a yearly deficit of nine billion dollars can afford to laugh, and I hope that if I ever write anything from Washington that is not serious and solemn, someone will throw me into the Attorney General's nearest swimming pool. ("Capitol," p. 14)

The subtlety of the juxtaposition of the seriousness of our national problems and the famous Kennedy swimming pool incident, set off against his innocent promise to refrain from frivolity, is characteristic of the blend of humor and piercing commentary in Buchwald's recent writing. He has tackled Washington's infamous bureaucracy, depicting a meeting of Washington officials to decide whether or not to have a meeting ("Lied," pp. 193-194), commented wryly on the dangers of rearming Germany ("Lied," pp. 164-165), and infuriated such personages as Chester Bowles, who he portrayed as having been exiled to a meaningless post for criticizing the President ("Capitol," pp. 31-33).[16] Recently, Buchwald has exposed the escalatory logic behind the proponents of the Anti-Ballistic Missile, representing

their cause with empty clickers, against the objections of a friend named Mulligan (March 27, 1969).

In addition to Washington politics, Buchwald comments on such important topics as air pollution (describing the earth's atmosphere as too polluted for travelers from Venus to visit here, "Lied," pp. 132-133), and civil rights. His columns on the latter topic are often his most intensely satiric and hence, least funny. For example, he describes a situation in a classroom at the University of Mississippi, in which the professor distorts the Constitution to uphold a variety of cruel or stupid practices, and then has a student arrested for asking a question about the fifteenth amendment (the right to vote, regardless of race, creed, etc.), stating, "If there is anything I hate worse than a Negro, it's a Constitution-lover" ("Capitol," pp. 223-224). However, Buchwald is also critical of black militants, depicting the servile white supporters of these extremists as "Uncle Johns" who are treated, by the blacks, just as the slaves were by their white masters ("Lied," pp. 144-145).

A good deal of Buchwald's recent satire deals with specific topics whose period of relevance will indeed be brief, but the perspective from which he writes, that of the wise fool character, gives his work a certain permanence, for bureaucrats, bigots, inflated "experts," and obnoxious, self-important individuals will always exist, in one guise or another. As John Wesley Fuller writes, in a review of a collection of Buchwald's columns,

". . . Buchwald's underlying topic is neither the Great Society nor its son (himself), but human foibles. His satire devastates phony political poses and suspect public pronouncements."[17] Buchwald's use of the wise fool persona is indicative of its survival, in modified form, through the twentieth century thus far. Dunne, Rosten, Hughes, and Buchwald span the century with an urban counterpart to the nineteenth-century American crackerbarrel philosopher, and their predecessors both American and foreign. In addition to Buchwald, such contemporary syndicated columnists as Arthur Hoppe and Russel Baker employ the motif, at times, and it has found its way into other mediums, including the television comedy of Bill Dana ("Jose Jimenez," a Spanish-American wise fool), and Gilligan, of television's "Gilligan's Island," among others. Furthermore, aspects of this character's perspective can be found in such important recent novels as Joseph Heller's Catch-22 ("Yossarian"), Ken Kesey's One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest (both the Chief and Murphy), and Rosten's Captain Newman, M.D. (discussed above).

As Arthur P. Dudden has written, in The Assault of Laughter, ". . . it has become commonplace of late to decry the dwindling output and declining quality of humor in the United States" (p. 22).[18] Proponents of this thesis tend to ignore columnists like Buchwald, Hoppe, et al., as well as the lecture-cabaret comedy of such satirists as Mort Sahl, Dick Gregory, Godfrey Cambridge, Alan King and a host of others (many of whom have also written humorous

works). Additionally, such satiric groups as "The Committee," "Second City," and "Upstairs at the Downstairs," successfully engage in sophisticated, often satirical humor. To paraphrase Mark Twain's famous remark, the reports of the death of the wise fool, and of American humor and satire, are greatly exaggerated.

Notes

[1]Anonymous, "The Capital Wit of Art Buchwald," Newsweek, 65 (June 7, 1965), 47.

[2]Anonymous, "Art Buchwald on Taxes, L.B.J., Automation, The Stock Market, and a Whole Bunch of Other Things," Nation's Business, 53 (August, 1965), 39.

[3]Anonymous, "Funnyman in Paris," Look, 26 (March 13, 1962), 102.

[4]Ibid., p. 102.

[5]Representative of the acclaim which he has received is the comment, by Walter Lippmann, "He's one of the best satirists of our time," quoted in "The Capital Wit of Art Buchwald" (p. 47). Former Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, goes so far as to claim, ". . . Art Buchwald is probably the greatest satirist in English since Pope and Swift," "Gift of Laughter in a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World," Book Week (May 26, 1968), 1.

[6]See, for example, interviews in Nation's Business, 53 (August, 1965), 38-43, 56 (January, 1968), 86-88; Playboy Interviews (Chicago, 1967), pp. 180-203; and the Detroit Free Press (May 18, 1969), 38-42.

[7]"Funnyman in Paris," p. 102.

[8]"Politics and Pins: A Review of . . . And Then I Told The President," New York Times Book Review (May 2, 1965), 3.

[9]Don't Forget To Write (Cleveland, 1960), pp. 193-195. The following abbreviations will be used for references to the many books in which his columns have been collected (his publishers put out an edition of selected pieces every eighteen months): "Write," Don't Forget To Write; "President," . . . And Then I Told The President (New York, 1965); "Lied," Have I Ever Lied To You? (New York, 1968); "Dollars," How Much Is That In Dollars? (Cleveland, 1961); "Capitol," I Chose Capitol Punishment (Cleveland, 1962); "Safe," Is It Safe To Drink The Water? (Cleveland, 1962); "Caviar," More Caviar (New York, 1957); and "Society," Son of The Great Society (New York, 1966). References to uncollected columns will be cited by the date of their appearance.

[10]Quoted in "Art Buchwald on Taxes, L.B.J., Automation, The Stock Market, and a Whole Bunch of Other Things," p. 43.

[11]Jesse Bier, in a recent book, The Rise and Fall of American Humor (New York, 1968), coins a useful term, "Antitheticism," to refer to the general tendency, in American humor, to reverse expected logic, concepts, and behavior to achieve a humorous effect. His discussion of the techniques commonly used by American humorists is applicable to the work of all four of the authors studied here (pp. 1-31).

[12]Buchwald had the last laugh by issuing his own press release in which his secretary noted, "Mr. Buchwald has been known to write adulterated rot, but never to my knowledge has he written unadulterated rot. I think it might have been a misprint" ("Caviar," pp. 168-169).

[13]Buchwald is quoted as saying, "Most of the things I write about really happened to me" ("Art for Humor's Sake"), Newsweek, 58 (December 4, 1961), 87; and his burlesques of actual events, people, and current realities are usually very easy to trace to their original source.

[14]"Art Buchwald on Taxes, L.B.J., Automation, The Stock Market, and a Whole Bunch of Other Things," p. 39.

[15]Quoted by John Joly, in an interview with Buchwald, "The Best of Buchwald--At Lunch Already," Detroit Free Press (May 18, 1969), 42.

[16]As he did with James Haggerty, Buchwald rebuked Bowles for having the temerity to complain about the piece by "innocently" suggesting that the column was meant to be a general comment on Washington practice, and that "he didn't know that Bowles was the only one of his kind.", Time, 82 (September 20, 1963), 65.

[17]"A Skillful Jester: A Review of Son of The Great Society," Christian Science Monitor (October 18, 1966), 9.

[18]This argument has been advanced by numerous critics, including Kenneth Rexroth in "The Decline of American Humor," The Nation, 184 (April 27, 1957), 374-376, and Jesse Bier, The Rise and Fall of American Humor (New York, 1968). Bier does hope for a resurgence of American humor, and he cites Art Buchwald as one cause of this hope (p. 336). One critic, Hamlin Hill, argues that native American humor has not disappeared, but has moved from literary to non-literary forms, becoming one stream of what he describes as a "dual trend," the other being the genteel "little man" humor described by Norris Yates in The American Humorist. Hill's article, "Modern American Humor: The Janus Laugh," appeared in College English, XXV (December, 1963), 170-176. Most of these critics, including Rexroth, Bier, Hill, and Yates,

either overlook or refer to only in passing, the humorous writing of Rosten, Hughes, and Buchwald, though they do recognize the work of Finley Peter Dunne.

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